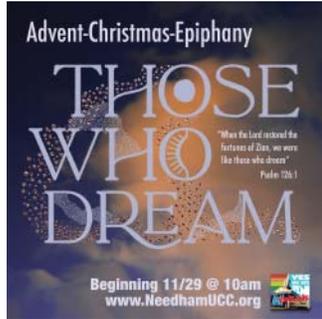


Dear Friends,



The story of God's people, in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, is the story of dreamers and their dreams. The dreams of the prophets for justice and peace for all the people, for all of creation. The dreams of Joseph and Mary for the ways their little lives would intersect with the life of the whole world. The dreams of Elizabeth and Zechariah, John the Baptizer, Simeon and Anna, even of the magi, foreigners to God's people but not to God's larger dream of a gospel of good news for all. Our dreams, too, as we envision our role in this transformation and wake to put our dreams to work.

Advent, the church season of preparation, begins this year on Sunday, November 29. Our theme for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany will be "Those Who Dream," a line taken from Psalm 126: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of

Zion, we were like those who dream." We'll use our holy imaginations to ruminate on hope, peace, love, and joy, looking for deeper meanings, deeper dreams to guide not just our holiday celebrations, but to help us experience the real reason for the season: the presence and the purpose of Immanuel, "God among us," which should be "good news of great joy for all people" (Luke 2:10).

In the pages of this special Advent-Christmas-Epiphany edition of our "Focus" newsletter, we hope you'll find resources to help you get back in touch with the dreamer inside of you and God's dream for you, for all of us. Some will be familiar favorites – though this year even those may feel stranger than usual – and some are new. Some are quiet, some are boisterous, some are more personal, and some are focused on helping others. We hope you will participate as the Spirit leads, knowing that when you take the time to deepen your spiritual life, whatever that looks like, you enrich the life of the whole church and our community.

In the meantime, here is a poem to help us prepare to prepare:

"ALL IN ALL" BY SHARA ARE

It takes strength to dream.
I imagine it's that same strength that leads
people to say, "I love you" first,
Those three vulnerable words,
Wrapped in heart strings,
Whispered,
Because what could be
Is too good to keep quiet about.
It takes strength to choose joy.
It takes strength to push the covers
Off our weary bodies morning after morning,
To plant weary feet on solid ground,
And look for signs of beauty.
It takes strength to remember that
we are not alone,

But the story starts with bone of bone and
flesh of flesh.
That feels like so long ago.
Oh yes, it takes strength to dream.
I imagine that's why many choose not to,
For it would be far easier to simply sleep.
But there are always those who dream,
Those who are up at night picturing
what could be,
Because this world is too good not to.

So we say, "I love you."
We push the covers off.
We find solid ground.
We look for beauty.
And we dream. We dare to dream.

Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love,
Rev. John MacIver Gage

WORSHIP WITH THE WIDER CHURCH CHRISTMAS CONTINUES SUNDAY, 12/27 @ 10AM LIVE! VIA ZOOM

As we gather as a church family, we gather also with our wider United Church of Christ denominational family to sing carols, share the good news, and commit ourselves again to living the Gospel every day.



Help us tell the story Sign up for our Christmas Pageant!

This year we will be pre-recording our Christmas pageant and enjoying the story together by Zoom on Christmas Eve at 4:00 PM. There are many ways for people of all ages to participate:

Sign up to act in the pageant: Scenes will be pre-recorded in one of two ways: schedule a time to come into the sanctuary and record with Rev. Maddie, one household will record at a time and appropriate social distancing and masking will be in place; OR record from home - you can either record on your own (in landscape view) or schedule a time to record over Zoom with Rev. Maddie. You can choose to create your own costumes or we can deliver some to your front porch. We are still in need of narrators and angels! Sign-up to act here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050e4eafad2caaff2-christmas>

Sign up to record a carol (all ages): Households can sign up to record one of our carols. You will be provided with the words and music to sing along to and record at home. You can choose to record video or vocals only and then send your recording in to be used as a hymn during our pageant on Christmas Eve. Whether you've sung in the Chancel Choir, Once in a While Choir, or just love singing in your car, your voices will help us to worship and sing these songs we love together! Email RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org if you are interested in recording a carol!

Sign up for the Children's Choir (children & youth): Children and youth are invited to participate in our virtual children's choir! You will be provided with words and music to sing along to and record at home. We will be singing Gabriel's Message and The Friendly Beasts. Email RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org and we will send more details about how to record along with words and music!

