



Dear Friends,

The season of **Lent** is a time of reflection, repentance, and recommitment to the Way of Jesus, of justice, peace, and compassion. Our Lenten theme this year is "**Grounded.**" We'll be taking time to ground ourselves once more in some foundational elements of our faith, what and how we believe. These will form a special worship series over the season from Lent through Easter, to include:

GROUNDING

Ash Wednesday



2/17 @ 7pm LIVE! via Zoom
Info at www.NeedhamUCC.org

- **2/21: Church** *Why are we here? Practice, practice, practice.*
- **2/28: Creation** *Our common bond with everyone and everything in God.*
- **3/7: Sin & Forgiveness** *Not just the dots, but the whole picture. And how to change the picture.*
- **3/14: Incarnation** *God is in the house, and not just in Jesus.*
- **3/21: Prayer** *The feedback loop. The transforming power of reflection and sharing.*
- **3/28 (Palm Sunday): Justice, Peace, Salvation, & the Kingdom of God** *The point, here and now.*
- **4/1 (Maundy Thursday): Communion** *Altogether now, or, "The Power of Seating Charts"*
- **4/2 (Good Friday): Suffering** *God is with the suffering, not in the suffering.*
- **4/4 (Easter Sunday): Death, Resurrection, & Hope** *All three are real.*
- **and 4/11: The Spirit** *The power to go above and beyond.*

*** I will be offering what I'm calling "**Close the Loop, Open the Sermon**" conversations LIVE! on Zoom each **Wednesday @ 12 Noon and Thursday @ 7:30pm** throughout the series **beginning 2/24-2/25** to give us a chance to talk about each of these topics. Just because they're essential—especially because they're essential!—doesn't mean there's just one way to understand them, and especially not just my way. It's good to reflect together.

Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday** next Wednesday. We will gather for worship, including Holy Communion, **Wednesday, 2/17 @ 7pm** in our usual Zoom space at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>. It's a good way to start our season of grounding; after all, the words traditionally associated with Ash Wednesday are "Remember you are but dust, and to dust you shall return" – ashes, dust, ground. Lent is a chance to remember that we are only human (adam in Hebrew and earthlings in Old English, "those made of earth"). We are a mix of faults and frailties, promise and possibilities, made by God and loved by God forever. This blend of humility and hope, confession and grace is essential for our faith, as we try to follow in Jesus' footsteps, striding, stumbling, falling, and picking ourselves up all over again along the way.

Since we won't be sharing the usual ash crosses and anointing with oil in person, **we've come up with something new: temporary cross tattoos.** (These are being sent separately. Look for them!) We realize that for some this may seem a little silly or showy or strange (as do the usual crosses). But, hey, it's for only one day, or even just half a day. So go ahead, give it a try. We suggest you apply the tattoo Wednesday morning and wear it through the day until after our worship. Put it some place where you can see it – not, perhaps, on your forehead, but maybe on your hand or your wrist. The point is not to "parade your piety before others" (Matthew 6:1) but to be reminded of your essential humanity, God's love for you, and your commitment to the Way of Jesus... and yes, maybe to smile as you do.

It's true that every day is an opportunity to draw closer to God, delve deeper into life, and give up and take on new practices to help us better embody the Gospel, just as every day is a chance to eat healthier, for instance, or get more exercise. But Lent is an invitation to tend to our spiritual health intentionally. I hope you will set your intention to use this Lent well.

Peace,
Rev. John MacIver Gage

FEBRUARY 2021**DELEGATION PLANS**

Although once again our upcoming delegation will need to be virtual rather than in person, we are looking forward to connecting by Zoom with the various committees in Santa María Tzejá during the dates of February 13-21. We discovered last August how meaningful it can be to see our partners in Guatemala face to face, despite the distance, and to hear about their work and challenges in the areas of education, health, and community priorities. We expect to hear that most education is still happening remotely and look forward to sharing our experiences of how students, parents, and teachers are coping. Despite the pandemic the community is moving ahead on some priorities, such as building a community market. Brenda Metzler, Jeff Clausen, and Ali Durbin are working to come up with some fun tweaks to enliven the meetings with community groups.

LAST-MINUTE PARTNER-FAMILY LETTERS?

