



THE GOOD WORD

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church, Natick
United Church of Christ
An Open and Affirming Congregation

Lent 2021 | Volume 23, Issue 1 | February 2021

"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty." ~ John 4:14

Friends,

"Mortal, can these bones live?" (Ezekiel 37:3) God asks this very provocative question of Ezekiel, in the prophet's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. Ezekiel's answer? "O Lord God, you know." Can you imagine a more non-committal response?! Believe me, as a former PR man I know spin control when I hear it, and – let me tell you – Ezekiel was good! Nevertheless, he evades the real question.

"Do you believe that all things are possible through me?" This is God's real question to Ezekiel. The resounding answer is graphically demonstrated in the prophet's vision by the multitude of bones coming together, taking on sinews and flesh, and receiving God's Spirit of life – a complete reversal of the decaying process. God's promise? "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live."

Dry bones. A body couldn't be deader than that without having completely decayed to dust. Dry bones alludes to things long dead, about as far from life as possible, but not totally annihilated. The broader application of the question, "Can these bones live?" is to all those places, times, and circumstances where we find death and yet the remnants of life.

Lent is the season that has us reflect on dry bones, and on God's promise to clothe them again with flesh and breathe life into them. That's why, in Lent, we hear Scripture filled with metaphors of wetness and dryness, matters of life and death to the people who live in the arid regions of the Middle East. But we – who live where water is plentiful – must also hear this story and promise as our own, acknowledging the desert places of our own lives, and the call to believe that, through Jesus, God has given us the living water of renewal.

We have all known circumstances and periods that have felt like desert times, as individuals and as a church. Job loss, depression, illness, grief, loneliness, stressed and broken relationships, extraordinary times such as a pandemic that push us to the limit of what we can bear – these can suck the vitality out of us. First Congregational Church of Natick has seen its desert seasons, too. Take Natick's great fire of 1874 that destroyed our sixth meetinghouse, a beautiful brick structure, twenty years old, that had just been enlarged and improved at considerable cost. The shock, disappointment, sadness, and the challenge of rebuilding must have made it feel like a full-blown drought! Yes, at times, we have seen the meager remnants of life and the slim prospects of renewal.

Yet, as Ezekiel reminds us, God's will for us is to leave the Valley of Dry Bones, to rise again, and to inhabit more fertile lands. So, in this Lenten season, I invite you to travel together, joining in some of the many opportunities for worship, study, prayer, and reflection our church is offering that you can learn more about in this newsletter.

Together, let us bear witness to our resurrection faith by allowing ourselves to be filled by God's enlivening Spirit and living water. And when God asks, "Can these bones live?" let us answer in faith, "Yes, Lord, with your help they can live again!"

Peace, Jonathan

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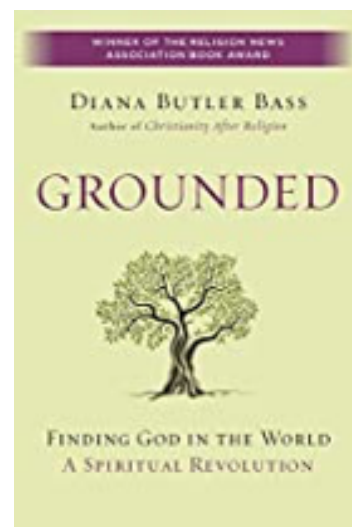


Lenten Soul Sabbatical: Grounded ~ Finding God in the World

Wednesdays @ 7pm

Five-week session beginning Feb 24, and continuing on
March 3, 10, 17, 24

You are invited to set aside a short time for reflection every day during Lent and gather five times in a facilitated small group via zoom to share conversation and connections. We will use the book *Grounded ~ Finding God in the World, A Spiritual Revolution* by Diana Butler Bass as our guide through this season. Following a year of unprecedented losses, we will look for healing in the natural world and in relationships. Soul Sabbatical offers suggested spiritual practices and reading to go deeper in your faith journey and create space for Spirit to move in your life.



