



NeedhamUCC

FOCUS Newsletter • August 2023

August 3, 2023

Beloved,

Summer may seem like a strange time to reflect on our responsibilities. When we think about summer, what's likely to come to mind is exactly the opposite: rest from, getting away from, even escaping from our work-a-day responsibilities (or wishing we could, since we know many folks can't afford to get away like that in our oppressive multi-job economy).

But anyone who's ever planted a garden knows about responsibility, the sort poet Louise Gluck talks about in her poem "Vespers." You can't just plant the seeds and walk away, wishing for the best, if you hope for any kind of real harvest. You worry about weeding and watering—the things you can control—and the sun and rain and blight you can't.

Of course, the same is true of our lives, our families, our communities, our churches. Anyone who's ever planned a family vacation knows how much work is involved; and raising a compassionate child or creating a just society, even more. But God calls us to share responsibility for all these.

In her poem, Louise Gluck complains about what she feels is the Creator's absence as she deals with the creation of her garden. And just listening to the daily news, I can empathize with that feeling. It's easy to feel the Creator may have gone on vacation as all of creation seemingly goes off the rails.

But the witness of our faith is that we are never alone. God is with us, Jesus is with us, getting his hands dirty helping us in the overgrown summer garden of our lives, weeding and watering, hoping and praying and caring. After all, he told us "I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5) And in the spirit of Christ, we have each other.

Peace, Rev. John MacIver Gage

Vespers [in your extended absence, you permit me]

by Louise Gluck

In your extended absence, you permit me use of earth, anticipating some return on investment. I must report failure in my assignment, principally regarding the tomato plants.

I think I should not be encouraged to grow tomatoes. Or, if I am, you should withhold the heavy rains, the cold nights that come so often here, while other regions get twelve weeks of summer. All this belongs to you: on the other hand, I planted the seeds, I watched the first shoots like wings tearing the soil, and it was my heart broken by the blight, the black spot so quickly multiplying in the rows. I doubt you have a heart, in our understanding of that term. You who do not discriminate between the dead and the living, who are, in consequence, immune to foreshadowing, you may not know how much terror we bear, the spotted leaf, the red leaves of the maple falling even in August, in early darkness: I am responsible for these vines.



Coming Up in Worship in August



“The Trouble with Kings, Divine & Otherwise”

8/6 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

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

Anytime we invest ultimate authority in a human or a human institution—a king, a congress, a religious leader, even an image of God—we run the risk of abdicating our own moral agency. If the king commands it, it must be right; the King of Kings, all the better. But what happens when the law, even the law of God, is morally repugnant? How do we know what really is right? (1 Samuel 15)



“Cartoon Violence, Cartoon Victory”

8/13 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

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

If you grew up going to Sunday school—or even if you didn’t—you’ve probably heard the story of David and Goliath. This mano a mano showdown between the underdog and the giant has become part of our culture. But wars aren’t actually won this way, and systemic challenges like racism or the climate crisis can’t be resolved by the actions of just one heroic individual—not David, not even by Jesus. So how do we change the stories we tell to address the challenges of our day? (1 Samuel 17:1-27)



“David & Jonathan Were More Than Roommates”

8/20 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

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

Spoiler: The Bible says “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” What? A loving same-sex couple in scripture? “But no,” we’re told, “that can’t be true.” Why not? History and Biblical criticism can be complicated, but love is love, complicated in its own way, but also so, so easy and so, so real. (1 Samuel 17:55-18:9)



This Barbie Doesn't Belong to Herself

8/27 @ 10am EDT, live on-site & online via Zoom at

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

On the surface, these verses from 1 Samuel tell the story of the political maneuvering between King Saul and soon-to-be King David. But in between the lines, it’s the story of the women relegated to the background, whose bodies, lives, are treated like commodities like cattle or crops to be exploited by the men in power. But that was long ago, and we’ve embraced the full equality of women, right? RIGHT? (1 Samuel 14:49-51, 18:17-21, 29)

FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH



FAMILY & YOUTH MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2023

Dear Families,

We have some fun activities planned for the end of summer vacation including a **Visit to Unity Farm Sanctuary on Thursday, 8/24 @ 10am for kids in Pre-K through Grade 5.** Children will need a caregiver to accompany them when we meet at the farm in Sherborn for a morning of learning about the work that Unity does with their animals, including learning about how caring for the environment helps to care for the farm animals too. We'll also get to meet some of these awesome animal friends! Nut-free snacks will be provided.



