



# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**Vol. 27 No. 3 March 2017**

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Many Christians who are long time “free church” members (traditions such as the New England congregationalists, baptists, and several others) do not really care for Ash Wednesday. Too high church and all. Too much against the grain of the gospel lesson recommended for that day: “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.” Matt. 6:1.

And then there’s the whole business with the ashes. Getting dirty on purpose. Letting someone else rub ashes (made by mixing chrism oil with the ashes of palms from past Palm Sundays) on your forehead or hand, while saying, “Remember, human, that you are dust and unto dust you will return.”

Most of us are also quite naturally too invested in avoiding the unavoidable fact that we will die someday. We are not naturally inclined to want to be reminded that sin and death are related. But the point of choosing to be reminded is that we embrace and recommit to our role and identity as followers of Jesus. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” Matt. 16:25

I do not write this just because I am a pastor. I share it with you as a fellow human and follower of Jesus. After all, the root word for human, *humanus* meaning “man” or “human,” shares a common root with *humilis* meaning “lowly or humble,” literally “on the ground.” Both *humanus* and *humilis* derive from *humus* or “earth.” In short, we are by our nature of the earth and to the earth we will return.

What Jesus proclaims – though his birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection –is that our return to the earth is not the whole story. Jesus proclaims that we can (and so should) transform the very human lives we live. All we need to do is embrace the way he calls us to follow.

That way requires a radical shift, which leads us deeper into the new life of Easter. And the more we live that way, the easier and more natural that becomes. But our everyday lives are not focused on transformation. Instead, we are naturally focused more on getting by, completing the to-do list. So we have entire seasons of preparation, Advent for Christmas and Lent for Easter. That allows their meanings to work on us over time. Those messages are that God so loves the world that every Christmas God enters it as a human to join us fully in the “human condition.” And God is willing to pay the ultimate price, every Lent repeating the journey of Jesus, facing up to the limits of being human, relearning the lessons of sincere humility, and accepting (and exposing) the reality of sin and death, on the way to new life and transformation.

There is no resurrection, no Easter, without accepting the struggle and death that precede it. That does not necessarily include ashes. It does necessarily include accepting our own humanity fully, and all the implications of being Christian.

Wishing you a Lenten journey that leads all the way to a deeper Easter,

*Michael*

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**Edwards Church is an Open and Affirming Congregation:**

*We embrace Christ’s command to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. Therefore, we welcome **everyone** regardless of ethnic background, economic circumstance, sexual orientation, family configuration, or difference in ability.*

*All who seek the love of Christ are welcome to Edwards Church and to share fully in its life and ministry. In response to the Spirit of Christ in our midst, we glorify God and rejoice in the inherent worth, dignity, and gifts of every person as a child of God.*

## ***From the Minister of Faith Formation***

Dear Members and Friends,

March 1, Ash Wednesday, begins the season of Lent. During this season we will travel with Jesus; first in the wilderness and then with him as he goes about his ministry which will lead him into Jerusalem. We'll meet Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, a blind man healed, and witness the despair of Mary and Martha. We will experience yet again, and perhaps differently this year, the events of Holy Week that begin with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, his abandonment and betrayal by those he loved, his trial, crucifixion, and death.

The liturgical color for Lent is traditionally purple to signify penitence. A few common symbols of this season are ashes (in the Hebrew scriptures ashes were synonymous with dust and death); barren stones which remind us of the command Jesus was tempted with; palms which people waved as Jesus rode into Jerusalem; a crown of thorns reminding us of the crown placed upon Jesus' head; and the cross.

In this wilderness time of Lent, we have an opportunity to look into our hearts, souls, and minds to empty ourselves of all that prevents us from living fully as beloved children of God. Some of us will be more intentional about a spiritual discipline such as prayer or another form of meditation. Some of us will fast *from* something or *for* something. Some of us will give of our time, talents, and treasures for neighbors near and far. Throughout this season, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can invite God into our lives in surprisingly new ways as we walk through these 40 days. The tenuous climate in our culture and world today is exceedingly ripe for whatever spiritual discipline(s) we choose.

I pray that your journey through Lent will be spirit and meaning filled and that you will be able to attend some or all of the special services offered.

*Blessings,*  
*Deb*

### **Mindfulness in Relationship**

Sunday, March 26, 2017 from 4:00-5:30

Please join us as we explore our relational lives from the perspective of mindfulness. We will consider what it would be like to see ourselves and others more deeply and to be able to bring increasing compassion to what we find. In discussing the tender and powerful topic of relationships, we will think together of family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and even those that (in our oh-so-human-way) we find challenging, frustrating, and hurtful.

Mindfulness offers us a path toward wholesome relationships. It speaks to our "longing to find the holy in ourselves and others," as expressed in our vision statement.

*[January 22: Bringing mindfulness into the relationship we have with ourselves]*

*[February 26: Bringing mindfulness into our relationships with others]*

**March 26:** Bringing mindfulness into our relationship with the Divine

Please contact Linda Vincent or Deb Moore if you are interested in attending this gathering.

## Upcoming Book Discussions:

*The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to be Christian*, by Brian McLaren, a leading contemporary theologian, pastor and activist. In this his most recent book, Brian explores what he sees as three shifts in Christianity: spiritual, theological, and missional.