Please rsvp to Saralyn at saralyn@firstchurchnatick.org to help us plan (In case we need more than one group) and so that we may provide you with additional spiritual practice resources to enrich your Lenten experience and the Zoom link.

You may buy the book through Amazon or your favorite local bookstore. We will ask that you come to the first gathering on February 24 having read the introduction through page 26.

You will want to acquire the book early so you are ready for the start of Lent on February 17 as the book also contains a 40-day Lenten devotional in the appendix providing a short daily meditation to start your day throughout Lent.

“Promises, Promises” – the Still Speaking Writers’ Group Lenten Devotional from the UCC



Has God's steadfast love ceased? (Psalm 77:8)

We know, we know. You've been burned before. Your trust has been bent to the limit, then snapped. Politicians. Lovers. Broadband providers. That very expensive eye cream. Western civilization. The church. They promised so much -- and it hardly matters whether they simply tried and failed, or never intended to honor their promises in the first place.

They say God isn't like the ones who let you down. But it's hard not to look at God with the same jaded eye you've begun to cast on everything else. "Promises, promises," you sneer, and resume doom scrolling.

This Lent, bring your cynicism and your scars. But be sure you bring, too, that little bit of hope you still have for a God who won't let you down.

To order a copy of the Devotional go to:

<https://www.thepilgrimpress.com/collections/lenten-reasources/products/promises-promises-2021-lenten-devotional>

"Holy Vessels" ~ FCC 2021 Prayer Practices Booklet

A variety of prayer practices with which to experiment.
See which practices are the most meaningful for you.

You can find this resource on the [church website](#).



Virtual Worship Services During Lent

Ash Wednesday Service ~ February 17 @ 7pm via Zoom

This service won't be broadcast – it will be accessed via this [zoom link](#).

You may choose to attend either with your video on or off.

Items to prepare:

- Communion Elements (cracker & 'wine')
 - Candle
 - Water
- Earth/soil/sand (small amount of dirt from your garden)
 - Small bowl for mixing
 - Sea Glass



~ Lenten Sunday Worship Services ~ 10:30am via Pegasus
Livestream & Local Access Cable

~ Palm Sunday Worship Service~ March 28 @ 10:30am via
Pegasus Livestream & Local Access Cable



~ Maundy Thursday Communion Service ~
April 1 @ 7pm via Zoom

This service won't be broadcast – it will be accessed
via this [zoom link](#).

You may choose to attend either with your video on
or off.

~ Easter Vigil ~ April 3 & 4 ~ choose a half hour shift
to pray from 8pm – 6am

~ Easter Sunday Worship Service ~ April 4 @
10:30am via Pegasus Livestream & Local Access
Cable

Ministry Updates

Outreach

The Outreach Team (Lane McDonough, Jeff Clausen, Ivylee Martinez, Beth Gillespie, MartyBeth Kincaid, Janice Gilkes, Jonathan New) met on January 26 to plan its agenda for 2021.

Our primary focus this year will be to promote opportunities for members to become involved in mission. Due to COVID social distancing restrictions, opportunities for direct mission support like WV Workcamp and Family Promise, were limited last year. It's not clear when we might be able to resume those types of activities, so Outreach hopes to keep mission opportunities in front of everyone while we wait for all the social distancing restrictions to be lifted.

Some of the ideas that we have for 2021 include introducing a Youth Philanthropy project. The idea is to guide the Youth Groups in researching and selecting an organization that the church could make a financial contribution to and (when COVID restrictions lift) possibly contribute with some hands-on support.

We will also be inviting guests to our virtual coffee hours after worship on one Sunday a month.

On January 3rd, Tiffany Spigarolo was our guest preacher and then joined us at coffee hour to talk about her chaplaincy work at the MetroWest Medical Center. On February 7th, Marge Roberson will join us to talk about our church's Immigration and Asylum Support work and how we may be able to get involved. It will also be an opportunity to get an update on how the new Biden administration is changing or not changing how this country treats and cares for immigrants and asylum seekers.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Reverse Advent Calendar Food Drive and to the Christmas Eve collection. Hopefully it won't be too long before we can do more than just make financial and food donations.