Partner-family letters (and letters to high school scholarship students) are being delivered electronically to the Computer Center in SMT on February 10th for printing and distribution. So



if you haven't sent yours in yet, please submit it ASAP to: davebjohnson77@gmail.com. The first electronic letter exchange last August worked well, with Dave Johnson facilitating good collaboration with Carmen Reyes, director of the SMT Computer Center.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Guatemala is officially registering about 1,000 new Covid-19 cases each day, though testing rates are low and cases are severely underreported, especially in rural areas. Mask use is required nationwide, but public transportation and workplaces often fail to enforce social distancing standards. The government recently announced a crackdown around these and other regulations. Guatemala has not yet acquired the Covid-19 vaccine, but the Ministry of Health projects immunizing 60 - 70% of the population this year.

The government manages a color-coded alert system, updated biweekly based on caseload numbers, that classifies each region as red (extreme risk), orange (high), yellow (moderate), or green (low). Santa María Tzejá is in a yellow region, which means that the community will presumably be allowed to start hybrid schooling soon. The calendar year starts in mid-January.

ADVOCACY FOR JUSTICE

As part of our mission to promote social justice, the Guatemala Partnership recently participated in two advocacy campaigns. We joined Freedom for Immigrants and the Detention Watch Network in urging the Biden/Harris administration to release immigrants from detention centers where conditions foster the propagation of COVID-19. We also signed an urgent action regarding attacks and threats against leaders of the Peaceful Resistance in eastern Guatemala, an Indigenous Xinka grassroots movement that opposes Pan American Silver's Escobal Mine due to the environmental, health, and social damages it has caused on their territory.

FOCUS

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

March issue
deadline:
Mon., Feb. 22nd

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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

FROM THE BOARD

The Board would like to thank church members for strong and prayerful participation during January in charting the course for our congregation. Your attentiveness and insightful questions at the budget forum on January 10 and at the Hearing combined with an excellent turnout for the Annual Meeting demonstrated that Congregationalism is alive and well in Needham. The Board would also like to thank all the families who increased their pledges after the budget presentations. The 2021 budget approved by our members is the first step in a three-year plan to get us on a healthy and sustainable path.

Church leaders, both newly elected and those continuing their terms, are ready to take the next steps in addressing our challenges, but we need your knowledge, creativity, energy, and social connections. The Board and the Deacons will be hosting forums in Lent to address the areas where we need to make progress: membership, fundraising for the operating budget, and rental growth. We invite you to participate in one or more areas (see the forum details elsewhere in this issue). You can also step up and join the Property Team which oversees our sprawling physical plant or the Finance Team. Additionally, with the elimination of funding in the operating budget for paid musicians, we encourage you to reach out to Rev. John or Valerie Becker, our Music Director, to share your musical gifts. As our Finance Team Chair said, "We need all hands on deck!"

Our life as a church community online is wonderful, but the hours required to prepare online offerings are intense. Our ministers and staff worked very hard in January to get all the preparations for the budget process and the Annual Meeting completed on top of the usual workload. At our last meeting, the Board voted to give each of our ministers and staff an additional week of paid time off, to be taken before June 1 and to be scheduled such that our office and ministerial needs are met.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judith Stewart
Moderator

News from ONA



OPEN AND AFFIRMING ANNIVERSARY

As we approach the 21st Anniversary of our Open and Affirming ministry on February 13, 2021, we look again at our ONA Covenant to remember what we promised.

We believe that all people are created in the image of God, who loves each of us as we are. Following the example of Jesus, we welcome and affirm all people, including those of every age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression; every racial, ethnic and cultural identity, and country of origin; every faith background, family configuration and economic situation; every mental and physical ability and health status; every life experience and circumstance.

We strive to be an example of God's extravagant welcome and to live these beliefs in our worship, language, actions and relationships.

We invite all people who desire to join us in this journey of faith to share in the full life and ministry of this church.

(ONA Covenant Revision - Adopted November 17, 2019)

HAVE NEW IDEAS? - TELL THE TEAM

If you have ideas about how we might address other areas of our Covenant, please contact anyone on 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,
Rev. John Gage.



MORE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ON RACE

We were delighted with the participation of over 30 people in the first section of the Constructive Conversations on Race from October to December. A planning team is meeting to map out the next sessions of this anti-racism course. The plan is to meet once a month, with assignments in between sessions. Schedule will be set based on the convenience of the participants.



STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

Thank you to everyone who made a pledge to our Growing In Gratitude Stewardship Campaign. We definitely G-R-E-W! Thanks to you, we received more than \$410,000 in pledges for our 2021 operating budget.

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 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. 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

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

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP Sunday, February 21st @ 9:15am

Men's Fellowship plans to meet with a Zoom

format at 9:15. Church men will receive an emailed invitation from our Zoom host, that week preceding.

Our schedule will include a chance to say hello/introduce yourself including a personal response to the sermon topic, or chosen scripture. Please consider volunteering by signing up to lead a prayer or initiating responding to the topic.

Well wishing,

John, jsbadwin@comcast.net

Rob, rob@rob.com

CLOSE THE LOOP, OPEN THE SERMON Wednesdays @ noon & Thursdays @ 7pm

Join us throughout the Lent Worship series beginning 2/24-2/25 live via the Worship Zoom link to talk about each of the weekly sermon topics. Just because they're essential – especially because they're essential! – doesn't mean there's just one way to understand them, and especially not just my way. It's good to reflect together.

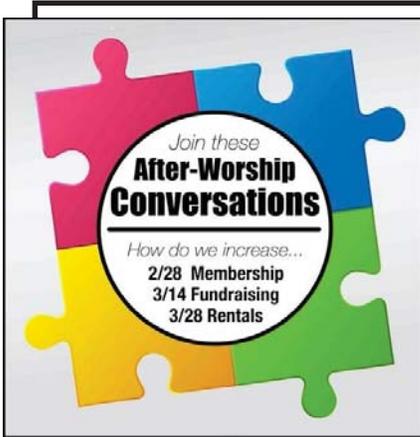
EMT BOOK REVIEWS Sunday, February 21st @ 11:15am

Please join us after church on February 21, when members of EMT will review books with environmental and climate change themes. We will be on Zoom at 11:15.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THREE AFTER WORSHIP CONVERSATIONS

The church will host three brainstorming sessions in February and March following Worship. Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend via zoom with the link you use to attend Worship.

- February 28:** Forum on Membership
- March 14:** Forum on Fundraisers for Operating Budget
- March 28:** Forum on Rental Income



It's "all hands on deck" time!

AFTER-WORSHIP CONVERSATIONS SUNDAYS 2/28, 3/14, & 3/28 @ 11:15AM LIVE! VIA ZOOM

It takes a whole church to be a whole church. Our church needs your input and participation in order to be as healthy and

sustainable a community as we can be. We've already seen marvelous growth in our stewardship pledge campaign to fund the church budget in 2021, but there's more we need to do. The Boards of Directors and Deacons have identified three areas, in particular, where we need your help in new ways. Please plan to be a part of one or all of these important conversations:

2/28 Growing Membership

The days of "Burmese tiger trap evangelism" (sitting quietly in the pews, waiting for new members to fall in) are over. How do we "share the good news that is in us" and the good things about our church with people who may not ever been to church before? More importantly, can we even articulate why church is important to us? What practical steps do we need to take before, during, and after someone visits us in order to be not just welcoming but inviting?

3/14 Growing Fundraising

We do a fabulous job raising money, for other people (and we should). But we're less adept at raising money for ourselves, for the roof, the gas bill, salaries and benefits, which are important if we want to keep helping others. How do we create opportunities to give that reach both inside and outside our congregation? And how do we do that without overly relying on the labor of a tiny group of people and burning them out (Looking at you, Village Fair!)

and 3/28 Growing Rentals

Back in the day, renting out our building to outside groups was pretty much an extra, icing on the cake. Now it's essential bread and butter. We need this income and we have an opportunity to resource outside groups in our community with like-minded missions. How do we harness the social connections of our members to attract more long term and occasional rentals. Who would be a good fit? And what do we need to change to accommodate them?

ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTRIES TEAM NEWS ...EARTH STEWARDSHIP FOR OUR LIVES TODAY...

EMT recommends you join with the League of Women Voters and take the Meatless Monday Needham Pledge.

Join your Needham neighbors for Meatless Monday Needham, to encourage healthy eating habits that prioritize human and environmental health. Endorse by the Needham Board of Health. You can pledge here. <https://www.meatlessmondayneedham.org/> Follow this link to the Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/meatlessmondayneedham/>

Lenten Carbon Fast

As people of faith, it is our responsibility to be wise stewards of God's Creation. These actions will reduce your production of climate changing pollution and help to preserve God's gift of the earth for future generations.

