

Dear Friends,

In this moment, full of anxiety, fear and promise, I have no easy words to offer. Nor, frankly, do I think that's my job. In this moment I throw myself on the Gospel of Christ, which is not all triumph and glory and easy answers. Not every Sunday is Palm Sunday and certainly not Easter. And the hard truth is that, for most of our neighbors in the world, more days are Good Fridays than not. But that is exactly where our faith is centered: on the cross, without which the empty tomb would be meaningless, merely sentimental, an obscene photo-op. Even our spirited Pentecost rejoicing is only truly grounded and given wings when we remember (as an anonymous Christian blogger posted this week) that's when we're supposed to "celebrate the birth of a revolutionary multiethnic organization led by dark-skinned people who refused to be silent after the state authorities murdered one of their own."

No, I believe I am called, we are called, to proclaim Christ crucified, which was and is and always will be a stumbling block to the so-called wisdom of this world, our wisdom that wants so bad to win and measures such success primarily in privilege, power, and property rather than love that is willing to lose everything for the sake of those the world labels "least of these" (1 Corinthians 1:23-31). The hard truth is, Christ has passed this way before, though not in our shoes. He marched and shouted and overturned tables for the sake of love; indeed, he loved even his oppressors so much, too much to let the hard truth go unsaid, even as he offered them the amazing grace of repentance and of resurrection. And we know where that got him. But he risked it all for love.

In this moment, I have no fix-it formula, but only the words I traditionally offer on Maundy Thursday, as the tenebrae shadows gather, and the cross looms large: Stay here. Stay in this discomfort. Resist the urge to run away and the urge to make it all better, alike. Stay here in the shadows. Watch. Pray. Listen. Learn. Witness. Wonder what God may be saying and doing in exactly the place we want least to be. Then be brave. Step out. Try something, and don't be afraid to fail. Then try again. Struggle, like Jacob, wrestling with God on his way to facing up to his age-old conflict with his brother (Genesis 32:22-32). Be willing to be put out of joint for a blessing. I promise I will be right here with you to support you – and asking you to support me – as together we go limping toward a better world, God's reign of justice, peace, and compassion on earth, as it is in heaven.

For a traveling mercy along the way, I offer you again this Franciscan blessing Rev. Maddie shared with our confirmands last Sunday:

*May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.*

*May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.*

*May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.*

*And the blessing of God the Supreme Majesty and our Creator, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word who is our brother and Savior, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Guide, be with you and remain with you, this day and forevermore.*

*Amen, and amen.*

Peace – no cheap or easy peace, but a deep, strong, and abiding peace that give us courage for the long and winding road ahead – the Peace of Christ be with us all,

Rev. John

# FROM THE BOARD

## Church receives funds from Payroll Protection Program

The Board voted on April 29 to apply for a forgivable loan under the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), a part of the CARES Act enacted by Congress in March. On May 8, the church was approved to receive \$74,200 and the Board voted unanimously to accept the funds.

The primary goal of the Board at this time is to ensure the financial support necessary for the church to provide strong spiritual leadership and comfort for our congregation, our town and beyond during this pandemic. People are hungering for spiritual support and we can provide it.

The Board did not apply to the PPP until the second round of funding when the length of the shutdown and its impact on us became more evident. The Board seeks to support our mission by paying our employees their usual wages and by offering different programs which may entail different kinds of expenses. We cannot reopen for a while given our high numbers of vulnerable people and inherent difficulties in promoting social distancing among children. During the pandemic the church cannot easily grow – we are primarily an in-person operation and we need to steward our resources carefully at this time.

## The Financial Impact of COVID-19 on the Church

The PPP funds will help the church during this challenging time. In the budget approved in January operations included rental income of approximately \$110,000, approximately 20% of our revenues. That percentage is based on a budget with an operating deficit of \$165,000. 2020 was supposed to be a year where we worked toward finding a path to a sustainable operating budget.

Our renters include a preschool, a daycare and small programs such as quilting and theater groups. With required closings due to COVID-19, these programs have been shut down. With resulting reductions in income, our tenants have requested concessions on rent. The Board has approved 50% rent reduction for four months for the daycare and preschool tenants. The smaller groups have requested deferrals toward meetings in the fall.

COVID-19 has also negatively affected the sale of 1180 Great Plain Ave. The buyer is in a legal dispute with the owner of a neighboring property and court closures due to COVID-19 have delayed resolution. The Board granted a two-month hiatus on the monthly \$5,000 payments the buyer has been paying us that help cover the operating costs of 1180. The Board anticipates extending the P&S but the same monthly payments are unlikely.