Advent-At-Home Kits



It's not too late to receive an Advent-At-Home kit to create your own paper Advent

wreath and other crafts for the season. Kits are fun for all ages - younger children may need a grown-up's help with cutting and taping pieces into place. All of the materials will be delivered to your front door by our CE team and the instructions are available on our online classroom: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050e4eafad2caaff2-christmas> (password: needhamucc)

Please email RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org and include your address for delivery and the number of kits needed.

Youth Group Christmas Party & Secret Santa!

Jr and Sr High students are invited to join in the **Youth Group Christmas Party on Zoom!**



Sunday, December 13 at 4:00 PM. We will hold a Secret Santa gift exchange, Christmas trivia, fun games, and have prizes for the best seasonal apparel. Best of all, we get to celebrate the holiday with friends!! Sign up for Secret Santa on Google Forms by Wednesday, November 25: <https://forms.gle/PzMnFPkQPSRBMsh56> (note: you don't need to participate in Secret Santa to join in the party) and then join us in the Youth Group Zoom Room to celebrate!

FOCUS

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

January issue
deadline:
Friday., Dec. 18th

Rev. John MacIver Gage
Senior Minister
revjohn@needhamucc.org

Rev. Maddie Foster
CE & Youth Director
revmaddie@needhamucc.org

Valerie Becker
Music Director
musicdirector@needhamucc.org

Danielle Jurdan
Administrator
office@needhamucc.org

Cindy Sullivan
Office Assist & Bookkeeper
office2@needhamucc.org

The Church Board
board@needhamucc.org

Judith Stewart, Moderator
moderator@needhamucc.org

The Deacons
Jim Ruetenik, Chair
emaildeacons@needhamucc.org

Pastoral Relations
Committee
prc@needhamucc.org

To provide feedback about any aspect of the church, email feedback@needhamucc.org

Celebrating the Gift of Music Among Us Online Christmas Concert

You are invited
to an online concert
of very special

MUSICAL CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

with the Congregational Church of Needham
Chancel Choir & Friendly Chimers

Premiering LIVE! via YouTube 12/13 @ 7pm
Info at www.NeedhamUCC.org

available from
**Sun. 12/13 @
7pm via YouTube**

Music is an integral expression of our faith and of our experience of the Advent and Christmas season. We may not be

able to gather safely indoors to sing or listen to singing this year, but the music goes on. Valerie Becker, our music director, is working to pull together some of the "greatest hits" of our Chancel Choir and Friendly Chimers from Christmas concerts past into an online Christmas concert to enrich our holiday season.

The concert will premiere on our church YouTube channel ("Congregational Church of Needham") on Sunday, 12/13 @ 7pm and be available to watch any time after. Direct connection info will be available on our website at www.NeedhamUCC.org.

DECK THE HALL! CHURCH FAMILY CHRISTMAS PARTY SUNDAY, 12/20 @ 4PM LIVE! VIA ZOOM

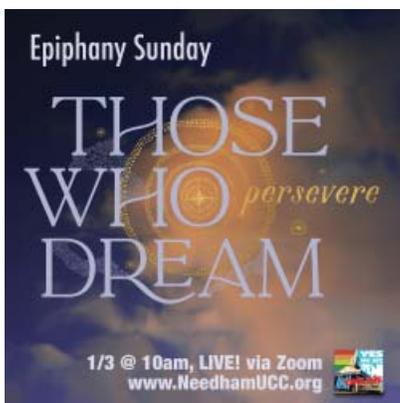
Joy to the World!—joy and laughter, good humor and good times! Join us for a Congregational Church family Christmas party for all ages.



We'll break into groups for an in-house (your house) holiday-themed scavenger hunt; we'll lean into the awkwardness of Zoom-delay for a carol sing-off; we'll give prizes for the most spirited "gay apparel" (as in "Don we now..."); and, especially for the children among us, we'll share a story about Santa's own "reason for the season" (hint: it has to do with the best gift God ever gave the world).

We'll gather LIVE! via Zoom on Sunday, 12/20 @ 4pm at our usual Zoom worship link at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>.

ARISE! SHINE! EPIPHANY CELEBRATION SUNDAY, 1/3 @ 10AM LIVE! VIA ZOOM



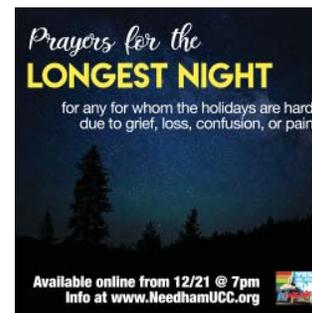
The holiday season comes to a close with the arrival of the magi and the opening up, the shining-forth (that's what epiphany means) of God's love, justice, and peace not just for any one people but for all people, for the entire world.

