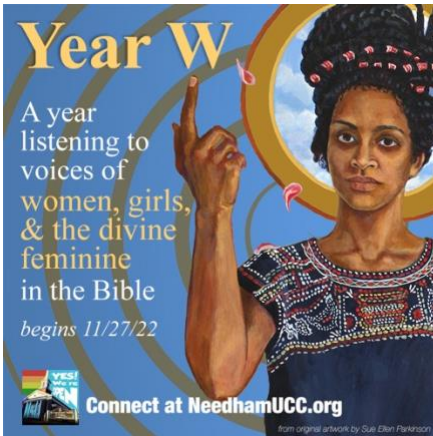




NeedhamUCC

FOCUS Newsletter • Winter 2023



An Invitation to Bible Study

Sundays @ 8:45-9:40am beginning 2/5

On-site in the Reception Room at church

& online via Zoom @ <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

Dear Friends,

An integral part of being Christian is having a relationship with the Bible, because, like it or not, the Bible provides the core vocabulary of our Christian faith, words, images and, most importantly, stories. *Like it*, because it is a gift and a responsibility to be in relationship through scripture with other persons and communities of faith across time and space, to know we are part of a vast pilgrim people looking to find the divine in their lives, the way of God *for* their lives. *Or not*, because we know, despite all the outward differences, our fellow pilgrims have always been more like us than we might like to imagine, prone to forgetfulness when it comes to God and the good in the world, our neighbors, and even ourselves, and there are those who would use the Bible to divide us.

Which underlines why it's so important for us to have our own relationship with the Bible and commit ourselves to growing that relationship; otherwise, we are left using someone else's roadmap to make our way, which can only get us so far and, by definition, *not* to the "one wild and precious life" (per poet Mary Oliver) to which God calls each of us and which is our greatest gift to the world. Listening just to prior generations of interpreters won't get you there. Listening just to me won't get you there. We have to listen for the call of the Spirit and the surprising things she has say to us through and even sometimes in complete counterpoint to the scriptures.

This Year W project we're engaged in, listening for the voices of women, girls, and the divine feminine in scripture with the help of Dr. Wilda C. Gafney, is a great opportunity to get reacquainted with the Bible. Rev. Dr. Gafney encourages us to read new stories and to hear old stories in a new way and ask hard questions expecting new grace. That goes double, triple for me after 25 years preaching! This is a chance for all of us to stretch our spiritual muscles, maybe ones we haven't stretched in a while, maybe since Sunday school. But stretching and growth are good for us and for our congregation.

So please join me Sunday mornings before worship for Bible study. We'll be diving into the scriptures that we'll be using that same day in worship, so come every Sunday or drop in any time, as the Spirit moves, on-site or online via Zoom. I truly believe Bible study does a body (of Christ) good.

Peace,

Rev. John MacIver Gage



Another Invitation: *Want to become a member?*

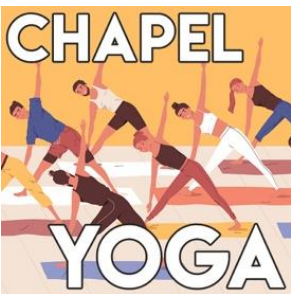
If you have been participating in the life of this congregation on-site or online for any length of time and would like to **make this church you're spiritual home** (or would like to know more about what **becoming an official member** means--and doesn't mean), please reach out to Rev. John via email at revjohn@needhamucc.org.

HEARING, CALL TO ANNUAL MEETING, & WARRANT

The members of the church are called to meet for our **Annual Congregational Meeting following worship Sunday, 1/29 on-site & online via Zoom** to take up the following business:

- Article I: To receive and act upon the reports of the standing committees, special committees, and officers of the church.
- Article II: To elect Officers and Committees for the Church year 2023.
- Article III: To amend the Bylaws with regard to regional UCC affiliation, number of Deacons, a temporary Moderator, and the audit or review of the church's operating account.
- Article IV: To adopt a budget for fiscal year 2023.