The PPP funds will help the Church be more flexible with our tenants and be able to pay our staff. The Board has committed to pay staff at the usual levels through August.

## Bylaw Considerations of the PPP

The Board discussed whether a vote of the congregation was required to apply for and accept a PPP loan. The church bylaws, which had been substantially updated after a year-long process and approved by the congregation in 2018, state that the "Directors shall be responsible for all financial, business, real estate, personnel, and legal matters of the Church." The bylaws further provide that the Directors shall not undertake without approval of the congregation "Borrowing money from commercial sources,

*Continued on pg 3*

## FOCUS

Contributions are welcome. Please submit materials by e-mail to [office@needhamucc.org](mailto:office@needhamucc.org).

July issue deadline:  
**June 23rd**

Rev. John MacIver Gage  
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Rev. Maddie Foster  
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[revmaddie@needhamucc.org](mailto:revmaddie@needhamucc.org)

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The Deacons  
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[emaildeacons@needhamucc.org](mailto:emaildeacons@needhamucc.org)

Pastoral Relations  
Committee  
[prc@needhamucc.org](mailto:prc@needhamucc.org)

To provide feedback about any aspect of the church, email  
[feedback@needhamucc.org](mailto:feedback@needhamucc.org)

# ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTRIES TEAM NEWS

...COVENANT WITH CREATION...

• Preserve and promote our local native ecosystems  
• by planting native species in your garden. Garden  
• in the Woods/Native Plant Trust in Framingham  
• sells a wide variety of native plants. [http://www.  
• nativeplanttrust.org/](http://www.nativeplanttrust.org/). Green Needham has a lot of  
• good information on planting and caring for native  
• plants, [https://www.greenneedham.org/blog/  
• projects/living-green/zero-waste-main-page-2/  
• sustainable-landscaping/flowering-plants-trees-  
• shrubs-and-vines/](https://www.greenneedham.org/blog/projects/living-green/zero-waste-main-page-2/sustainable-landscaping/flowering-plants-trees-shrubs-and-vines/)

• While out in your backyard or hiking in the  
• woods, you may have noticed a lot of the birds  
• singing. To help you identify the many birds,  
• The Audubon Society has created an app called  
• Song Sleuth, [https://www.audubon.org/news/  
• testing-out-song-sleuth-new-app-identifies-birds-  
• their-calls](https://www.audubon.org/news/testing-out-song-sleuth-new-app-identifies-birds-their-calls).

• Reductions in air pollution around the world may

• be a silver lining to the Covid-19 pandemic, as  
• shown in the photos in the attached link. Maybe  
• this will inspire us to care for creation and make  
• changes in our fossil fuel consumption to reduce  
• climate change. [https://www.insider.com/  
• before-after-photos-show-less-air-pollution-  
• during-pandemic-lockdown](https://www.insider.com/before-after-photos-show-less-air-pollution-during-pandemic-lockdown)

• As businesses begin to reopen, and we are asked  
• to wait outside before using various services,  
• please be mindful of not idling in your car for  
• long periods of time, as this contributes to air  
• pollution/global warming and can contribute to  
• health issues. In Massachusetts, idling is against  
• the law, [https://blog.mass.gov/masslawlib/legal-  
• topics/start-your-engine-but-dont-idle-too-long/](https://blog.mass.gov/masslawlib/legal-topics/start-your-engine-but-dont-idle-too-long/)

• We hope that everyone enjoys the outdoors this  
• summer, planting gardens, listening to birdsong,  
• or just relaxing in the backyard!

## FROM THE BOARD *Continued from pg 2*

except for emergency repairs or maintenance. The Directors may refinance or restructure an existing loan if the principal owed is not increased."

The Directors concluded that the PPP is not a "commercial loan" as it is a forgivable loan backed by the federal government. The Board also noted that the PPP program is designed to address the economic emergency created by the pandemic, and as noted in the finance summary above, the church faces the likelihood of growing budget shortfalls due to anticipated reductions in rental income and payments from the buyer of 1180. The Board considered the bylaws and the current state of emergency and concluded that the Board has the authority to apply and accept the PPP funds without a vote of the congregation to ratify the decision.

The Board also discussed whether the bylaws permit an online congregational meeting. The Board concluded that the bylaws don't prohibit such a meeting but procedures would need to be established so that we can follow the meeting-related requirements of the bylaws.

### When will the church building re-open?

In a joint session of the Board and the Deacons on May 13 both groups decided that the church building will remain closed at least through the summer. The exact science behind how the virus is spread is still unknown but singing in a closed space with the resulting dispersal of droplets and aerosols is considered risky. Communion, shared bathrooms and commonly used door handles present risk as

well. The Deacons and Directors want to protect the most vulnerable among us and keep us all worshipping together virtually. Church leaders will continue to monitor CDC, state public health, UCC conference, and other reliable sources for guidelines as well as observe the outcomes at other churches that open their buildings earlier.

