

# NeedhamUCC

## FOCUS Newsletter • Lent 2026, Part 1

### Lent Begins

*The 1st Sunday in Lent is 3/22*

Lent is a church season of reflection, repentance, grace, and recommitment to spiritual growth. It's a pilgrimage, of sorts, with deeper loving relationship with God, our neighbors, and ourselves as the goal. In worship, we will walk with Jesus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem and moves into direct conflict with the secular and religious powers there for the sake of God's liberating Gospel—a journey which will end in his murder by the state. Except it doesn't. No matter how challenging the journey, God promises it will end in Easter resurrection and abundant life, or it's not the end.

**In worship on Sunday, 3/22 we will share the mark of ashes (“Remember you are only human”) and anointing with oil (Remember, you are loved by God forever), signs of the hard truth and amazing grace that are ours to share with the world in the Spirit.**




**PERIOD PARTY\***

*\*It's (not) exactly what you think it is*

*Collecting & repackaging menstrual products for neighbors in need*

**Sunday, 3/15 @ 12 Noon**  
at the Congregational Church of Needham  
1154 Great Plain Ave  
Connect at [www.NeedhamUCC.org](http://www.NeedhamUCC.org)

*It's that time of the... year... again*

### Period Party

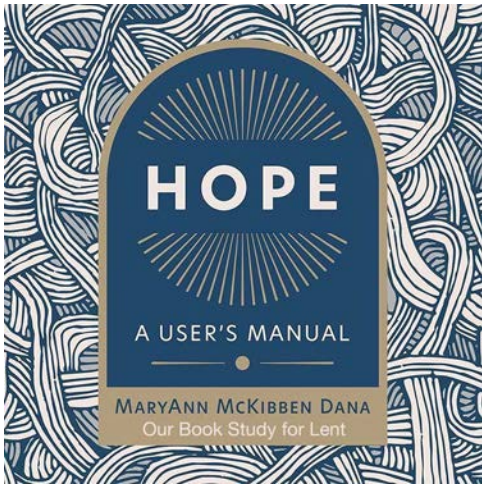
**3/15 @ Noon, in the Fellowship Hall**

When you're living unhoused or in a shelter, there are so many questions to think about, so many needs to be met; but there's at least one we don't often consider: **“Where am I going to get the products I need to deal with my monthly period cleanly and safely?”** So we're partnering with **Circle of Hope** here in Needham to address this need. We're collecting pads, tampons, pantyliners, & hygiene wipes, all individually wrapped, which we'll repackage into reusable containers for distribution to folks who need them.

**TO DONATE ITEMS**, please use this link to our Amazon Registry: <https://tinyurl.com/dmrx35ds> (Yeah, *Amazon*: we know. But this ensures we get exactly the products we need in the quantities we need.)

**TO DONATE MONEY** to the effort, go to [www.NeedhamUCC.org/paypal](http://www.NeedhamUCC.org/paypal) and click on the PayPal link, then select "Period Party" from the dropdown menu; or you can write a check to the church with "Period Party" in the memo line.

**TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PARTY**, join us at the church on 3/15 (parking available in the lot behind the church off Linden Street) to help repackage those donations into individual bags for distribution. Our goal is to assemble 1000 kits, and many hands make light work.



## Lenten Book Group: *Hope: A User's Manual*

*How do we cultivate hope to face each day? How do we find the energy to persevere, knowing things don't always work out OK, no matter what the platitudes say? How do we pursue the work of justice, knowing that the task is too big for any of us? One thing is certain: real hope demands that we do something with it. That we live it out. That we use hope to participate in a bigger story playing out behind the bleak world we see on the news or in our social media feeds every day. If you're a human being who longs for a spiritual counter-narrative to live by, this book points to one resilient enough to endure crises and crushing defeats.*

Over the course of the season, we'll gather to read and reflect on *Hope: A User's Manual* by Maryann McKibben Dana. Most weeks there will be both an **on-site only group Sundays after worship** and a **Zoom-only group Wednesdays @ 7:8:15pm**. You are free to attend either or both as fits your

schedule. *A few weeks will be Zoom only due to conflicts with Sunday programming. See schedule below:*

\*Chapter 1: WED 2/25 ZOOM-ONLY  
Chapter 2: SUN 3/1 & WED 3/4  
Chapter 3: SUN 3/8 & WED 3/11

\*Chapter 4: WED 3/18 ZOOM-ONLY  
Chapter 5: SUN 3/22 & WED 3/25  
Chapter 6: SUN 3/29 & WED 4/1

