

Meditations for Sunday,
May 24, 2020
(or whenever you are so led
to pause, reflect, and pray)

Ascension Sunday

Edition 10

*Christ is risen—risen,
indeed! Alleluia!*



Lighting the Candle of Life

You may wish to light a candle or use the candle photo as a focus.

ALL: We light the Candle of Life — a candle that represents community, spirit, and the fullness of all of life — birth and death and all of the transitions in between and beyond.



Living in Perspective...

Ascension Sunday hallmarks the day in Eastertide when we observe Jesus' taking leave of his followers in a mystical cloud. Significantly, in Acts, he promises the coming of the Holy Spirit which will enable them to bear witness to his life and teachings...but not yet. For now, they are to experience his absence and live in expectant hope.

- *The disciples will pose a question of deep importance and longing for them, and Jesus will not give them a definitive answer. For what do I long and deeply desire today?*
- *Regarding the larger view of the global impact of the COVID19 pandemic, we are living in a season of pauses and reflection amidst the chaotic change. What am I learning about the world? My community? Myself?*
- *What is important now? What matters less?*

Hymn 323

Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise

LLANFAIR

The prolific Methodist hymnist—he wrote over 6500 hymns— Charles Wesley (1707-1788) wrote this hymn for Ascension Sunday and published it with his brother, John, in 1739. Originally with 10 verses, it has been significantly altered over the years, and the “Alleluias” added a century after Wesley put it to print. Speak or sing these words as you enter into worship, or sing along with the congregation of Mt. Olivet Church, Arlington, VA, online here: <https://youtu.be/zNJbUBGZfE> ¹.

Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!
to his throne beyond the skies. Alleluia!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!
enters now the highest heaven. Alleluia!

There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!
He has conquered death and sin; Alleluia!
take the King of glory in. Alleluia!

Highest heaven its Lord receives; Alleluia!
yet he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!

Though returning to his throne, Alleluia!
still he calls us all his own. Alleluia!

See! He lifts his hands above! Alleluia!
See! He shows the prints of love! Alleluia!
Hark! His gracious lips bestow, Alleluia!
blessings on his church below. Alleluia!

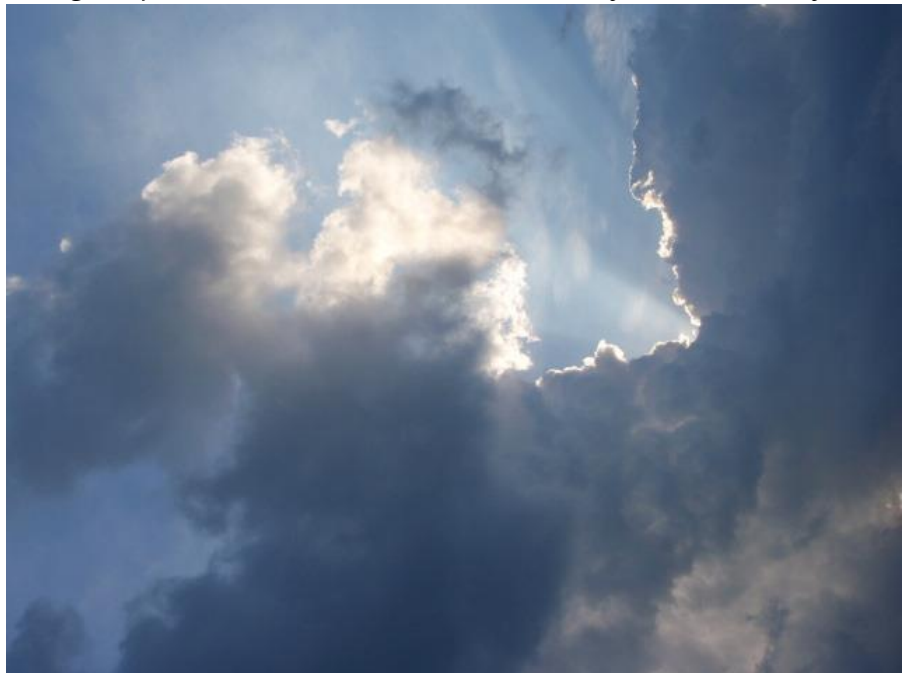
There we shall with you remain, Alleluia!
partners of your endless reign, Alleluia!
see you with unclouded view, Alleluia!
find our heaven of heavens in you. Alleluia!