The Deacons and the Directors know that the congregation hungers for social contact and we encourage you to call each other and stay after worship for virtual coffee hour. We will investigate more virtual groups and perhaps some outdoor small group activities with advance sign up required. If you have an idea please send it to [moderator@needhamucc.org](mailto:moderator@needhamucc.org).

### Board and Deacon Information session on June 14 after worship

The Board will present a mid-year financial update including the plans to refinance the loan for 1180 Great Plain Ave and an update on the endowment. The Deacons will present why the building will not open until the fall at the earliest.

### How you can help the church.

The church needs to actively address closing the deficit in our operating budget. The Property team is brainstorming how the church can generate more income out of the physical plant. We ask you to think creatively about our space and tell us your ideas or join the Finance or Property teams. Please call Judith Stewart or send an email to [moderator@needhamucc.org](mailto:moderator@needhamucc.org).

## Update on Santa María Tzejá

The community continues trying to isolate from other communities, and people are wearing masks and socially distancing. Although no cases of COVID-19 have been detected in the community, there is virtually no testing anywhere in the region. Many people are planting larger crops to accommodate their food needs. However, some families with fewer resources and especially elders who cannot work are experiencing food shortages. Last week the village leaders distributed food bags, compliments of the municipal electric company EMRE, to families in need (See photo).



*'Food Distribution to Families in Need in Santa María Tzejá*

On the education front, despite classrooms being shut down in Santa María Tzejá, the middle school teachers have instituted an at-home education plan. They meet with small groups of students once a month to distribute homework packets. The students complete the packets at home and turn them in at the end of the month. Likewise the Computer Center staff has recently begun a trial program of delivering educational materials to students. Needham funds are helping to support these programs.

## Support for Emerging Needs in Santa María Tzejá

For 29 consecutive years the Guatemala Partnership has hosted its largest project of the year in May - the annual Guatemala Yard Sale. Normally it is an event of great joy and fellowship, as over 100 participants come together to celebrate spring and join in our commitment to solidarity with our friends in Santa María Tzejá. The Yard Sale is usually our biggest fundraiser of the year, followed closely by the Guatemala Serv-a-thon.

Since we have not been able to hold either of these two events this year, we have instead organized a Virtual Fundraiser for Emerging Needs in Santa María Tzejá. These funds would primarily insure that emergency health services are available as needed, protecting the food supply and other critical services as transportation and access to roads are diminished, and helping the village continue to

Whether you are a regular participant in the yard sale or are simply inspired by the need to provide equitable access to resources for the most vulnerable communities, we hope you will support this effort.

You may donate in either of two ways:

1. Donate by Check to the Church, made payable to: Congregational Church of Needham, with a notation: 'Guatemala Partnership'. Mail to the Church at: 1154 Great Plain Ave., Needham, MA 02492.
2. Donate securely On-Line at [Guatemalapartners.org](http://Guatemalapartners.org): Click on Make a Donation at the bottom of the Home Page.

Thank you for participating as we share our prayers for health and safety with everyone in our community - in Needham and Santa María Tzejá.

## August Delegation Status and Partner-Family Letters

In all likelihood the August delegation will need to be a 'virtual' one, given the limitations imposed by the coronavirus in both of our countries and around the world. A final decision is being made in early June. In this case Partner-Family Letters will need to be delivered via the Internet rather in person. This requires further planning, and further details will be provided when available.

## COMING UP IN WORSHIP

In worship on Sunday, June 7, we welcome a guest preacher to our pulpit (live via Zoom): The Rev. Marilyn Kendrix, who served as the Conference Minister for the Rhode Island Conference and now is one of the Bridge Conference Ministers for the newly formed Southern New England Conference of our United Church of Christ denominational family. Rev. Kendrix is a second-career pastor, having worked previously in the corporate world of organizational development consulting for major corporations before graduating from Yale Divinity School in 2013 with the Henry Hallam Tweedy Prize for exceptional promise in pastoral leadership, the highest honor conferred on a graduate. Within the SNEUCC, her focus is on discipleship, the church's work of calling, encouraging, and equipping followers of Jesus. Rev. Kendrix scheduled this time to be with us months ago, and we are grateful for the gifts of technology that allow her to worship with us now.