Our worship will include sharing the gift of "star words" once again to help us realize our giftedness and put our gifts to work in the year ahead. Join us Sunday, 1/3 @ 10am LIVE! via Zoom at our usual worship link at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>.

For Any for Whom the Holidays are Hard

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

available from
**MONDAY, 12/21
@ 7PM via YouTube**



As beautiful as God's gift of love in Jesus is, our observance of Advent and Christmas should never be a forced march to false happiness for anyone. "Immanuel" means "God with us" right where we are, and that includes in the shadow of the star, in grief, loss, confusion, and pain. That's never been truer than this year, when the shadows are deep for so many folks. This service is a reminder that God is indeed with us, no matter who we are, no matter where we are on life's journey. Love persists, even now.

This service will premiere on our church YouTube channel ("Congregational Church of Needham") on the longest night of the year, Mon., Dec. 21 @ 7pm and be available to watch any time after. Direct connection info will be available on our website at www.NeedhamUCC.org.

Advent-Christmas-Epiphany Calendar Overview

All events are LIVE! via Zoom unless otherwise specified.

11/29 @ 10am: 1st Sunday in Advent Worship, "Those Who Dream... Keep Awake" Music from Soomi Lee and the Once-in-a-While Choir

Last day for Giving Tree donations for the families of Family Promise MetroWest

12/6 @ 10am: 2nd Sunday in Advent Worship, "Those Who Dream... Prepare the Way," including communion

@ 11:10am: "Imagining Hybrid Worship," discussion led by the Deacons

12/13 @ 10am: 3rd Sunday in Advent Worship, "Those Who Dream... Sow Love"

@ 7pm: Special Christmas Concert, featuring "greatest hits" from Christmas Concerts past from the Chancel Choir and Handbell Choir **premiering on YouTube and available anytime after*

Last day for Christmas flower donations

12/20 @ 10am: 4th Sunday in Advent Worship, "Those Who Dream... Are Not Alone"

@ 4pm: All-Ages Holiday Zoom Christmas Party, to include a multi-family, in-home holiday-themed scavenger hunt; Zoom-delay Christmas carol sing-off; and prizes for over-the-top "gay apparel"

12/21 @ 7pm: Longest Night Service, "for those for whom the holidays are hard" **premiering on YouTube and available anytime after*

12/24 @ 4pm: Christmas Eve Pageant Worship

@ 9pm: Masked, socially distant, in-person singing of "Silent Night" on the church lawn, BYOC: Bring your own candle, as the weather and pandemic conditions permit

NOTE: This year, we all will share in this Christmas pageant worship. There will not be a second service.

12/25 @ 10am: Christmas Day Kitchen Table Worship, a brief service LIVE! via Zoom, pajamas strongly encouraged

12/27 @ 10am: Worship for the 1st Sunday after Christmas, sharing with the wider United Church of Christ

NOTE: The church office staff will be on holiday break from 12/24-1/4

1/3 @ 10am: Epiphany Sunday Worship, including communion and "Star Words"



Fingers Crossed

SILENT NIGHT ON THE CHURCH LAWN CHRISTMAS EVE, 12/24 @ 9PM

If the weather and pandemic conditions permit, we invite you to BYOC – Bring Your Own Candle – and gather on the church lawn at 1154 Great Plain Avenue on Christmas Eve, 12/24 @ 9pm to sing "Silent Night." We will remain masked and socially distant, but we will be together. The church office will send out a confirmation 24 hours ahead of time to let you know if we're a "go." Keep your fingers crossed!



Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy! Christmas Pageant

Thursday, 12/24 @ 4pm LIVE! via Zoom

At the heart of our faith lies the Jesus story, and that story begins with Jesus' birth on the outskirts of human history, among the vulnerable, poor, and oppressed, those deemed "lowest and least" in the eyes of the world. It was there that God's love "came a floweret bright" to lighten every load and lift every spirit. That is the story the children of our congregation will share with us once again this year in our Christmas pageant – but how much we need to hear it afresh!

Join us Thursday, 12/24 @ 4pm LIVE! via Zoom at our usual worship link at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>.