*We have hard copies of this book available (and if you can, we'd welcome help defraying the costs). Email Rev. John at [revjohn@needhamucc.org](mailto:revjohn@needhamucc.org) to reserve yours.*

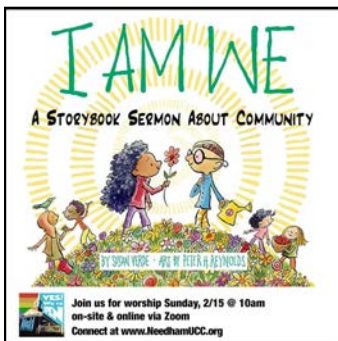


## Membership Growth Initiative

**Join Us for an All-Church Brunch and Discussion**  
Sunday, 2/22 @ 11:15am in Linden Hall (Fellowship Hall)

We'll provide the meal and facilitate discussion about our "Who are we now?" answers. We're eager for everyone's input. **Please email [Kristin@mollerus.net](mailto:Kristin@mollerus.net) to sign up** so we can get a headcount for food. **And let us know if you need to participate via Zoom!**

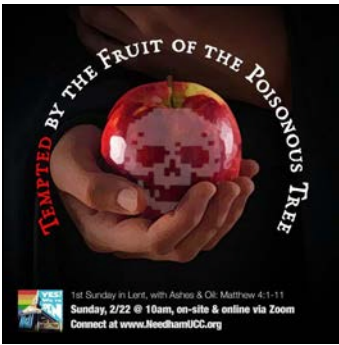
## — COMING UP IN WORSHIP —



## *I Am We: A Storybook Sermon About Community*

2/15 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

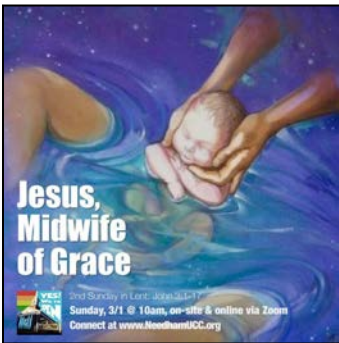
"Sometimes we may wonder: How does caring for ourselves help anyone else? But then we realize that the better we feel inside, the more we can be there for others—our friends, families, and communities. We are part of something bigger than ourselves, and when we turn our goodness and compassion outward, we can create, learn, and love." This is an all-ages StoryBook sermon based on the children's book written by Susan Verde and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds.



## Tempted by the Fruit of the Poisonous Tree

2/22 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

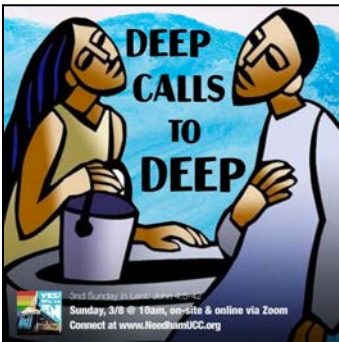
We begin Lent with the story of how, before he even began his public ministry, Jesus spent time in the wilderness, fasting and praying and being tempted by the Devil. You don't even have to believe in a literal Devil to understand what he goes through. As Jesus begins to frame his Gospel mission for justice, peace, and compassion in the world, he has to decide what means he will and won't use toward that end. Because even with the best of intentions, evil means will always bear poisonous fruit. (Matthew 4:1-11)



## Jesus, Midwife of Grace

3/1 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

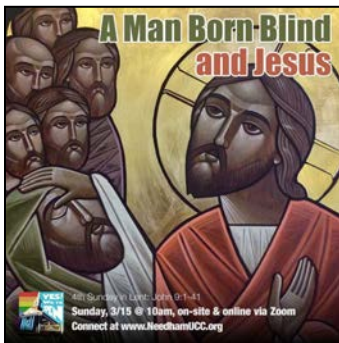
When Jesus says it's impossible to "see the kingdom of God" without being "born again," Nicodemus wonders what that even means. And generations of Christians have wondered the same thing and often concocted abstract and convoluted theological explanations. But sometimes it's just not that difficult to understand. Jesus has come to midwife new life into the world in us and through us, because that's what God wants: new, abundant, more loving, and more graceful life for all of God's children of every age. And like every birth, that's easier said than done. (John 3:1-17)



## Deep Calls to Deep

3/8 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well and asks her for a drink, and the conversation just flows from there. Conversation, not a lecture. Conversation, not a sermon. In fact, it's the longest single conversation Jesus has with anyone in the Gospels, and maybe the deepest and most personal. At the end of the day, she tells her friends that she felt seen and heard and known by Jesus. "Deep calls to deep" between them, and the world is turned upside down. (John 4:5-42)