## SUMMER SERMON & STUDY SERIES, BEGINNING JUNE 21



**What happens when our world falls apart?** (Not just an academic question these days, if it ever was one.) What does it look like to search for God in the gray area of our lives? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose threads? Sometimes we need to be unraveled – from shame, fear, patterns, or identities that cause harm. To unravel is to acknowledge and grieve what has fallen apart to allow God's newness to unfurl. This worship series explores 10 stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. These are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans – and us – into something new.

**This series is designed to be multisensory and multigenerational, with opportunities for congregational, small group and personal engagement, as well as built-in children's activities.** There will even be a full color downloadable/printable study journal with original visual art to inspire reflection and discussion. So this summer, be like Job: Raise your prayer to God in the whirlwind, and be prepared for surprising answers!



# ONA Team News

## Boston Pride?

What would have been the 50th anniversary of Boston Pride has been postponed until June 12, 2021.

## ONA Ministry Team Resource Recommendations - while you're at home...

Welcome to this month's installment in our series of resources for your Open and Affirming ministry, featuring two books, two articles and a television series. For one of the books you'll see an accompanying video interview of the author as well as a lecture by the author. We encourage you to let us know how you liked any of these resources and to share with us any other resources you have found yourself. You can be in touch with any member of the ONA Ministry Team: Cheryl Aglio-Girelli, Jackie Allen, Kathie Carpenter, Shawn Halford, Barbra Morton, Stephanie Oddleifson, Bill Rees, Dianne Rees, Heather Salerno, Katie Wolf and Rev. John Gage.

### Book:

#### Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America

by Jennifer Harvey  
With a foreword by Tim Wise,  
Raising White Kids is for families, churches, educators, and communities who want to equip their children to be active and able participants in a society that is becoming one of the most racially diverse in the world while remaining full of racial tensions (amazon.com). (Recommended by Rev. John)



### Article:

"75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice"  
by Corinne Shutack in Medium Daily Digest  
<https://medium.com/equality-includes-you/>

what-white-people-can-do-for-racial-justice-f2d18b0e0234

This packed article contains not only the 75 suggestions, but also interesting articles to which you can link from the text of the main article. (Recommended by Kathie Carpenter)

### Article:

#### "A dubious distinction: Massachusetts ranks first in growth of family homelessness"

by Zoe Greenberg Globe Staff, Updated January 28, 2020

"Massachusetts notched the unfortunate ranking of third most expensive state nationwide for renters in a recent report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition." READ MORE...

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/28/opinion/dubious-distinction-massachusetts-ranks-first-growth-family-homelessness/>

### Television Series:

#### "Why We Hate" - Discovery Channel Series

from Alex Gibney and Steven Spielberg  
<https://www.discovery.com/shows/why-we-hate>  
1 season, 7 episodes; well-conceived, well-researched and compellingly presented. (Recommended by Kathie Carpenter)



### Book:

#### Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War

by Dr. Vincent Brown, professor of American history and African and African American Studies at Harvard University



### Lecture (video):

#### Dr. Vincent Brown on Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?468358-1/tackys-revolt>

### Interview:

#### Boston Globe Interview (Update May 20, 2020) with Dr. Vincent Brown, author of Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War

[https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/20/opinion/slavery-was-war/?et rid=24050979&ts\\_campaign=todayinopinion:newsletter](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/20/opinion/slavery-was-war/?et rid=24050979&ts_campaign=todayinopinion:newsletter)

## REACHING OUT - WITH THE PRAYER & CARE TEAM

The Prayer and Care team was created two years ago. Our purpose is to attend to the needs of our elders and to those in difficult circumstances, such as health concerns or experiences of loss. We will continue to meet weekly throughout the summer. If you know of anyone in our church community who needs support, please let one of us know. Our current members are: John Baldwin, Sue Cotton, Rick Devereux, Mary Lou Hughes, Martha Lamb, Carol Miller, Dibby Moder, Joanne Seiden, and Jean Veigas.

If you would be willing to prepare and deliver meals for others, please call or email Dibby Moder (contact information in the church directory).

# WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP & ADULT ED

## WORSHIP TOGETHER ONLINE Sundays @10am



We'll be using Zoom and will have the same Zoom link, phone number and Meeting ID every Sunday.

The Zoom link is <https://zoom.us/j/907548568>  
The call-in number is Tel ( 253) 215-8782 or (301) 715-8592  
The Meeting ID number is 907

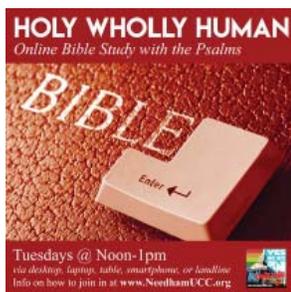
548 568.