We begin the school year activities with a **Back to School Blessing on Sunday, 8/27 @ 4pm for kids of all ages.** Bring your backpacks or bicycles, your basketballs or ballet shoes – anything you will use for learning or other activities during the school year – and we will bless those things and, most importantly, YOU before you head back to school!

Our program year kicks off on Sunday, September 10 along with the **beginning of Sunday School for Pre-K - Grade 5.** We will offer Registration before worship outside the Sanctuary and during worship in the classroom. (All families need to complete a registration for each year for children and youth!) Children will head to their classroom with Rev. Maddie following the children's moment and return to worship to celebrate Communion with their families. Our curriculum for the first part of the year will explore all the important basics of our church life – getting to know the Bible, learning about Baptism and Communion, and learning about our church's own history – before we meet up with the



lectionary in Advent and move to lectionary-based Sunday School lessons. Our fall series will be especially helpful for families who might be new to church – this is a great time to invite friends to church who might want to learn what church is all about!

Our youth in **Grades 6-12 will gather on Sunday, 9/17 during the worship service** for youth group which includes a check-in time, conversation-based programming, and donuts or other snacks. We will have some other gatherings before our Trunk or Treat but youth will have a special part to play in our event this year so be sure to mark your calendars for 10/21!



Both our Sunday School and Youth Group programs rely on the help of volunteers to teach and lead! All of the material prep is done in advance by Rev. Maddie and lesson plans are available online to make teaching as straightforward as possible for our volunteers. When you arrive to teach you simply grab the box marked for that Sunday, give everything a once-over, and prepare to welcome kids to the classroom!

In addition to our Sunday morning programming, I am looking forward to inviting families with babies and toddlers to join me and McCoy for **Little Mindfulness – a small group for older babies and toddlers and their caregivers!** Each week of this 6 week session, caregivers will learn about a mindfulness practice for even the littlest littles. We'll begin with circle time, move into our practice, and then end with some free play while caregivers get a chance to connect with one another. The cost for the 6 sessions is \$100. Assistance is available if this program is cost-prohibitive for your

family - just reach out to me. See the following flyer for more details – or to share with a friend!

We want to make sure that our families are receiving all the important information about our programs! Please **make sure you are receiving the church's weekly email** – if you are signed up but don't see it in your inbox, check your spam! Our Sunday School & Youth info is in this email every week – scroll down! In addition, once you register your family for the 2023-2024 school year, you'll be added to our mailing list specifically for family ministries for newsletters and special events emails – this email list is updated each year based on registrations so please be sure to fill out a new registration form for your family – this will be used for special events and news (Trunk or Treat, Christmas Pageant, etc.).

If you have any questions on our programs, please reach out and I'd be happy to answer them! Here are ways you can get in contact with me:



Email: RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org

Text: 781-343-1923

Or schedule a 30 minute Zoom chat during my virtual office hours with Calendly:

<https://calendly.com/revmaddie/30min>

**SIGN UP ONLINE TO TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL
OR LEAD YOUTH GROUP:**

<https://tinyurl.com/CEYouth2324>

FAMILY & YOUTH MINISTRIES REGISTRATION FORM 2023-2024

Please fill out a new, updated registration form for your family each year.