Guest Preacher

## A Man Born-Blind and Jesus

3/15 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Jesus heals a lot of people, but the story usually called "Jesus and the Man Born Blind" is one of the longest and most detailed meditations on illness, disability, and healing. And it's one of the few times where the experience of the disabled person—in this case, the "man born blind"—is centered in the text. So it's fitting that our guest preacher, a person who lives with disability themselves and has a ministry centering the needs *and gifts*, the whole personhood of disabled people will share their experience with us. (John 9:1-41)



## Oubliette

3/22 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

ou-bli-ette (,ü-blē-'et) *noun*, a dungeon with an opening only at the top; from the French, *oublier*, to forget (related to *oblivion*)

When their brother Lazarus died, it may have seemed to Mary and Martha that God didn't care, that Jesus had forgotten him, and them. But Jesus never forgets anyone, and God's eye isn't just on the sparrow but on each of us, particularly those the world might prefer to forget: the last, the least, the lost, the lonely, the dying, and the dead. Jesus weeps with us and holds us close until our own resurrection arrives. (John 11:1-45)

## — FOR HOLY WEEK —

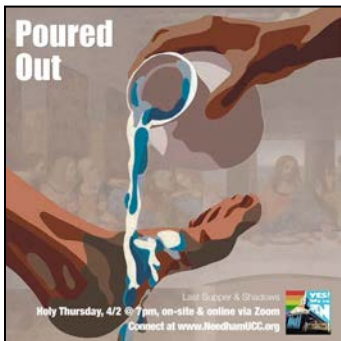


*Palm & Passion Sunday*

### **Just No**

**3/29 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>**

Have you ever wondered why, when Jesus was raised again to life, he didn't take his revenge on those who betrayed, abandoned, tried, tortured, and executed him, like any popular action hero or politician? Because, even as the King of Kings, Jesus wasn't that kind of king. The Jesus we see on Palm Sunday makes it crystal clear how different the power of love really is from the love of power.



*Maundy Thursday*

### **Poured Out**

**4/2 @ 7pm, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>**

We follow Jesus through his last hours as the prospect of arrest and execution by the state loomed large. Still, he took time to turn aside and share himself even more fully with those disciples he insisted on calling friends, even though—and soon—so many would desert, deny, and betray him. He washed their feet and shared his last supper and gave them a new commandment: “Love one another, even as I have loved you”—his life poured out. And for that radical teaching, he was murdered—his life poured out. *Worship will include music from the Chancel Choir and both Holy Communion and a Service of Tenebrae or Shadows.*



*Good Friday*

### **Ecumenical Good Friday Worship**

**4/3 @ 7pm, ON-SITE-ONLY at Christ Episcopal**

*1132 Highland Ave (with parking at the Needham Public Library)*

We will gather with neighbors from Christ Episcopal Church, Carter Memorial Methodist, First Parish in Needham, and others for this ecumenical observance of Good Friday at Christ Episcopal on Highland Avenue.



*Easter Sunday*

### **I've Got Good News \*or Bad News, Depending**

**4/5 @ 10am, LIVE! on-site & online via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>**

We're taught that Jesus' Easter resurrection is a good thing—that, in fact, it's the very best thing: the death of death, the springtime of souls, the divine affirmation of Jesus' Gospel ministry of justice, peace, and compassion. But is it good news for *everyone*? The guards who witnessed it firsthand were so frightened they “shook and became like dead men.” That doesn't sound good. Or does it? What happens when the power of Easter goes to work in a world that isn't just unprepared to receive it but actively opposed to it? (Matthew 28:1-10) *This service will include our tradition of “blooming the cross” (see below).*



### **Easter Flower Delivery: Volunteers Needed!**

**Sunday, 3/22, after worship**

Help us share the joy of Easter with church members who may be going through a hard time just now or simply can't make it to worship as often. We need volunteers to help deliver beautiful spring flowers around town (and just a little further) after worship on Sunday, 3/22.



