



Dear Friends,

By the time you read this, we will have made our way once again through the ups and downs, the joys and agonies of Holy Week with Jesus, and we'll have arrived with the women and the disciples at the empty tomb and the unbelievable news: Christ is risen!

Of course that all happened, a long time ago. We don't make it happen new each year (and the power of that Easter resurrection doesn't depend on us doing it right, either). Rather, we remember it, sharing the memories and the stories that have been passed down to us over generations.

But, in the words of the preamble to the Constitution of our United Church of Christ denominational family, it falls to us, the Church here and now, to "make this faith [our] own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, in purity of heart before God." In other words, while that first Easter is now ages old, it's up to us to find that reality of resurrection – life not simply restored but made utterly new – in our own time and place.

And what a time and place this is! Our second Easter celebrated at a physical distance from one another, more than half a million of our fellow Americans dead from the coronavirus pandemic, with cases still rising in many places. Sure, there's a vaccine, but it's still largely a matter of promise and hope. Meanwhile, the deadly virus of racism still runs rampant, and hate rises against Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander communities. We need that Easter good news so desperately, but when we go to look for it, it may we feel like all we find is the empty tomb.

Which is all those first disciples found, too, when first they went looking, still wrapped in the pre-dawn darkness and the shadows of pain and grief, confusion, anger, and fear. At first, things looked worse: "Oh no! They've stolen even the body of our beloved!" But it was in the midst of that messy swirl that something else took shape: hope. It didn't come from what they'd known and now lost, from the normal they hoped to return to. The Jesus they once knew, they knew no longer that same way. This good news was completely new – new life, hope, a new way. Christ is risen! And their world would never be the same, or ours.

It's that newness I pray for us now, not a return to our old normal, but an entirely new and blessed normal. We've been through too much, and others much more, to simply turn back the clock. It's time for us to step up and step into a new Easter world. It's time for us to announce a blessing not just from long ago, but in this moment and for the future: "There is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Peace,
Rev. John MacIver Gage

Risen
by Jan Richardson

If you are looking
for a blessing,
do not linger
here.

Here
is only
emptiness,
a hollow,
a husk
where a blessing
used to be.

This blessing
was not content
in its confinement.

It could not abide its isolation,
the unrelenting silence,
the pressing stench
of death.

So if it is
a blessing
you seek,
open your own
mouth.

Fill your lungs
with the air
this new
morning brings
and then
release it
with a cry.

Hear how the blessing

breaks forth
in your own voice,
how your own lips
form every word
you never dreamed
to say.

See how the blessing
circles back again,
wanting you to
repeat it,
but louder,
how it draws you,
pulls you,
sends you
to proclaim
its only word:
Risen.
Risen.
Risen.

FROM THE BOARD

Thank you to many members who participated in the Church Growth (formerly known as Membership) and Fundraising for the Operating Budget "Conversations" which were held after worship recently. The energy, engagement, and creative thinking were impressive. The new teams addressing these areas will consider your comments as they deliberate and create a plan to move forward. This work is very important in meeting the goals of our three year financial plan to get us on a healthy and sustainable path.

The church is moving carefully toward more in-person activities with outdoor activities taking the lead. The Covid Advisory team and the church staff are working to implement safety protocols. Please watch your weekly emails for these events. We are hoping that hybrid worship will begin in late Spring but the sound engineering company that will upgrade the system in the Sanctuary has not given us a date for the work.

The church was notified of a bequest recently from the Rimmele Trust. The gift to our endowment will be approximately \$70,000. Robert Rimmele, who established the trust, passed more than 25 years ago and his legacy gift reflects his deep commitment to this church community.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judith Stewart
Moderator