PARENT/GUARDIAN 1

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Cell Phone: (_____) _____ - _____

Mailing Address: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN 2:

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Cell Phone: (_____) _____ - _____

Mailing Address (if different from above): _____

CHILD 1:

Name: _____ Pronouns: _____

Birthday: ____/____/____ Grade: _____ Age: _____ T-Shirt Size: _____

E-mail (if YOUTH): _____

Allergies: _____ Does your child have an EpiPen? YES or NO

CHILD 2:

Name: _____ Pronouns: _____

Birthday: ____/____/____ Grade: _____ Age: _____ T-Shirt Size: _____

E-mail (if YOUTH): _____

Allergies: _____ Does your child have an EpiPen? YES or NO

CHILD 3:

Name: _____ Pronouns: _____

Birthday: ____/____/____ Grade: _____ Age: _____ T-Shirt Size: _____

E-mail (if YOUTH): _____

Allergies: _____ Does your child have an EpiPen? YES or NO

I give permission for my child/ren to participate in Family & Youth Ministry offerings offered by Congregational Church of Needham, United Church of Christ. I acknowledge that by registering my child/ren I will be added to the Needham UCC Family & Youth Ministries mailing list. I acknowledge that photos may be taken during events and used in Needham UCC communications; photos of children under age 13 will be blurred/will not include faces; photos will never be accompanied by full names. In the rare event of an emergency during programming, I give permission for Needham UCC volunteers and staff to seek medical attention for my child.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

LITTLE MINDFULNESS

at Congregational Church of Needham UCC

A small group for
Crawling/Walking
Babies & Toddlers

COME AND JOIN US!

SESSION 1 BEGINS SEPT. 22
THURSDAYS @ 10:30 AM
\$100 PER 6 WEEK SESSION

FRIENDSHIP & COMMUNITY
MINDFUL ACTIVITIES LIKE BABY
YOGA, BABY MASSAGE, & MORE!

THE DETAILS:

- For **older babies, toddlers, and their caregivers**
- Join us for **circle time**, a **mindful practice** for little and their caregivers, and an **opportunity for caregivers to share & socialize** together
- All materials will be provided
- Pre-registration is required
- Financial assistance is available

REGISTER OR LEARN MORE:
REVMADDIE@NEEDHAMUCC.ORG



HIGHLIGHTS FROM GENERAL SYNOD 34



The United Church of Christ's 34th General Synod had it all. A new leader and a historic vote. A change from biennial to triennial. And giving witness to some of the most urgent issues — trans dignity, reproductive rights, racial justice, creation care and much more — through resolutions, special speakers, prayer and action.

Indianapolis and the Indiana-Kentucky Conference played hosts from June 30-July 4. It was the UCC's first in-person national gathering since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides the business side of this "family reunion," delegates and visitors came together to worship, break bread, embrace and shed tears of joy.

Read more... MUCH more... at the links below:

Business highlights

- [Karen Georgia Thompson becomes first woman to lead UCC in historic vote](#)
- [General Synod frequency to change to every three years as Bylaw changes pass by a single vote](#)
- [Following SCOTUS ruling, statement supporting affirmative action endorsed by General Synod](#)
- [Envisioning a future from the past, Dorhauer delivers final State of the Church address](#)
- [From Synod stage, Dorhauer apologizes to Afro-Christian Convention for 'rewriting of our history'](#)

Resolutions and results

- Committee 1: [Abortion is healthcare, General Synod says](#)
- Committee 2: [Delegates vote to pursue reparative acts for Native Boarding Schools](#)
- Committee 3: [Synod takes stand for digital justice, calls for increased accessibility](#)
- Committee 4: [Synod delegates pass resolution of witness on electrification](#)
- Committee 5: [Delegates call on churches to commit to harm reduction advocacy](#)
- Committee 6: ['Hope is a verb': Synod calls for turning 'Guns to Gardens'](#)
- Committee 7: [In narrow vote, Synod supports reparation efforts for Hawaiian language revitalization](#)
- Committee 8: [Delegates reject resolution on plant-based living](#)
- Committee 9: [Synod delegates call for reduction in single-use plastics and overall plastic pollution](#)
- Committee 10: [Synod takes stand for public school educators, academic freedom and equity efforts in schools](#)
- Committee 11: [Delegates call for study, developing reparations for African Americans](#)
- Committee 12: [After debate about wording, Synod declares 'prolonged solitary confinement' as torture](#)
- Committee 13: [Synod overwhelmingly affirms dignity of trans and nonbinary persons](#)
- Committee 14: [Synod delegates call on congregations to declare and create 'white supremacy free zones'](#)
- [New website for UCC resolutions archive launches](#)



Summer Food Drive

Every other month church volunteers support the families served by the Baby Basics diaper distribution program with bags of food. This summer, we hope to involve the congregation in this very important project. **For August, we are asking you to contribute 5oz cans of chunk light tuna (in water); 12.5oz cans of chunk chicken breast, and large jars of natural peanut butter.** You can bring your donations to worship on Sundays or drop them off when the church office is open during the week.