Peace,
Lane - Outreach Team Coordinator

Penguins vs Polar Bears for A Place to Turn Food Pantry

We have exceeded our goal of \$3,000!

Total contributions to the Souper Bowl
were \$3,226.10

All food purchased will be shipped
directly to A Place to Turn.



Santa Maria Tzeja: Update

By Jeff Clausen

This time last year, Jenna and I were deep into our preparations to travel to Guatemala over February vacation to visit with our friends in Santa Maria Tzeja. We were following a long unbroken tradition dating back to 1987, continuing the friendship and siblinghood between our two communities. Among the many things we were packing and carrying down with us were the OVERWHELMING amount of school supplies that you all had gathered up for us to bring to the village. School supplies that unbeknownst to any of us, would ultimately become a small—but integral—part of the village's response to the pandemic.

When we were in the village last February, the pandemic was just beyond the horizon. The school year (which in Guatemala runs from January to October) had just begun and students from the village's kindergarten up through its middle school were busy beginning their academic year. It was only a few weeks later in March of 2020, however, that the virus arrived in Guatemala and everything began to shut down, including the schools.

While the Guatemalan government mandated the closing of all schools, the government's solution to education during the pandemic was, and has been, poor. When schools were suspended in March, Guatemala's Ministry of Education began to televise classes for students nationwide. Each grade level was provided a time slot of 30 minutes for three days a week, and that half-hour was divided into just 15 minutes of literacy and 15 minutes of mathematics. Even with that, many in Guatemala, especially those in rural settings like Santa Maria Tzeja, do not have access to television. For a lot of children in Guatemala, education effectively stopped at this point.



Santa Maria Tzeja, however, was fortunate in that it is a tight knit community with a historically strong focus on education. Over the years, through the support of the Guatemala Partnership, many in the community have become trained education professionals. As a result, Santa Maria Tzeja is unique in that it is a rural, indigenous community in which the schools are community led and community taught. In confronting the pandemic, this meant it was better positioned than other rural communities to develop ways to address and facilitate remote learning in the appalling void left by Guatemala's Ministry of Education.

With limited resources but a can-do spirit, the community of Santa Maria Tzeja came together to implement their own solutions to remote learning. In the spring, they informed us that they had distributed all the school supplies we had brought down to the students, so that each student would be able to continue their studies at home.

In the partner family letters we received in August, many wrote about the effort, including Nelly Canil who wrote:

We are working in the [middle school](José and I)
delivering worksheets to students so they can work them at home and then
deliver them to their respective teachers, all this is being done so as not to
lose the 2020 school year. – Nelly Canil

In other partner family letters, many noted how their children had been able to continue their studies remotely, including Matt and Kelly McCormick's partner family, Florinda Toj, a widow and mother of two. Florinda noted in her letter that her oldest son was receiving education packets and that she was grateful both of her sons had been able to continue their education. One can imagine that Florinda's children, and many other students in the village were completing their work with the school supplies you had contributed.



Looking back over the past year, it is tough to comprehend all the loss and all of the disruption caused by the pandemic. We all worry for our children and wonder what the long-term repercussions will be from this year of distance learning. It is with great hope, however, that the children of Santa Maria Tzeja will have been able to better weather this disruption due to the fortitude and focus of their parents and their community, and the support of all of you, including, in small part, because of the school supplies that you contributed last February.