HEARING: In preparation for the annual meeting, you are invited to attend an **official hearing for discussion of these articles**, particularly the proposed by-law changes and budget for 2023 **following worship Sunday, 1/22 on-site & online via Zoom.**



Chapel Yoga THURS @ 9am through 2/23

One of the best things any of us can do for our physical, mental, and spiritual health is find ways to reaffirm the living connection between our body, mind, and soul. And yoga is a great way to do that. Our own **Carol Oberle, a trained yoga instructor**, will help us kick off the new year leading a **50m yoga class for 8 weeks on Thursdays @ 9am in the chapel**. This beautiful space we now share with the Charles River Ballet is perfect for yoga with the gorgeous winter light pouring in. **This class is free to church members and their guests.** *Participants will need bring a yoga mat and be prepared to leave*

your shoes and water bottles in the hallway before entering.



Mindful Meditation ONLINE

Sundays @ 7pm LIVE! via Zoom at <http://zoom.us/j/907548568>

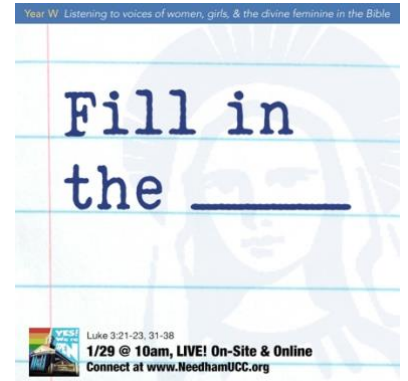
What is mindful meditation? *It's a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress. Who couldn't use more of that?* Join longtime practitioner Sue Findlay and others Sunday evenings online via Zoom.

Coming Up in Worship...



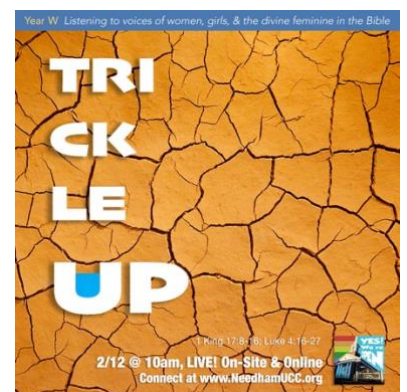
January 22, “Inside Everything” Many people in many churches both down through the centuries and still today believe that what is holy, divine, of God is separate from things of this world – separate from and, in fact, opposed to. They say that to be closer to God, we must reject, well, *stuff* and *matter* and *bodies* (our own and others’), or enjoy them only on a very strict regimen. But there are others, including the author of First Timothy, who believe God is inside everything. (1 Timothy 4:1-6, 9-10)

January 29, “Fill In the _____” The author of the Gospel According to Luke begins their account of Jesus’ formal ministry by grounding him in a detailed genealogy. They recount all the generations of faithful persons who helped shaped Jesus as a person and a prophet – except they left out the women. So now that we know they’re missing, it’s up to us to fill in the blank. (Luke 3:21-23, 31-38)



February 5, “LoveSong of Songs” Song of Songs is one of the most unique books in the Bible. It’s a love poem passionate and earthy. Many Biblical scholars over the years have tried to explain it (away) by saying it’s really an extended metaphor about the Church’s relationship with Jesus. But would it be any less holy if it was just a celebration of bodies – women’s bodies and dark-skinned woman’s bodies, at that? (Song of Songs 4:9-15) *We will celebrate holy communion – If you’re participating online, make sure to prepare your own food and drink!*

February 12, “Trickle Up” In this country we’ve long been told by so-called experts that the best way to help Main Street and the folks struggling to live there is to support Wall Street and the fat cat corporations that do very well there, that they economic blessings bestowed on them will trickle down to those below. But those below are still waiting. Good thing God doesn’t wait and helps them first. (1 King 17:8-16; Luke 4:16-27)



February 19, “Stop! Look! Listen!” “Confirmation bias” means people tend to find what they’re looking for, good or bad, and nothing more. The same was true in Jesus’ day. Religious and political leaders dismissed God’s prophets John the Baptist as a demon and Jesus a glutton because they thought they knew exactly how the divine would show up. If we really want to recognize what God is up to in the world today, we’re going to have to stop, look, and listen for the unexpected. (Luke 7:24-35)



Sunday School & Youth Group News

January & February 2023 Calendar

Sunday, January 22

- 10 AM: Sunday School (K-5)

Sunday, January 29

- 10 AM: Sunday School (K-5) & Youth (Gr. 6-12)

Sunday, February 12

- 10 AM: Sunday School (K-5) & Youth (Gr. 6-12)

Sunday, February 26

- 10 AM: Sunday School (K-5) & Youth (Gr. 6-12)

Creating the Spring/Summer Calendar - YOUR INPUT IS NEEDED!