A Reading from Acts 1:6-14 (NRSV)

Read the text aloud. Pause and notice what image or phrase stands out or “shimmers” as you tell the story.

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.



While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into

¹ Ascension Sunday 2004, Bob Swift, organist and choirmaster (2008).

heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

ALL: The word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Eastertide Alleluia Hymn 736 Celtic Alleluia arr. Fintan O'Carroll & Christopher Walker
This Alleluia response to the scripture reading will follow us through the season of Eastertide. Alleluia means "God be praised!" You may choose to recite it as a prayer of thanksgiving, sing it to your own tune, or sing along with this online version: https://youtu.be/kSS_TanMwWE ².

[Refrain] Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of the Lord lasts forever. What is the word that is living?
It is brought to us through God's son, Jesus Christ. *[Refrain]*

Living in Waiting ...

Acts notes that despite all they have experienced with Jesus, his teachings, and his death and resurrection, the disciples still hold onto the hope that their people, Israel, will be restored as an earthly kingdom. Some part within them still looks for Jesus to be a political revolutionary who upends the systems of power and oppression, and takes control of their present circumstances. Instead, Jesus speaks to them of a distinction between human time and God's Time. And then, he is gone.

- *Jesus calls us to wait on God and the moving of the Holy Spirit. How do I embody this waiting? How am I resistant to it?*
- *Just as Jesus indicates the disciples must wait longer, he also directs them that they will be empowered to bear witness to the ends of the earth. This time between his leaving and the Spirit's arrival grants them time to spiritually prepare for a new way of being in the world—a way that, for many of them, will be harsh and fatal. How may I live in this season of Eastertide and COVID19 in such a way as to spiritually prepare myself for a new way of being in the world—a way that may be harsh but still requires and needs my compassion and love as part of the Body of Christ?*
- *As Jesus tells the disciples to wait, once he is gone, the angels tell them not to dawdle there but to be on their way. As I live into waiting physically in place and spiritually upon God, how may I do so in a way that honors the sacredness of each day and night and the everyday routines that comprise most of life? What is my prayer for my everyday living?*

² *Spirit & Song: Disc B* © 2013 OCP. All Rights Reserved All Selections BMI Released on: 2013-11-15 Music Publisher: OCP

Reflection Hymn

Kum Ba Yah

DESMOND

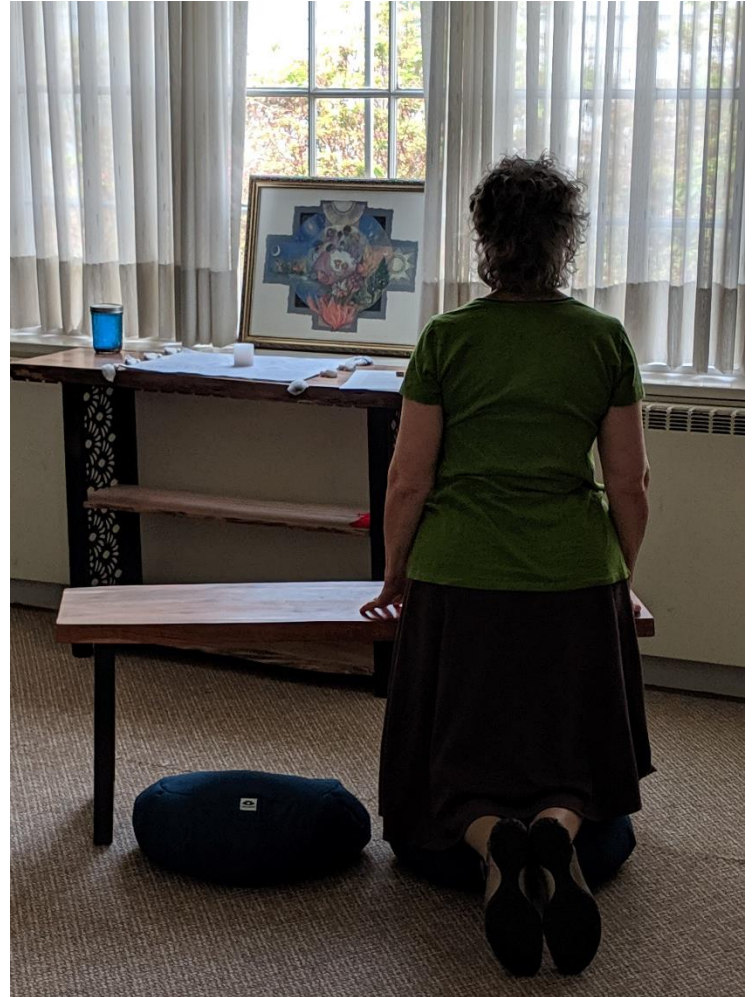
While its origins are disputed, this familiar African-American Spiritual is known to have been sung among the Gullah Geechee people living on islands and along the coastline of Georgia and South Carolina and ties to the West African slave-trade. Often sung now as a camp song, the original voices stories add import and sacred lament to the words. As we live within the complexity of COVID19, allow these words to draw from deep spaces of your soul as you speak or sing them or sing along with Chester Children's Chorus from Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, online at: <https://youtu.be/IPdDWiHhNs>³.

Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Come by here, my Lord, come by here.
Oh Lord, come by here.

Someone needs you, Lord, come by here.
Someone needs you, Lord, come by here.
Someone needs you, Lord, come by here.
Oh Lord, come by here.

Someone's prayin', Lord, come by here.
Someone's prayin', Lord, come by here.
Someone's prayin', Lord, come by here.
Oh, Lord, come by here.

Kum Ba Yah, my Lord, come by here.
Kum Ba Yah, my Lord, come by here.
Kum Ba Yah, my Lord, come by here.
Oh, Lord, come by here.



Prayers of the People

Enter into this time in song. If you don't know the tune, let the words be the doorway to your prayer.

Sung Prayer

Hear My Prayer, O Lord

BENZENHAFFER
arr. Holly C. Benzenhafer

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord.
I am asking, hear my prayer, O Lord.

³ The Chester Children's Chorus at Swarthmore College is a year-round organization that focuses on the children of Chester, PA, throughout the year both musically and academically. Started in 1994 with seven boys from one school, it now serves 100 boys and girls representing every 3rd-12th grade school in Chester. Learn more about the Chorus at <https://www.swarthmore.edu/chester-childrens-chorus>.

Prayerful Meditation

God knows no distance.⁴
—Charleszetta Waddle

We Hold in Prayer...

*Many of this week's prayers are requests from members of our congregation in the past week. **If you have general or specific prayer requests—joys as well as concerns—to share please contact Holly or Daryn to pass them along.***

As a community of faith gathered in Spirit when we cannot be in person, we offer our hearts and voices in prayer where we are, as we are, entrusting the Spirit's moving among us and responding far beyond our individual reach and influence...

We enter prayer today with Jim, Clif, Harry, and Pastor Holly holding in prayer the souls who have entered God's nearer presence. With Jim, we hold his mother's step-son, **Larry Brown and his family** as they grieve the death of Larry's wife to COVID19. We continue to surround **Jim's mother** in prayer for God's tender mercies as she lives isolated from networks of loving support within the grief of her husband, Johnny Brown's, death in April. We hold the family of Clif and Harry's friend, **Madeline Buttrick**, who died from COVID19, to Spirit's consolation and give thanks for her life fully lived. We continue to hold **Clif's nephew and his wife** as they live within the grief of her father's death. We lift the family of Harry's friend, **Audrey Ross**, who also died of COVID19, to God's deep peace within their sorrow.