*We need your help to*  
**Bloom the Cross for Easter**

A bare wooden cross stands at the center of our worship during this season of Lent. It will get even colder and harder during Holy Week as we accompany Jesus through the last hours of his life to his crucifixion on Good Friday and his burial in the tomb. But we believe death does not have the last word, and even the cross can be redeemed. As a sign of our hope in the resurrection, please bring flowers—LOTS OF FLOWERS— either from your lawn or the store, to decorate the cross and make it bloom on **Easter Sunday, April 5 @ 10am.**



**Thursday Soup Lunches**

We will gather on **Thursday, 3/5 at 12 Noon in the church library** for our monthly soup lunch. Please join us for delicious soup and friendly conversation. It will be warm and nourishing for body and soul! *Rides are available for any who'd like one. Please email [prayerandcareteam@needhamucc.org](mailto:prayerandcareteam@needhamucc.org) to inquire.*



**Men's Fellowship: Upcoming Meetings**

- Sunday, Feb. 15: “Community” (scripture: **Micah 6:8**)  
*“Sometimes, taking care of ourselves IS taking care of others.”*
- Sunday March 15: “Lent 4: From Challenge, Glory” (**John 9:1-41**)  
*“When bad things happen, don't ask “Why?” Instead, ask “What can I do?”*
- Our **Calendar**

Join men of the church for scripture-based conversation and fellowship at 9:00 a.m. before worship on the third Sunday of the month. Meetings are hybrid (on-site & ZOOM) and include a light breakfast & coffee. We meet in the small dining/conference room by the office.

Please use this zoom link:

<https://zoom.us/j/93975548873?pwd=S3AydjcxQjdjUGhUaW8rM0dlQnpvUT09>  
 Meeting ID: 939 7554 8873 Passcode: 152434



*From the Outreach Committee*

**Baby Basics Groceries Ongoing Food Collection**

Each Sunday in worship, we collect specific core proteins for the groceries we give to the families accessing diapers through Baby Basics every other month. In January, we're looking for large jars of natural (no sugar added) **peanut butter**; large cans of **tuna in water**; large cans of **chicken**; and bags of **dried beans**.

**Update on Giving:** Thanks to the generosity of everyone who attended our worship service on Christmas Eve, we raised > \$1400 to support the work of Family Promise MetroWest.



## *From the Guatemala Partnership*

### **February Delegation Departure!**

An enthusiastic group of 14 people, including a father-daughter duo and a father-son duo, will visit Guatemala from February 11-22. We will spend time with families in their homes, visit the schools, and learn about community projects.

We are excited to see the brand-new gazebo in the center of town, hike at the nature reserve, and make chocolate from scratch. We will help run the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Library Fair with read-alouds, board games, and art activities. Notably, we will hand-deliver your partner-family letters and letters to scholarship students.

We also look forward to delving into issues that affect both of our countries, including human rights, immigration, democracy, and justice. The friendships we make and the connections we forge will help break down the borders, barriers, and imbalances that divide us.

Be on the lookout for our Report Back presentation in the weeks following our return!



## *From Children & Youth Ministries*

### **Cocoa Hour a Sweet Success!**

Sunday, February 8th, may have been cold and icy outside, but inside the church, one could find warm hearts and hot cocoa. The youngest members of the church, along with the Christian Ed Committee, hosted Cocoa Hour, serving up ladles of hot chocolate (milk or water based versions), delicious muffins, cookies, and berries with a choice of toppings that included whipped cream and marshmallows. Along with preparing the food, they carefully presented everything in an artful arrangement, taking care to also provide labels for each item.

The young organizers also invited the wider church to answer the question, "What Warms Your Heart?" Responses have included "sunshine", "spending time with friends", "chocolate chip cookies", and more. *Next time you visit, check out our easel, and please add your words about what warms your heart!*



## *Save the Date!*

### **Annual Just-4-Fun Egg Hunt**

**Saturday, 4/28**

**9am "Sensory Friendlier Hunt & 10am "Bells & Whistles" Hunt**

For five years now, we've been giving this no-strings-attached gift to families with small children in our wider community (and our own): not an *Easter* egg hunt, but just an egg hunt for everyone—no matter who, no matter where they are on life's journey—just for the joy of it. And we'll need your help to stuff over 2000 eggs ahead of time and then welcome families and run the hunts the day of. Keep an eye out for more info about how you can volunteer and how to sign up the kids in your life.



## *From the Environmental Ministries Team*

### **Lenten Carbon Fast Ideas from the Environmental Ministry Team**

Ash Wednesday on February 18<sup>th</sup> begins six weeks of Lent. As people of faith, it is our responsibility to be wise stewards of God's Creation. Use the actions below to reduce your production of climate changing pollution and to help preserve God's gift of the earth for future generations.