They say it takes a village, and for Santa Maria Tzeja we have been—and are—part of that village. As one family from Santa Maria Tzeja recently wrote:

Our family feels very appreciative for all the support you have provided to our community and for bringing so many opportunities to our children. We see them excelling and know that your long-term support over so many years has been an important part of their success. We are thankful to have friends with such good hearts. – Bartolo Tomas, Manuela Hernandez

Despite facing many challenges, due to the enduring spirit of the people of Santa Maria Tzeja their future is bright. The Guatemala Partnership provides scholarships to a number of graduating middle school students in Santa Maria Tzeja that enable them to continue on to high school. One of the new scholarship students this year is Jennifer Pastor. Below is a photo of Jennifer's grandmother taken in 1992. That photo was taken during Guatemala's civil war and at a time when half the community was living in refugee camps in Mexico and the remainder were in the village living under oppressive military control. Looking at that photo today, it would likely have been hard to believe all that was to come. That the civil war would end and the refugees would be allowed to return; that the community would be free to build a middle school; that some of the middle school students would be able to go to high school; that some of those first high school students would go on to college; that some those first college students would become attorneys and doctors; and moreover, that one of them would become part of the legal team that would bring litigation against the former president of Guatemala who was responsible for the genocide that resulted in the destruction of the village. But it would all become true, all those things would come to pass. And now, continuing that march of progress, Jennifer has completed middle school and through the Guatemala Partnership has received a scholarship to attend high school. The pandemic will end. Santa Maria Tzeja's march towards a brighter future will continue.

During the February break this year, while we will not be able to be in the village in-person due to the pandemic, we will be meeting with community leaders via Zoom and will be learning of recent developments in their community.

If you would like to follow news on the Guatemala Partnership and Santa Maria Tzeja, please visit our Facebook page at [Facebook/PartnersforGuatemalaEducation](https://www.facebook.com/PartnersforGuatemalaEducation).



Work continues inside and out on the Steeple

Is there a music festival going on somewhere downtown today?

No, that's just the First Church steeplejacks playing their music and singing along, as they continue the many-faceted work on both the inside and outside of our church steeple.

Outside, the slate and copper roofing replacement work is continuing on the lowest, 'sweep' portion of the steeple.

Above that, the slate has all been removed, to be replaced with new fiberglass panels that have been fashioned to look exactly like the original slate. The fiberglass panels are currently being painted in the shop, before being installed on the steeple itself. The existing fiberglass at the topmost section of the steeple will also get a fresh coat of paint once a suitably warm enough day happens (probably not until Spring but remember the 70 degree day we had a couple Februarys ago?) The town is in the administrative process of awarding the contract to complete the town clock repairs and renovations as well. The actual restoration work will likely begin in March.

Inside, extensive repair and re-pointing work is continuing on the masonry and brickwork at the clock level of the steeple. There are actually two brick walls on all four sides, an inner wall and an outer wall. Part of the work is to make sure that these two walls are properly tied together, with special steel connectors called 'Helfix Bowties'. Once the masonry work is done, the interior steel work to provide a better anchoring and support system for the decorative grills at the bell level will be constructed and installed. In addition to the work on the steeple itself, contractors are also on site installing the new cell antennas that will be located beneath the existing ones. We've also made the local newspaper!

Look for the article in the February issue of Local Town Pages Natick.



Join FCN Book Club on March 20 at 11:00 am!

The book this month is "A Most Beautiful Thing" by Arshay Cooper.

This book is about the first all African-American US high school rowing team.

This seemed like a neat bookend to a book group title we read about the unlikely Olympic Rowing Team going to Nazi Germany to compete, The Boys in the Boat.

This is also a movie, if you'd like to check it out,
<https://www.amostbeautifulthing.com>

Annual Meeting Recap

First Church Natick held on 2021 Annual Meeting on
January 31, 2021

Highlights of the day include:

- We had MORE than enough people to meet the required quorum AND just about everyone stayed for the entire meeting;
- We faithfully passed all of the Warrant Articles with a unanimous vote;
- The first ever Zoom Annual Meeting went extremely well!;
- AND
- We met Hobo, a cute furry feline, who was attending the meeting with Lorraine on her iPad!



Chef Bob

SATURDAY NIGHT DINNERS AT FCN

On the second Saturday of the month, come and enjoy one of Bobs famous dinners - to go!