FOCUS

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

May issue deadline:
April 23rd

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

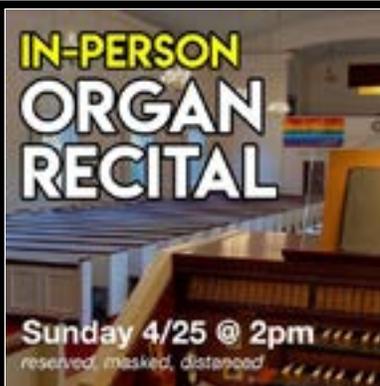
The Church Board
board@needhamucc.org

Judith Stewart, Moderator
moderator@needhamucc.org

The Deacons
Nancy Lane, Chair
emaildeacons@needhamucc.org

Pastoral Relations
Committee
prc@needhamucc.org

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



In-Person Organ Recital Sunday, April 25th @2pm

Working with the COVID Advisory Team, we believe we are ready to begin taking steps toward gathering in a limited way in person in the sanctuary. While we wait for our hybrid worship equipment to arrive and be installed, our first such offering will be an organ recital Sunday, April 25 @ 2pm by Robert Barney, organist with Trinity Episcopal Church in

Concord, MA. Mr. Barney will offer a 45-minute program of beautiful, uplifting music.

This will be a good opportunity for us to practice the safety measures we'll need for the future:

- A maximum of 30 people will be allowed in the audience.
- Reservations are required. You can make yours by going to <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0844A8AA23A2FD0-inperson> or calling the church office at 781-444-2510.
- Volunteer health advocates will ask screening questions of everyone on the way in.
- Everyone will be required to use level 3 medical-grade masks the church will supply.
- Seats will be assigned to maintain safe distancing.





Delegation 'Reportback' - Sunday, April 18, approximately 11:10 am:

All are invited to join us on the Church's Zoom link following the April 18th church service for a presentation from the February delegation that combines some history of the partnership, an overview of highlights over the years, and a view of where we hope to go from here. Whether you know a little or a lot about the partnership, you'll find something to engage you. Questions are welcome!

Guatemala Yard Sale/Hold Those Treasures!

Although date selection is still pending, awaiting updates on vaccinations and coronavirus caseloads in Massachusetts, we are happy to announce that we plan to host the Guatemala Yard Sale this year, presumably on a Saturday between June and September. So, as you do your spring and/or pandemic cleaning, please set aside your best-quality items (but no clothing) as follows:

Kitchen and household items, children's gear, toys, puzzles and games, current sports equipment, bikes, collectible or vintage items, jewelry, artwork, electronics (no TV's or computers), books/DVD's/records, outdoor furniture, or small indoor furniture items. For questions please contact Brenda Metzler: bmetzler7@verizon.net.



Environmental Stewardship in Santa María Tzejá

As countries around the world celebrate Earth Day this month, it is fitting to acknowledge the several upcoming projects in Santa María Tzejá that stem from the community's successful efforts to have the Cerro

SMT's nature preserve. Photo by S. Botón

Cantil nature preserve designated as a nationally protected area. Borrowing from a recent article written by Ali Durbin:

"Through a land protection incentive linked to a European carbon-offset program, Guatemala's Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) awards land stewards a yearly stipend for protecting old-growth forests or for reforesting cleared areas. Upon learning of their eligibility for this grant, SMT leaders surveyed families through a participatory decision-making process to determine how to use the funds. The community has decided to invest the money in two eco-friendly, sustainable health projects: composting latrines, which do not use water and will provide rich soil for crops; and fuel-efficient stoves, which will reduce smoke from cooking fires in homes while consuming a minimal amount of firewood. These chosen projects will contribute to public health and wellness, while safeguarding water and trees. The Cantil Reserve project is therefore a triple win: a win for forest protection, a win for resource conservation, and a win for families in Santa María Tzejá!"

Primary School Grateful for COVID Relief Funds

The primary school teachers and parents in SMT are very grateful to have received some of the COVID Relief funds raised by our church last year. The money is being used to purchase the following PPE supplies that were government



Teacher w/ mask and face shield takes student's temperature. Photo by: V. Gutiérrez

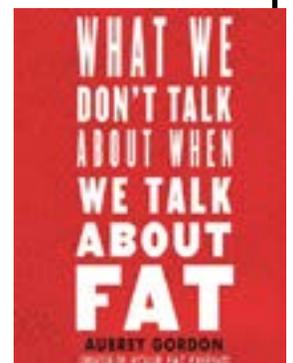
pre-requisites to starting school this year: face masks, face shields for teachers, hand gel, a digital thermometer, and cleaning supplies.