SAVE THE DATE! Ride for Food

Join the Needham UCC team and Three Squares New England for the 12th Annual Ride For Food on **October 1, 2023**.

The Ride For Food raises money to address food insecurity in New England. Our team has ridden as part of the Needham Community Council since 2016. There are three options: a 25-mile ride, a 50-mile ride and for the most adventurous, a 62-mile (100 km) ride. You can also make your own adventure as part of the "Off the Beaten Path". For more information, contact Rein Verschoor-Kirss at r.kirss@northeastern.edu.



From our Environmental Ministries Team

A Memory in Light and Power and Change

We are very saddened by the death this spring of Deb Baldwin. As many church members know, Deb started the Church Green Team (now known as the Environmental Ministries Team) in 2008. Her goal was to influence personal, church and community behavior to combat climate change and leave a healthy Earth for her grandchildren and all children. During her years leading the Green Team and later years when she had to step back due to health issues, she was a strong advocate for decreasing the carbon footprint in our homes, church and community. In response to Deb's desire, the Board of Directors has committed to implementing solar on the south side of the sanctuary roof by the end of 2024. A memorial fund has been started to offset the costs of the installation of the project, and contributions to the fund are being accepted. Simply mail a check to Cindy Sullivan, church financial administrator, and in the memo section write "Deb Baldwin Memorial Solar Fund".



Children’s Book Recommendation: “Wake Up, World”

written by Sarah Paiji Yoo, co-founder & CEO of Blueland

Sarah wrote the book to inspire the next generation to protect the planet, Wake Up, World follows a young boy on his sustainability journey and the steps he takes to start caring for the planet. This book teaches us that if there’s one thing everyone can learn (kids and parents alike) – it’s that there’s no such thing as too small. All proceeds of this book go to donating it to teachers and classrooms across the country in hopes of

sparkling eco conversations among kids in classrooms everywhere. More about the book and about Blueland here: [Wake Up, World – Blueland](#)

Ring Out for Climate Justice

EMT will continue to ring the church bell on the 11th of each month @ 11am to signify that we are in the 11th hour in the fight against climate change. Join us to ring the bell and hold signs on Great Plain Ave on **SUNDAY, 8/11** and again **MONDAY, 9/11**.



The **Needham Farmers’ Market** is open for the season every Sunday until November @ 11am-3pm at Greene’s Field.



From our Guatemala Partnership

Guatemala Yard Sale, Saturday, 9/16

Plan on Donating, Working, and Attending

Once again the Guatemala Yard Sale will be held on the Church’s front lawn on Saturday, September 16th (9:00 am – 2:00 pm). Hopefully you have been saving your ‘treasures’ to donate, as we hope to continue the 30-year tradition of offering lots of appealing and diverse items! For questions, or to volunteer early, contact Brenda Metzler: bmetzler7@verizon.net.

Desired items (clean and in working order): Household and kitchen items, collectible or vintage items, jewelry, musical instruments, children's gear, toys, games, and puzzles for all ages, sports equipment for adults & children, bicycles, framed art, electronics (no TV's/computers), adult and children’s books, DVD's, non-classical records, or small furniture items (no clothing). Thank you.

Donations Drop-Off: You may drop off items at the Church Library the week before the sale. Drop-off Times: Mon. – Thurs. (Sept. 11-14) from 9:30 am – 4:00 pm; and Friday (Sept. 15) from 9:30 am – NOON. We also hope to offer early drop-offs on Sunday, Sept. 10, following the Church service (11:15 am – 2:00 pm).