Feb 13 - Jambalaya

March 13 - Ham & Bean supper w/ cole slaw and brown-bread, and potato salad

April 10 - Chicken/Eggplant parm

May 8 - Beef/Mushroom stroganoff
(with GF noodle option) and veg

Order online a couple of days in advance!

All proceeds will support the mission
and ministry of First Church Natick!

Please order through
google forms in the weekly LINK.





SPARK Kindness presents
a **FREE virtual program**
on **February 25th at 7pm ET**



Strengthening Your Student's Executive Function Skills and Independence During the Pandemic

with Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP

Register and learn more about
this FREE online program and
more by visiting

SPARKKindness.org



Spotlight Community Partner
NATICK SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council)
SEPACNatick.org

**SPARK Kindness presents a FREE virtual
program on February 25th at 7pm ET --
Strengthening Your Student's Executive
Function Skills and Independence During
the Pandemic with Sarah Ward**

Hybrid? All remote? In the classroom?

Regardless of the environment the demand on children's executive function skills is greater than ever. More and more independence is required of students to navigate school schedules, assignments and due dates as well as manage the workload. Sarah will share many practical executive function based interventions families could implement to improve organization, task and time management.

Notification Signups - Natick COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics

The Town of Natick has setup a "Notify Me" list for all Natick residents wanting to be notified when registration opens for COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics offered by the Town of Natick Board of Health. You can subscribe to be notified by email and/or text message for all updates.

To register for these notifications please visit
<https://www.natickma.gov/list.aspx?ListID=460>.

These clinics are for Natick Residents only.

Please Note: This is NOT the Natick's Smart911 System that broadcasts weekly COVID-19 updates along with other town emergency alerts. This is only for COVID-19 Vaccine clinics given by the Natick Health Department.



Important Immigrant Information

**There are things you can do in your home
and town.**

[This information can be found here.](#)

There's important upcoming legislation.

[This information can be found here.](#)

**Are you looking to make Donations
locally and state wide**

[This information can be found here.](#)





Southern New England Conference
United Church of Christ
Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

SAVE THE DATE! SUPER SATURDAY(S)

And It Came to Pass, Luke 2:15 - Living Into the Fulfillment of God's Promise

Each spring and fall, the Conference holds a Super Saturday event - a full-day of skill building, networking and discussing best practices.

Each event offers numerous workshops, a keynote address, worship, a marketplace of vendors and ideas and an opportunity for church leaders, both clergy and lay, to network with one another.

Upcoming Super Saturday Virtual March
Super Saturday(s) - March 13 & 20, 2021

Watch for updates in the LINK



Thursday, February 11, 2021 at 2:00 PM

Register here:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Mxcw2pgLQFiNmXK80wuL2w

A few ways to honor the History of African-Americans this month:

1. Commit to being Anti-Racist and align yourself with like-minded organizations.
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/.../talking.../topics/being-antiracist>
2. Educate yourself about the impact of white supremacy in our world.<https://news.harvard.edu/.../a-reading-list-on-issues-of-.../>
3. Reflect on your inner circle and query if there are voices of folks who do not look like you. If your circle is homogenous do the personal work to expand your horizons.https://youtu.be/V3NdUmQd_ss
4. Patronize Black Owned and Operated Businesses.
<https://officialblackwallstreet.com/directory/>
5. Explore Southern New England Conference and National UCC Resourceshttps://www.ucc.org/justice_racism/

COVID-19 2021 Update: Seeds of Hope

Rev. Darrell Goodwin, Executive Conference Minister, and the Health & Wellness Team present the first in a monthly series of discussions: COVID-19 2021 Update: Seeds of HOPE. It is our purpose to promote health and wellness by providing support for all throughout the Southern New England conference UCC. The challenges faced by clergy, churches, and communities continue to change as the pandemic evolves. Uncertainty and anxiety are heightened as virus variants are discovered, COVID-19 testing methods expand, vaccines are rolled out, and people experience confusion and frustration. This webinar will provide practical information and resources to inform and support your congregation and community.



Good Word Newsletter

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