Women's Book Group

WHAT WE DON'T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FAT

Thursdays beginning April 29, 8:00 PM

What attitudes have we learned from American culture and the wider church about our bodies? Together we will read "What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat" by Audrey Gordon and we'll explore these attitudes and our own experiences as we consider the bodies we inhabit, sacred and precious at every size and ability. We'll read and discuss one chapter each week. If you'd like to participate, please email RevMaddie@needhamucc.org



WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP & ADULT ED

Findlay or the office at office@needhamucc.org or 781-444-2510 for the Zoom details

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 the first Sunday of the month and on holidays 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.*



MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Sunday, April 18th @ 9:15am

LIVE! via Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/93975548873?pwd=S3AydjcxQjdjUGhUaW8rM0dlQnpvUT09>

Sure, the breakfast may be BYOBreakfast at this point, but the fellowship remains as rich as ever. Join us for conversation around worship scripture.

What does prayer look like in your life? Does it feel like you thought/were taught it would? What do you think prayer is supposed to do? Is that working? for you?

ALL men in the congregation are invited to this time of reflection and fellowship.

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. Contact Sue

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY WITH EMT & OUTREACH April 17th 8:45am-1pm

The Environmental Ministry Team and Outreach have teamed up to bring an outdoor opportunity for all to help others in our community. We are working at the Needham Community Farm, at the church, and around the Needham community in a socially distanced way. Use this link <https://forms.gle/evdVB1bJLsQZp48S8> to set aside a spot. All family members need to be included in the sign-up form to account for numbers. Remember to wear your mask, bring work gloves, and have plenty of water.

To celebrate our work and weather permitting we'll have a socially distanced picnic lunch on the church lawn at 12:30 pm, socially distanced of course. Bring a picnic lunch and something to sit on.

WOMEN'S BOOK GROUP: WHAT WE DON'T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FAT Thursdays beginning April 29th @ 8pm

What attitudes have we learned from American culture and the wider church about our bodies? Together we will read "What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat" by Audrey Gordon and we'll explore these attitudes and our own experiences as we consider the bodies we inhabit, sacred and precious at every size and ability. We'll read and discuss one chapter each week. If you'd like to participate, please email RevMaddie@needhamucc.org.

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Working with the COVID Advisory Team, we will be offering an organ recital Sunday, April 25 @ 2pm by Robert Barney, organist with Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord, MA. Mr. Barney will offer a 45-minute program of beautiful, uplifting music.

- A maximum of 30 people will be allowed
- Reservations are required. go to <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0844A8AA23A2FD0-inperson> or call the church office at 781-444-2510.
- Volunteer health advocates will ask screening questions of everyone on the way in.
- Everyone will be required to use level 3 medical-grade masks the church will supply.
- Seats will be assigned to maintain safe distancing.

Environmental Ministries Team News ...earth stewardship for our lives...



Spring is here!!

Needham is a designated "Tree City USA". On April 29, the Arbor Day Foundation celebrates it's 149th anniversary leading up to the 150th celebration of Arbor Day. Check out celebratearborday.com and celebrate

by making a donation to support tree planting. Arborday.org is a great resource for shopping and learning about specific trees. Speak for the Trees Boston is a local organization that also accepts donations.

At the church EMT book reports, two bestsellers about trees were reviewed. The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben is a work of nonfiction about why trees matter on a global scale. Peter describes the social network of trees and how they communicate. For instance in the presence of a threat, trees communicate by secreting a chemical that warns other trees. You will no longer look at a tree in the same way and no longer see them only as a commodity. Overstory, an epic book of fiction, was written by Richard Powers after he read The Hidden Life of Trees.



**Celebrate Earth Day 2021 50+1 years
Saturday 4/17, 9am-1pm**

Meet at the church at 8:45am, and we'll divvy up jobs for the day.

The Environmental Ministry Team and Outreach have teamed up to bring an outdoor opportunity for all to help others in our community. We are working at the Needham Community Farm, at the church, and around the Needham community in a socially distanced way. There are opportunities to paint, garden, construct, and pick up trash. [Click here](https://forms.gle/evdVB1bJLsQZp48S8) or type this link <https://forms.gle/evdVB1bJLsQZp48S8> into your browser to set aside a spot. All family members need to be included in the sign-up form to account for numbers. Remember to wear your mask, bring work gloves, and have plenty of water.