Volunteers Needed! For questions, or to volunteer, contact Brenda Metzler: bmetzler7@verizon.net. Forty volunteers are needed the day of the sale! And 4-5 are needed each pre-sale day (Mon.-Fri.) for sorting and pricing, so please step up! It’s not too early to handpick your shift! Don’t miss out on raising funds for education in Santa María Tzejá, while having a lot of fun and reconnecting with your church community. Thank you.



From our

OPEN AND AFFIRMING MINISTRY TEAM

Coming Up This Fall

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE UCC JUSTICE SUMMIT

“Trans and Non-binary Belonging in the Church”

The 2023 Justice Summit, on **October 7** in Boston and online, will center on **trans and nonbinary belonging in the church**. This full-day event will include worship and preaching, workshops, relationship-building and connection. Our keynote preachers are Rev. Nicole Garcia, Faith Work Director for the National LGBTQ Task Force, and Rev. Tyler Connoley, Conference Minister for the Central Pacific Conference UCC.

To register, go to: <https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/17384234>



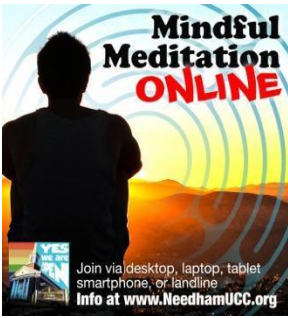
Needham Has Pride: Rally! March! Party!

For the second year in a row, our congregation has partnered with First Parish in Needham, UU to host a “family-sized” LGBTQ+ Pride event in our community, and for the second year in a row it was a marvelous success. As many as a hundred parents and kids joined us for speakers at the UU church, a “march” through



the Needham common, and a party on our front lawn. This year’s event, which had folks laughing and blowing bubbles and feeling loved, included a very special “drag queen story hour” with the marvelous local entertainer Mx JP. And we landed on the cover of the Needham Hometown Weekly yet again!

(Thanks to our own Georgina Arrieta-Reutenik for this photo of our special guest and volunteers.)



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.*



3rd Sunday Men's Fellowship

Sunday, 6/18 @ 9-9:45am LIVE! via Zoom

All the men of the church are invited to gather online for fellowship and Bible study via Zoom before worship on the third Sunday of each month. For more info, email Rob Dunlavey at robdunlavey@gmail.com

Get to Know Our Community Renters!

*Click the links in **red** to learn more about these community partners*

Our building will start to fill up again as the new school year kicks off! The Needham Public School's **NCE "Little Rockets" Early Childcare Program** (open now to all Needham families) has expanded into the section of the basement directly under the Sanctuary. The **Noah's Ark Preschool Program** resumes in its usual rooms under the Choir Room and Linden/Fellowship Halls. Two theater troupes, Freelance and Spotlight (offered to Needham children and teens through the nonprofit **Rehearsal for Life**) will be rehearsing and performing in the Fellowship Hall this fall/winter season, and **Art4YourChild** will be teaching art to children down in Stevenson Hall on Tuesday afternoons. The **Charles River Ballet Academy**, which is renting the Chapel to offer ballet classes to children ages 2yo thru teen as well as ballet for adults. Ballet classes take place mostly on weekday afternoons and on Saturday mornings. Also we welcome back **Sound Play Music**, who will be in the Linden Hall, which engages infants – 5yo and their caregivers in music-making, dancing, and play. We are in talks with a few other possible renters whose offerings align with the church's vision of being an inclusive and supportive community

Few requests of our church members:

- Check in with the church office before going down into the lower level during weekdays, 7am-4:30pm, when the childcare and preschool programs are in session. This is required by the safety protocols of these partner renters.
- Wear only soft-soled shoes if you enter the Chapel in order to protect the ballet academy's recently-installed, temporary, and fragile dance floor (which is protecting our floor underneath)

Thank you!!!

FOCUS newsletter contributions are always welcome!

*The submission deadline for our next “Grand Opening” issue (including events for September and early October) is **Monday, August 28th***

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



Rev. John MacIver Gage, *senior minister*

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

Valerie Becker, *music director*

Robin Bevilacqua, *church administrator*

Cindy Sullivan, *finance administrator*

Board of Directors

Tom Mollerus, *moderator*

Board of Deacons: Linda Bauer, *chair*

Pastoral Relations Committee

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