Rev. Maddie and the CE team are working on the spring and summer 2023 calendar for Youth events including offsite events and summer service opportunities. If you have any big events - theater, sports, school events, etc. - that you can provide the dates for to help us plan around please submit them to RevMaddie@NeedhamUCC.org by Feb. 12 for them to be considered while planning our spring calendar.

YOUTH: Join Rev. Maddie beginning JAN. 29 @ 10 AM

Youth group meets with Rev. Maddie beginning on Sunday, January 29 during the worship hour. Enjoy hot chocolate and donuts along with conversation, games, and working on youth group service projects, prepping for offsite events, etc.

SAVE THE DATE: Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 1

Our annual egg hunt will take place on Saturday, April 1 with multiple time slots being offered including a sensory friendly morning offering. Look for the eventbrite link coming soon to sign up!

Volunteers Needed:

Sunday School teachers are needed for the following Sunday:

Jan. 22, Jan. 29, Feb. 12, Feb. 26

All lessons are printed and prepped in advance and supplies are provided. You can view the lessons plans anytime on CE's Google Drive folder.

Sign up to teach on Sign-Up Genius or email Rev. Maddie with any questions.

<https://m.signupgenius.com/#/showSignUp/8050E4EAFAD2CAAFF2-sunday1>



The Men's Fellowship will meet **online** at 9:00-9:45 A.M. on **Sunday, September 18, and on the 3rd Sunday each month.** We welcome all men of the church for fellowship and discussion of the day's scripture and sermon focus.

Look for the weekly church email for the Zoom link or contact Rob Dunlavey: rob@robd.com or John Baldwin jsbaldwin@comcast.net.



From our Open and Affirming Ministry Team

DONATIONS TO OUR PARTNERS in 2022

The ONA Ministry Team was pleased to have been able to donate to our special ONA- related organizations in 2022. Our church has had a long-standing commitment to each of these organizations. Our thanks to the Outreach Committee for providing these grants.

The **LGBT Asylum Task Force** is a ministry of Hadwen Park Church UCC (Worcester) and a community-based organization dedicated to supporting and empowering LGBTQI individuals who are seeking asylum in the United States.



OUT MetroWest builds communities where LGBTQ+ youth thrive. We offer multiple programs each week for LGBTQ+ youth as well as programs for families and educational offerings for the community.



The **Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ** oversees and resources the largest and fastest-growing LGBTQ-welcoming program in the world.



HAPPY 23rd ONA ANNIVERSARY TO US on February 13, 2023!

What can all of us do to live out Open and Affirming?

Learn about the many threats and anti-transgender legislation aimed at transgender and non-binary children, youth and adults. View the United Church of Christ's campaign to support transgender and non-binary people at the following link:

<https://socialpresskit.com/ucc#transgender-and-non-binary-justice>





From our Guatemala Partnership

Fusion Christmas Celebration

On 12/27 about 20 Partnership friends and delegation participants enjoyed a Posada Party, with a lively mix of North and Latin American elements, at Lucienne Ronco's house. We enjoyed chatting about Christmas traditions in our sister community while sampling guacamole, flan, black bean soup, and other delights. A highlight for the youth was smashing a donkey-shaped piñata to much cheering by all, followed by a rush to collect the flying candy.



February 2023 Delegation and Partner-Family Letters

The upcoming February delegation has been filled and includes a diverse mix of experienced and first-time travelers, ranging from teenagers at one end of the age spectrum to adventurous folks in their 70's on the other! Co-leaders Jeff Clausen and Ali Durbin are currently leading orientation/planning sessions with the travelers. All participants are excited to experience in person this long-term friendship of solidarity, trust, and cultural exchange.

Reminder: Partner-Family Letters DUE

Partner-family letters were due 1/2, so if you haven't sent yours in to Letter Coordinator Alan Clayton-Matthews yet, please e-mail it to him ASAP at: a.clayton-matthews@northeastern.edu. Our volunteer translators need your letters now so that they have time to translate them to Spanish and send them back to Alan for printing and packaging prior to the delegation's departure (2/16). Your letters help to build and maintain the connection with our friends in Santa María Tzejá, who appreciate so much that people, who they often have not met, care about them. We appreciate your timely efforts so that further

FOCUS newsletter contributions are always welcome!

*The submission deadline for our upcoming Lenten issue scheduled to go out the end of the second week in February is: **Wednesday, February 1***

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



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