- Turn down your thermostat by at least one degree. Aim for 60°F at night. Turn down the heat when you leave your home.
- Take advantage of an Eversource free Home Energy Assessment.
- Hang some of your clothes on a line to dry them.
- Be a vegetarian for two days a week (ask church members for their favorite recipes).
- Bring reusable bags with you to all stores, not just the grocery store.
- Strive to use NO disposable water bottles during Lent. Always bring a water bottle with you, and refill it as needed.
- Make one of your journeys more environmentally friendly by carpooling, combining errands, walking/biking, or by taking public transportation.
- Speak to a neighbor/coworker about the changes you've made during Lent.
- Save paper by using cloth towels/napkins instead of paper towels/napkins.
- Refresh your memory on what your town recycles by looking at the town website. Bring recyclable items you use elsewhere home to recycle.
- Educate yourself about global climate change.

On Easter, take some time to reflect on all the changes you've made that bring you into greater harmony with the earth and all life. Make a personal pledge to continue living sustainably.



## *From the Open and Affirming Ministry Team*

### **Another Year as an Open and Affirming Congregation: *Still More Work to Do***

On March 1st, we'll celebrate our 26th Anniversary of declaring ourselves an Open and Affirming Congregation—one that is open to and affirming of the full human dignity and active inclusion of all persons, especially lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender folks, in the life of church and society—with a special celebration cake at coffee hour. We pledged to be a church that is *for* every person and to let the world know that. And the world needs that now more than ever.

We are pleased to report that a large contingent from our church is participating in "Faith Organizing as Resistance," a special offering from Eden Seminary (a UCC-related theological school) in St. Louis, Missouri, made possible through our local Metropolitan Boston Association. This three-part course (February, March, and April) will give us a chance to take stock of what's going on in the world around us today and learn skills to help us build positive power with like-minded folks to be even more effective as an ONA congregation committed to Jesus' justice, peace, and compassion.



## Worship Volunteer Sign-Ups

More than just the ministers, it takes a whole group of volunteers to make our worship happen each Sunday. To make it happen smoothly, we need:

- 1 x Tech Desker (to run tech for worship)
- 1 x Zoom Greeter (to welcome people online)
- 2 x On-Site Greeters (to also help with coffee hour set-up)
- and once a month, we need Communion Preparers and Servers

And now we have one link where you can sign up for all of these! [Simply click here](#) and type your name and email address in the appropriate blank. If you have questions about any particular task, email Rev. John at [revjohn@needhamucc.org](mailto:revjohn@needhamucc.org). Thank you for your generosity with your time and energy to help shoulder the responsibility and share the joy of being church together.

---

## FOCUS newsletter contributions are always welcome!

*Our next issue will cover the middle of March through the end of April*

The deadline is Monday, 3/9. Please submit materials to [office@needhamucc.org](mailto:office@needhamucc.org)

---

## Best Way to Make an Appointment with the Pastor

Our pastor doesn't just work on Sundays! He is busy during the week writing sermons, planning curriculum, recruiting volunteers, supervising staff, representing our congregation in the wider church and in our local community, and lots more. His schedule is different nearly every week, every day. He also would love to meet with you.

The easiest way to make an appointment to talk is to reach out via email ([revjohn@needhamucc.org](mailto:revjohn@needhamucc.org)) or, even more directly, use the Calendly app online to schedule your own appointments via Zoom. Rev. John's Calendly link: <https://calendly.com/revjohn-needhamucc>

*Rev. John's sabbath days are Mondays and Saturdays. In the event of an emergency (use your best judgment) on these or any days, please text or call.*



Rev. John MacIver Gage, *senior minister*

Valerie Becker, *music director*

Darlene Wong, *director for children & youth*

Robin Bevilacqua, *operations manager*

Cindy Sullivan, *finance administrator*

Board of Directors

Tom Mollerus, *moderator*

Board of Deacons: Alan Clayton-Matthews & Avery Casper-Filbin, *co-chairs*

Pastoral Relations Committee

[revjohn@needhamucc.org](mailto:revjohn@needhamucc.org)

[musicdirector@needhamucc.org](mailto:musicdirector@needhamucc.org)

[childrenandyouth@needhamucc.org](mailto:childrenandyouth@needhamucc.org)

[office@needhamucc.org](mailto:office@needhamucc.org)

[finance@needhamucc.org](mailto:finance@needhamucc.org)

[board@needhamucc.org](mailto:board@needhamucc.org)

[moderator@needhamucc.org](mailto:moderator@needhamucc.org)

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

[prc@needhamucc.org](mailto:prc@needhamucc.org)

**The Congregational Church of Needham (MA), United Church of Christ**

1154 Great Plain Ave, Needham MA 02492

Tel 781.444.2510 • [www.NeedhamUCC.org](http://www.NeedhamUCC.org) • Instagram @NeedhamUCC