To celebrate our work and weather permitting we'll have a picnic lunch on the church lawn at 12:30 pm, socially distanced of course. Bring a picnic lunch and a blanket or something to sit on. There will be no bathroom facilities at the church.

News from ONA

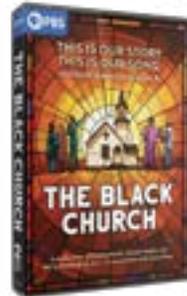


CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ON RACE CONTINUE

This year, the ONA Ministry Team committed to holding a course on anti-racism as a major element of our promise of inclusion and affirmation of every person. We are currently running the second half of our course titled Constructive Conversations on Race. Twenty-three people participated in the six sessions in the fall. This spring, sixteen of those people returned and we welcomed six new people.

The course involves prep work before each class (videos and readings), whole and small group sessions, hearing and telling stories of one's social identity and racial identity development. We have also addressed whiteness and deconstructing White privilege. Participants are keeping journals of their responses to the resources and their feelings about issues of race currently. Upcoming topics include anti-Asian hate, policing in the Black community, representation of Black people in society and media, inequities in medical care, and reparations.

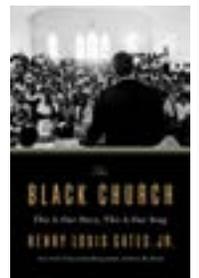
2 GREAT TELEVISION PROGRAMS



We recommend two television programs that are worthy of your time and are extremely informative on the Black experience.

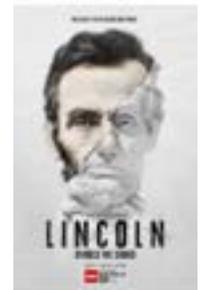
"The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song" PBS production

The program is hosted by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. You will see a beautiful history of the church, its music and its relationship with the White church. You can access the 4-hour series through On Demand. This is also available as a book.



"Lincoln: Divided We Stand" CNN Series

This wonderfully constructed series deals with the intricacies of Lincoln's complicated relationship with slavery and the unexpected route he took to improve and preserve the Union.





Learning About My Bible:

Students in grades 3-5 are invited to join Rev. Maddie in the Family Ministries Zoom Room to learn more about their Bible - the different parts of the Bible, where to find our favorite stories, and more! Sunday, April 25 11:30 AM - Noon.

Kindergarten & Upper Elementary Bibles

Children in Kindergarten and Upper Elementary school receive an age-appropriate Bible from the church to assist in their exploration and faith formation. Kindergarteners receive a storybook Bible and upper elementary students receive a Common English Bible. There is no cost to families.

If your child is interested in receiving their kindergarten or upper elementary Bible, please email RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org by Sunday, April 25.

SAVE THE DATE! APRIL 25TH WORSHIP HAS MOVED



On the Sunday after Christmas, we were joined for Zoom worship by the members of the Brighton Allston Congregational Church, UCC and their pastor, Rev. Nikira

Hernandez-Evans. Now it's our turn to go visiting! On Sunday, April 25, 2021, we will not hold our own worship service but will gather with the Brighton Allston church for worship "at their place," at their Zoom link AT 10:30AM. We'll send out LOTS of reminders beforehand (and have tech deacons on our usual link at our usual time to redirect folks), but please go ahead and make a note for yourself now.

Adopt a Plot in the Garden of Eatin'



- Families with children in sunday school and/or youth group are invited to adopt a portion of our garden to tend this spring and summer!
- We have spots to grow tomatoes, zucchini, beans, lettuce, herbs, and strawberries. Each family will be assigned one type of produce and care for the same spot throughout the season. Families will sign up for a recurring day to come and care for the garden.
- Please reach out to Rev. Maddie if you're interested in adopting a garden plot!