Feel free to invite your friends and family to join us, too, no matter where they live, and share this sign-in information with them. We don't want anyone who wants to be connected with a spiritual community in this turbulent time to go without.

*PS: Worship each Sunday will include our celebration of holy communion. Please prepare your own elements--something to eat and drink. Hint: It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice. Most Sundays we'll have a bring-your-own coffee hour at the end of worship, so... bring your own and be prepared to mingle*

## HOLY WHOLLY HUMAN: Finding ourselves in the Psalms Tuesdays @noon

New Online Bible Study!  
We often think of the Bible as a book full of "oughts"--all the things we ought to be or ought not to do. But really our whole, broken lives have a place in scripture just as we all have a place in God's heart. Join Rev. John for this walk with the oh-so-human psalmists Tuesdays @ Noon-1pm on Zoom via desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or land line.



The Zoom link remains the same--<https://zoom.us/j/907548568>--as does the call-in number-- (253) 215-8782 or (301) 715-8592--and the Meeting ID number--907 548 568.

## CANCER SUPPORT GROUP ONLINE Thursdays @9:15am

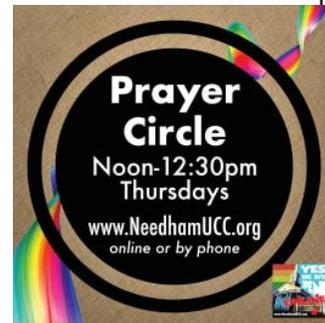
Our Cancer Support Group will meet online,

Thursday mornings. You can contact Rev. Maddie ([revmaddie@needhamucc.org](mailto:revmaddie@needhamucc.org)) for more information. Join us if you need an extra hug or prayer said for yourself or a family member.

## PRAYER CIRCLE Thursdays @noon

Need to take a deep breath?

You're invited to join us for an online prayer circle THURSDAYS @ Noon-12:30pm in the same Zoom room we're using for Sunday worship (and so by phone, too, of course).

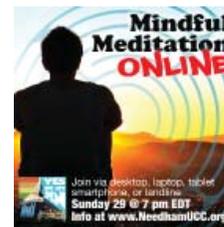


All the same instructions apply to join us via desktop, laptop, table, smartphone, or landline:

The Zoom link remains the same--<https://zoom.us/j/907548568>--as does the call-in number-- (253) 215-8782 or (301) 715-8592--and the Meeting ID number--907 548 568.

## MINDFUL MEDITATION ONLINE Sundays @7pm

Stressed? Worried? Scared? Bone-Tired?



There's never been a better time to lean into mindful meditation. It's a way to reel in all our frayed emotional-mental-physical feelers and ground ourselves again in the present moment.

Join us online on the Zoom platform via desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or landline. Please contact Sue Findlay or the office at [office@needhamucc.org](mailto:office@needhamucc.org) or 781-444-2510 for the Zoom details

## MEN'S FELLOWSHIP BREAKFAST Sunday, June 21 @ 9:15am

Sunday, June 21st, Men's Fellowship plans to meet with a Zoom format at 9:15. Church men will receive an emailed invitation from our Zoom host, Paul Brown ([paulsbrown.aia@gmail.com](mailto:paulsbrown.aia@gmail.com)) that week.

Our schedule will include a chance to say hello/introduce yourself including a personal response to the sermon topic (Father's Day.) What did you learn about faith from your father, and how did he practice it?  
Well wishing,  
John, [jsbaldwin@comcast.net](mailto:jsbaldwin@comcast.net)  
Rob, [rob@robd.com](mailto:rob@robd.com)



The Congregational Church of Needham

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

Like us on  
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Congregational Church  
of Needham UCC

save THE  
DATE!

Mid-Year Update from  
the Board and Deacons

**SUNDAY,  
JUNE 14TH**  
immediately following Worship

### OTHER WAYS TO BE CONNECTED

As the situation continues to change beneath our feet, we are working hard to keep up and put out good resources for you and your family through all the means at our disposal. Please check in and make use of any and all of these as you feel the need. Please also let us know what you would like to see. Email Rev. John at [revjohn@needhamucc.org](mailto:revjohn@needhamucc.org) and Rev. Maddie at [revmaddie@needhamucc.org](mailto:revmaddie@needhamucc.org).

The church website: [www.NeedhamUCC.org](http://www.NeedhamUCC.org)

This is the hub to stay connected. If you lose any of these other sites or information, they'll be up there.



On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NeedhamUCC](http://www.facebook.com/NeedhamUCC)

Sign up for our private Facebook Group: NeedhamUCC In-House Group

On Twitter: @NeedhamUCC  
On Instagram: @NeedhamUCC

address

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF  
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stamp