We also keep the families and friends of Holly's former BU student, **Cassie Helms**, a school teacher, who died from gall bladder cancer in Birmingham, AL; and of her Iona Community friend, **Fiona Churcher**, a guitar maker, who died from cancer in London, England. For the lives lost to COVID19 and its impactful trauma, all persons who have entered God's nearer presence since last we entered prayer together, souls who grieve this day... and for souls whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Barbara, Ann, Bev, and Pastor Daryn, we lift to God's healing presence persons continuing to be diagnosed and living with COVID19. We especially name **Bruce Wile** and the residents at Wingate who have tested positive, and hold **Ann** and **Sherry** in their concern as they must be present to Bruce from afar. We also hold Daryn's friend, **Frank Dawkins**, living with COVID19, and increase our awareness to the millions of people who have suffered this illness around our world and who will succumb to it in the weeks and months ahead. For their resilience and God's watch-care...and for souls we now name to living with the virus...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Ernie, Liz, and Pastor Holly, we hold persons living with non-COVID19 illness and injury requiring hospitalization or treatment. We hold Jonathan Steeve's mother-in-law, **Cindy Chambers**, to Spirit's keeping as she is critically ill with ovarian cancer. We continue to hold Liz's

⁴ Julia Cameron, *Heart Steps: Prayers and Declarations for a Creative Life* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1997), 80.

Aunt **Virginia** who has developed an infection in her throat that impedes her swallowing and recovery. We pray for Holly's Aunt **Deb Benzenhafer**, in Wartburg, TN, as she prepares for stomach cancer surgery in June, and her Uncle **Tom Benzenhafer**, who is recovering at home from knee replacement surgery. In the midst of suffering and unknowing, life changes and beloved presence, we gather these souls before you, Holy Spirit, and now speak the names of persons likewise confronting serious medical conditions...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Harry and Pastor Holly, we lift persons working across the spectrum of medical services and health care, especially Harry's grandson, **Dr. Ryan Chin**, a doctor in the Bronx and Holly's friend, **Dr. John Merriman**, a nurse in New York City. For them and countless other physicians, nurses, and technicians who specialized in other medical areas but now are managing COVID19 patients; for the over-arching emotional and traumatic toll their dedicated service is exacting; and for their own need for rest, respite, and spaces to grieve in the face of suffering and death...and for souls in medical fields whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Ernie, Stan, and Barbara, we offer gratitude for the spiritual sustenance of music and song and the particular beauty of the human voice. We cherish the blessings of scripture and the Worship Resource to connect us to God's presence and our human faith community each week. For these gifts and the goodness of spiritual practices to bear us through all life ...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Ann and Harry, we offer gratitude for food delivery services and food banks providing assistance to seniors, home-bound persons, and people living with food scarcity. We give particular thanks for the Needham Senior Center, Needham Community Council, and FBC Jamaica Plain as well as family, neighbors, and friends who continue to offer care and help...and for souls receiving assistance and souls engaged in this work whose names we speak aloud...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*