YOUTH GROUP

Tie-Dye & Pizza Party: Sunday, April 18, 3:00-4:00 PM

Junior & Senior High students are invited to join in this in-person outdoor event on Sunday, April 18. Each student will receive one of our new church t-shirts to tie-dye. We will have pizza (Gluten-free crust, too!) and lots of fun. Students can also bring additional items to tie-dye. \$25 per student covers t-shirt, tie-dye supplies, and pizza. Masks are required except when eating and social-distancing will be observed. Sign up online at <https://m.signupgenius.com/#/showRSVPSignUp/8050E4EAFAD2CAAFF2-youth>

Silly Walk-a-Thon for Family Promise: Sunday, May 2, 3:00-4:00 PM

We'll gather at the church to participate in the Family Promise Walk for Change and play outdoor games.



Learn more about Family Promise here: <https://familypromisemetrowest.org/news-events/events.html> And RSVP to RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org by Sunday, April 25. Masks and social distancing will be observed.

“A MAZE IS ABOUT LOSING YOUR WAY. A LABYRINTH IS ABOUT FINDING IT.”



A labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool, a walking meditation for the heart, mind, soul, and body. Though labyrinths certainly predate Christianity, they have been incorporated into Christian practice over the centuries. There are labyrinths embedded in the floors of great cathedrals, and labyrinth walking is being rediscovered in churches around the world. A labyrinth has a single path that winds from the edge into the center. The same path leads back out to the edges again. In that way it resembles the indirect path of our lives, which leads us, twisting and turning, sometimes feeling straightforward, sometimes off on what feels like a tangent, but always deeper into life, and therefore the heart of God. Remember: Unlike a maze, you cannot get lost in a labyrinth. Just keep walking.

We will continue to look for opportunities to use our lovely indoor labyrinth, but also **please enjoy our new outdoor labyrinth on the front lawn of the church at 1154 Great Plain Ave.** We're inviting our



whole community to enjoy it as well. There are information sheets available there with suggestions for how to approach walking. Thanks to Rev. Maddie and Diana Conroy for doing the painstaking work of laying it out for us.



Family Promise MetroWest Walk for Change

Begin the month of May taking a walk to help a cause the church has joined others to support: the Family Promise Walk for Change.

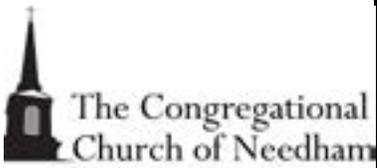
Family Promise MetroWest (FPM) runs four programs which provide a continuum of support to families in varying stages of housing instability. In 2020 they served 50 families which included 89 children.
<https://www.familypromisemetrowest.org/>

A major source of funding for FPM is the annual Walk. This year the Walk for Change will be conducted wherever participants want to walk over the weekend of May 1 and 2. Our Church has set a goal to involve 100 walkers and raise \$3,500. There will be opportunities to join one of our church's several Themed Teams organized by members with Rev. Maddie and Rev. John. Please reach out to other members and friends of the church and anyone else interested in joining the effort and making a pledge to support local families in crisis. Look for more details related to our Themed Walk following Easter.

Registration for the walk on the FPM website is quick and easy - on the pull-down menu select the Congregational Church of Needham Team to be part of our overall effort:

<https://familypromisemetrowest.salsalabs.org/walkforchange/index.html>

At the bottom of the registration home page you will find links to various activities organized by FPM. Any questions can be directed to Vance Fernandez: vancefernandez@hotmail.com 617-816-5871



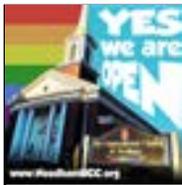
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office@needhamucc.org

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needhamucc.org

On the twitter
 @needhamucc

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 Congregational Church
 of Needham UCC



And now... We're a Podcast!

In an attempt to make our weekly sermons more accessible and more useful to you, we've created a new, audio-only podcast we're calling

"Yes! We're Open: Living Faith with Needham UCC"

Find us on podcast providers including **iTunes, Spotify,** and others. (If you can't find it on your favorite service, let us know and we'll put it there.) So now it's even easier to listen to a sermon again or for the first time, around the house, in the car, or while you're out walking off the pandemic blues. You can even easily share a sermon or the whole podcast with someone you think might enjoy it. It's a great way to share our church. **So like it, subscribe, and start listening now.** (Oh, and give us a "like" to make it easier for others to find our podcast, too. (Find it now at <http://needhamucc.buzzsprout.com>)



address

stamp

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 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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