Visit EMT on the church website at <https://www.needhamucc.org/environmental-ministries.html> for suggestions. Each week, choose several easy actions from each category to fulfill our stewardship of the Earth.

EMT Book Reviews

Please join us after church on Sunday, February 21, when members of EMT will review books with environmental and climate change themes. We will be on Zoom at 11:15.

Worship Flower Donations



Now that we're Zooming worship from the sanctuary, we'd like to have a flowering plant on the altar (which will then be given to someone in our congregation afterward). If you would like to sponsor the flowers for a Sunday, you can sign up online at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0844a8aa23a2fd0-worship>, email the church office at office@needhamucc.org or call the office at 781-444-2510 with your two choices of dates and your dedication. Donations may be made via PayPal on the church's web site or by sending a check to the church office.



LENT-AT-HOME FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

This box will take families with children in Pre-K - Grade 5 from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday with reflections and questions for family conversation, coloring pages, activities and crafts to take children through each week of Lent. Kits will be delivered around Needham beginning Sunday, February 14 so families can begin to use them on Ash Wednesday.

Reserve your Lent-at-Home kits online: <https://forms.gle/k8P9vEDFWGzDbJxd6>

Participate Screen-Free or in Our Online Classroom!

All instructions and reflections will be printed and included so families can do these activities screen-free! Optional videos with Rev. Maddie will be available in our online classroom.

Outside of Needham? We can mail you a kit!

We know that we have some families outside of the Needham area as well! Fill out the same form with your full mailing address and we will send your Lent-at-Home kit to you!



Reclaiming & Living Covenant: An Antiracism Lenten Study for Youth

Youth in Junior and Senior High are invited to join Youth Group for a special Lenten series beginning Sunday, February 21.

Covenants play a powerful role in how we understand relationships. Covenants help us understand how we should act and what to expect from one another when we are being our best selves. Covenants tell us who we are and whose we are. And covenants are lived, they are something we act out in our lives. We will reflect together on God's covenant with us and our covenants with each other.

While we consider this web of relationship, we will also reflect on how God uses covenant to bring us hope and promise in our wandering times (like in the story of Exodus). As we journey through Lent together, we will consider God's invitation to renew our covenants with one another and refresh our commitment to share life together as we seek to create a holy and just society, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Join us on this journey, Sundays at 7:00 PM in the Youth Zoom Room. We will begin with check-in time, move into our conversation, and end with some time for games together. If you need the link for the Youth Zoom Room, please email RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org

NEEDHAM UCC YOUTH LENTEN PHOTO CHALLENGE

A photo (or video) challenge for creative spiritual reflection.
Remember to tag @RevMaddieFoster on Insta or TikTok to share your submissions.

2/17: Dust

2/18: Wilderness

2/19: Gather

2/20: Listen

2/21: Remember

2/22: Open

2/23: Heal

2/24: Look

2/25: Voice

2/26: Injustice

2/27: Settle

2/28: Refuge

3/1: Love

3/2: Go

3/3: Shelter

3/4: Joy

3/5: Covenant

3/6: See

3/7: Thirst

3/8: Witness

3/9: Gratitude

3/10: Power

3/11: Presence

3/12: Sacrifice

3/13: With

3/14: Free

3/15: Beloved

3/16: Breathe

3/17: Peace

3/18: Dwell

3/19: Grace

3/20: Forgive

3/21: Journey

3/22: Companion

3/23: Wait

3/24: Hunger

3/25: Carry

3/26: Path

3/27: Steadfast

3/28: People

3/29: Holy

3/30: Follow

3/31: See

4/1: Commune

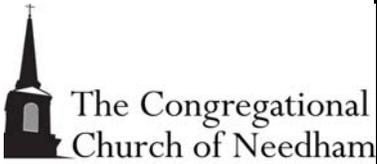
4/2: Dark

4/3: Void

4/4: Alive

LENTEN PHOTO CHALLENGE

Youth (and any one else with an insta or tiktok!) are invited to join in this creative spiritual exercise and share one photo or video a day inspired by that day's word. Remember to tag @RevMaddieFoster on insta or tiktok so we can see your submissions! Youth Group participants who complete at least 30 days will receive a surprise in gratitude for your participation.



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On the web at
needhamucc.org

On the twitter
 @needhamucc

Like us on
Facebook
 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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