With Harry and Pastor Holly, we lift up students and teachers as they continue to maintain educational pursuits in make-shift and haphazard conditions. As they move to the end of the school year, prepare for exams and final projects, and work to wrap up a most unusual semester, we ask for Holy Spirit's guidance, ability to focus, and good-humored stamina. We especially remember Harry's **grandchildren**, and Holly's teaching colleagues **Bethaney Duncan** and **Arturo Bagley**...and souls in education we name aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Stan, we hold to God our concerns for our communities, state, and country as people slip into patterns of dehumanizing disregard, anger, aggression, violence, and deadly force in their frustration over the restraints necessary for the good of the whole. We pray for the safety of customer- and public-facing workers who are encountering ill-treatment, threats, and endangerment for doing their jobs to serve the public. We pray for the individuals at risk of turning to rage and violence and ask for Spirit's intervention. We ask for Holy strands of kindness, compassion, patience, and dignifying respect to weave through the lives and hearts of persons that we may encounter one another as children of God...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Anthony, Clif, and Barbara, we delight in creative endeavors that brighten each day and offer goodness and hope in the world, especially art, coloring, cooking, and Zoom yoga...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Louise, Liz, Clif, Stan, and Ernie, we celebrate the beauty of nature and the ability to be outside gardening, walking in nature, getting exercise through cycling, and enjoying flowers in the yard. For the continuity of creation's bounty and promise in the turning through spring toward summer...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Stan and John, we acknowledge the safety and privilege that being able to shelter in the relative comfort of a home, have food available, and being retired or having ongoing jobs affords some of us. With gratitude for each way in which our lives are stable in this chaotic time, we pray for souls who do not have these benefits and privileges and whose income is inconsistent or depleted. We bear witness to the hard discernment our sisters and brothers face in determining whether or not they can afford to shelter at home or risk returning to work. For their safekeeping, ease from worry and fear, job security, insurance, shelter, and access to all needed services...for souls walking the tenuous lines between a stable daily life and one of devastating circumstances who we now name...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Ernie and Stan, we hold ministers, musicians, and church staff as they continue to daily discern how to best adapt to an ever-changing reality, expectations, restrictions, and safety concerns for their congregations. For the countless hours of unseen work, planning, strategizing, prayer, and ongoing weekly schedules that they devote in the pastoral care and ministry to and with their communities of faith, and for their continued health, ability to rest, and claim of God's hope and compassion in the world...and for souls in ministry, music, and religious work whose names we speak aloud...*Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With John and Harry, we cherish time with family, going on walks together, enjoying children and grandchildren... *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With John and Stan, we anticipate new life in all its forms, especially John's two daughters-in-law (**Liza** due in July and **Liz** having twins in September) and Stan's daughter **Christie** (due in August)...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

For the prayers of our hearts that you, Holy One, know even when words cannot hold them...
Hear my prayer, O Lord....

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.

Living in Prayer...



The book of Acts notes an interesting point after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Once the angels direct the disciples to leave Mt. Olivet, they return to Jerusalem to the upstairs room where the larger group of followers are sheltering and devote themselves to prayer alongside Jesus' family and the women followers. Often, we read these scriptural accounts as though the events happened in quick succession. In reality, the texts span a great deal of time in some parts and very short spans of time in others. Here, we don't find them receiving Jesus' direction to go to the ends of the earth and bear witness as an immediate imperative. Instead, they return to the upper room—perhaps it was same room where they shared the Last Supper with their Teacher and where Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection—and turn to discerning prayer. They wait on the Spirit to be revealed. They do not act immediately, but instead devote themselves to spiritually preparing for whatever will come.

- *What role does prayer have in my life? What, if any, practice of regular prayer do I embody?*
- *What does it mean for me to be part of a praying community?*
- *Turn to the Prayers of the People and select one paragraph of prayer. How may I devote myself to prayer and discerning reflection upon these themes each day this week?*
- *Am I able to not only speak to God in prayer but also be still—body, mind, and soul—to receive prayerfully what God seeks to offer me? Am I prepared to receive a response I do not desire or expect? Am I ready to receive a response I long for and then live into it?*

Hymn 719

Go, My Children, with My Blessing

AR HYD Y NOS

The son of Czechoslovakian immigrants, Jaroslav J. Vajda (1919-2008) was born in Lorain, OH. He was a Lutheran pastor in Pennsylvania and Indiana before turning to book editing and helping to develop Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. A published poet and hymnist, Vajda was asked to write a benediction to fit the Welsh tune AR HYD Y NOS. He envisioned God offering this blessing to us at the end of a worship service, just as we are coming to now.

Read aloud or sing the text in assurance of God's love, Christ's embrace, and Spirit's enduring presence. Or, you may wish to sing with (or close your eyes and listen to) the Compline service of the 2011 Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, online at:

<https://youtu.be/oaYlqRgdW4>⁵.

Go, my children, with my blessing, never alone.
Waking, sleeping, I am with you; you are my own.
In my love's baptismal river I have made you mine forever.
Go, my children, with my blessing—you are my own.

Go, my children, sins forgiven, at peace and pure.
Here you learned how much I love you, what I can cure.
Here you heard my dear son's story; here you touched him, saw his glory.
Go my children, sins forgiven, at peace and pure.

Go, my children, fed and nourished, closer to me;
grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.
Here my Spirit's power filled you; here his tender comfort stilled you.
Go, my children, fed and nourished, joyful and free.