Christmas Pageant
LIVE! via Zoom 12/24 @ 4pm
Info at www.NeedhamUCC.org

NOTE: There will be no second service this year.

Pajamas Encouraged!

Christmas Morning Kitchen Table Worship
Friday, 12/25 @ 10am LIVE! via Zoom



This year we have an opportunity to bring our celebration of Christmas home in a special way. You are invited to share a brief, joyful, and informal worship service for Christmas morning live from your own kitchen table, pajamas strongly encouraged (though not mandatory, of course). So clear away

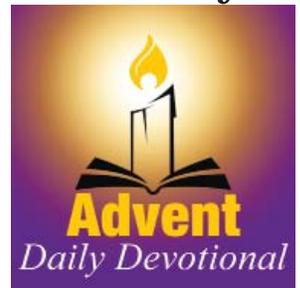
the wrapping paper and the dishes and let's take a moment (about 30 minutes) to center ourselves in the love of God that is the real reason for this and every season.

Join us Friday, 12/25 @ 10am LIVE! via Zoom at our usual worship link at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>.

LIVE! via Zoom 12/25 @ 10am
Info at www.NeedhamUCC.org

"Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord..."

"Those Who Dream" Daily Devotional for Advent, Christmas, & Epiphany



This devotional is for the dreamers in all of us – those who dream of a deeper connection with God and those who dream of a better world. It's for those who dream of comfort and for those who have given up on their dreams. It's for those whose dreams have been crushed and for those who show us that dreams take time. Set aside some time this season to renew your spirit with this daily devotional of reading, art, reflection, and rest keyed to our "Those Who Dream" theme. You can download the devotional so you may decide if and how you'll use it at: <https://www.needhamucc.org/devotional.html>. We hope this helps turn your holidays into holy days.

ROSEMARY IS FOR REMEMBRANCE

DONATE CHRISTMAS FLOWERS

In past years we've asked for donations for poinsettias to decorate our sanctuary during the season. This year we're making a shift: Your donation this year will go to buy fragrant rosemary Christmas trees which we'll distribute to members of our congregation to remind them they are in our thoughts and in our hearts.

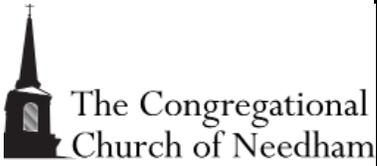
You can make your donation via the PayPal link on our website at www.NeedhamUCC.org (simply choose "Christmas Flowers" from the drop-down menu) or by sending your check made out to "Congregational Church of Needham" with the memo: "Christmas Flowers" to the church office at 1154 Great Plain Ave., Needham, MA 02492.



DONATE CHRISTMAS FLOWERS

Your donation this year will buy fragrant rosemary Christmas trees to remind members of our congregation they are in our thoughts & in our ❤️❤️❤️

Use the PayPal link at www.NeedhamUCC.org, "Christmas Flowers" from the drop-down menu



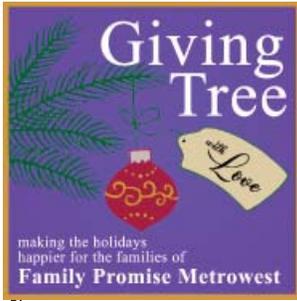
1154 Great Plain Avenue
1180 Great Plain Avenue
Needham, MA 02492-2202

T: 781-444-2510
office@needhamucc.org

On the web at
needhamucc.org

On the twitter
[@needhamucc](https://twitter.com/needhamucc)

Like us on
Facebook
Congregational Church
of Needham UCC



Holiday Giving for Good

The Giving Tree

For this year's Giving Tree, we're collecting donations to be turned into gift cards for the families served by Family Promise Metrowest. These folks are doing the hard work of transitioning from homelessness into stable housing. Your donations will help make their holidays just that much happier. We know it's not as fun to give money as it is to shop for a present, but your gift will empower these parents to choose gifts for their own children and put food on the table throughout the Christmas season.

Donations must be received by Sun., Nov. 29th.

You can make your donation via the PayPal link on our website at www.NeedhamUCC.org (simply choose "Giving Tree" from the drop-down menu) or by sending your check made out to the "Congregational Church of Needham" with the memo: "Giving Tree" to the church office at 1154 Great Plain Ave., Needham, MA 02492.

NOTE: The church office staff will be on holiday break from 12/24-1/4

address

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF
NEEDHAM
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
1154 Great Plain Avenue
Needham, Massachusetts 02492-2202

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