I, the Lord, will bless and keep you and give you peace;
I, the Lord, will smile upon you and give your peace;
I, the Lord, will be your Father, Savior, Comforter, and Brother.
Go, my children, I will keep you and give your peace.

Offering

For online giving, go to <https://www.fbcneedham.org> or continue to support the ongoing ministry of the church by sending a check to the church office via mail to: First Baptist Church in Needham, 858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham MA 02492. Please indicate it is your offering or pledge on the check.

Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

⁵ Martin Luther College is the college of ministry operated by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

Benediction

(Speak these words of benediction knowing that you are part of a loving community of faith. If you lit a candle at the beginning, you may wish to blow it out now.)

One: Our blessing to one another is that we are here for one another, that we are with one another, that we celebrate and remember one another along the journey.

ALL: We extinguish the Candle of Life, but the Light continues to shine within us. As we pass the peace we carry the Light of the Candle of Life from this hour into this world and beyond, offering peace, hope and light wherever the journey leads.

Passing of the Peace

(Picture in your mind's eye the faces of beloved souls with whom you would share the peace of Christ in person if you could, and offer each one your blessing of peace.)

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

One: Let us greet one another in peace as we prepare for the journey ahead.

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Announcements

While the Church Office and Building are currently closed, our ministry continues! Pastoral and office staff are working from home. Office voicemail and email are being checked regularly. If you have a pastoral concern, contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly by email, phone, or text.

Do You Need Washable Masks? Be Kind Needham Masks for Seniors is a local organization making washable fabric masks available to local senior residents *for free*. Your health and safety in the weeks and months ahead is paramount, and having reusable, washable masks aids sanitation, is environmentally friendly, and is cost-effective. If you or a senior you know need masks, please contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly.

Needham Community Council continues to provide necessary resources and food to individuals in need of their services. If you or someone you know are in need of reaching out to them or if you want to learn how you can best volunteer to help at this time, go to their website at: <http://needhamcommunitycouncil.org>. *Please note: They ARE NOT accepting drop-off donations at this time due to safety protocols. Financial donations are greatly appreciated and needed.*

Text and Photo Attributions: "Christ's Ascension, Sergev Posad, Russia;" "P&G Wedding Candles 2015;" "Breakthrough Light, Canobie Lake, NH;" "Kneeling Prayer, FBC Needham 2019"; "Church Tree Art 2018;" and "Praying Monk & Orchid" by ©Holly C. Benzenhafer 2020. Use with permission.

MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES **ONECHURCHFUND**

The Massachusetts Council of Churches and its member congregations and denominations believe in One Church. We believe all parts of the body of Christ are necessary. And, at this terrible moment when so many people are suffering because of the COVID19, some parts of the body of Christ are suffering more than others. As members of the one body of Christ, we cannot say to one another, “I have no need of you.”

Through the One Church Fund, the Massachusetts Council of Churches prioritizes the financial, practical, and relational support of immigrant, Black, poor, unhoused, and unaffiliated churches.

Many of these churches’ needs are going unmet by federal, state, denominational, and local church resources, even as they have been decimated by the circumstances of the COVID19 pandemic compounded by long legacies of racial and economic disparities and systemic inequities. Churches are essential service providers, especially in immigrant Black, poor, and homeless communities. Immigrant churches and Black churches have long operated with an outsized role in meeting the needs of their communities, by providing education, banking, health care, food, clothing, mental health and spiritual support, often because other institutions failed to provide care.

The need for your support is urgent and growing because many of these vibrant churches operate from plate to plate, with no reserves, no endowment, no savings. These churches are in danger of closing critical ministries because of the economic crisis caused by COVID19. These churches are experiencing increasing need at a time of decreasing local resources. We need your help to unify and sustain these churches in the communities experiencing the most suffering. We can be a balm to one another in the Body of Christ. To learn more, go to <https://www.onechurchfund.org/about/>

Please give generously and ask for what you need to ensure the whole body of Christ endures.

You can also donate through our church’s Paypal link at www.fbcneedham.org.