Dates and times for this book discussion:

Tuesday 3/7, Wednesdays 3/15 & 3/22 from 7-8:30 p.m. in the Edwards Room

*Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, & the Bible*, by M. Daniel Carroll. In this second edition of his book, Daniel states: "this book is a modest attempt to provide a solid foundation for a truly Christian perspective on immigration; a primer for a more biblically and theologically informed approach to the issue of immigration."

Dates and time for this book discussion:

Sunday 3/19 & 4/2 from 4-5:30 p.m. in the Edwards Room

Let Deb Moore know ASAP if you plan to participate in either of both of these book discussions.

## YOUTH GROUP

Edwards Church Youth Group's ministry is open to those in Grades 6 -12.

We generally meet on the second and fourth Sunday of the month from 11:30-1:00, with a few exceptions. Youth are always welcome to bring a friend!



Here's what is coming up:

March 12 – 2-3:30 p.m. Writing Letters of Hope for Syria at Lander-Grinspoon Academy and assembling "muck shoes" for Syrian children made from recycled materials

March 26 – Meeting from 11:30 – 1:00 in the Edwards Room

*Annual Pancake Breakfast –  
Sponsored by the Youth Group with  
support from interested adults*

Save the date – April 9<sup>th</sup>, Palm Sunday  
8:30 – 9:30 a.m. in Addis Hall



Menu includes: Blueberry, chocolate chip, plain and gluten free pancakes  
Meat and veggie sausages,  
Hard boiled eggs  
Coffee, tea and juice

## Communion Table Flowers

The gift of flowers for the communion table in our sanctuary is a revered custom. The flowers may be given to an ill or homebound member, or the donor may keep them and give to whomever they wish. The flowers may be of all kinds: wee plants from the grocery store, greens gathered on a woodland walk, cut flowers from the grocery or from a local florist.

Persons who receive flowers from our communion table are always so surprised, grateful, and appreciative. Please consider giving flowers as a wonderful way to express your love for the church and for each other.

Please contact Janet Hemminger at (413) 584-1635 or [chuck.hemminger@gmail.com](mailto:chuck.hemminger@gmail.com) to select a date.

Many thanks,

*Janet Hemminger*

## Circle of Care

Our Edwards Church Circle of Care decided to share the correspondence and email attachment that appear in the box below. We got the idea that this informal communication between Circle members might be of interest to our wider church community, as it offers a window into some of what occurred on the night that our family came to the U.S.

Members of the Circle of Care:

Annie Bissett (co-leader), Chris Hjelt (co-leader), Jack Hjelt, Deb Moore, Sarah Briggs, Linda Vincent, Cynthia Stanton, Nancy Flickinger, Jan Hemminger, and Karen Pohlman.

Feb 18, 2017

Well, dear friends, Chris asked for my impressions of last night. So, I jotted something out after our company left just now. Here are thoughts and feelings in a dance of sleepiness :-) and excitement...

Attachment below...

Love to each of you. Linda

Attachment:

Rendezvous at Bradley Airport and drive to Northampton

Feb 17, 2017 (and into the early hours of Feb 18)

Yasimiyah, Yousuf, Ayub, Catholic Charities (3), interpreter (1), Gazette reporters (2), COC (3)

What are my impressions?

Whirlwind of people trying to be helpful, many things not going as planned or expected, getting some things right and others not. Everyone wanting, some of us praying, that we can make arrival for this family into the U.S. a respectful, humane experience. In the rare quiet moments between the talk- on- top- of- talk, the atmosphere surrounding us continued to whisper, yes, you have come to a place where you are wanted and safe. That made all of the chaotic welcome-- and even the ever- present, tireless reporters-- seem Ok. We were all in this together, to mark this event in history and to be part of a support network for this family on the night of their immigration.

Although we were a swarm of activity, the family was composed and gracious. Beautiful, poised, mostly smiling warmly at us when we made eye contact. I loved that. Just those moments of looking into eyes that seemed so bright and full of life. And, I imagined a few times that they must have thought we were a funny sight, going in this direction and that, in action and words. But, consistently smiling and patient they were, even without sleep for nearly 2 days.

My heart is nearly bursting with the memory of Yasimiyah, Yousuf, and Ayub. I can hardly wait to see them again, even though we do not speak the others' language. We met without words, in the exchange of shy smiles, theirs and mine. Sometimes I wondered why there was any talk or activity and why it was that we didn't all just join hands and sit quietly together, soaking in the bigness of the moment.

I try to imagine... having left family, friends, home, country, continent, language, and culture to come here... offering themselves to this community, to this country... 12 bags of belongings and two wheelchairs, they seemed simply present with their smiles and aura of hope.

## Seeing Double

David Kidwell will conduct the Holyoke Civic Symphony in a concert entitled "Seeing Double" on Sunday, March 5 at 3:00 p.m. at Holyoke Community College. It's a free concert, but donations are gratefully accepted.

The orchestra will present a double helping of Brahms: the *Tragic Overture* and the *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello*. Soloists for the concerto will be violinist Ron Gorevic and cellist Melissa Westgate.

The orchestra will also give the world premiere of *Two Portraits for Oboe and Orchestra* by Vermont composer Zeke Hecker. The piece was commissioned by the orchestra to celebrate its 50th anniversary season.

For more information, including directions, program notes, and a video introduction to the concert, please visit the orchestra's website at [www.holykecivicsymphony.org](http://www.holykecivicsymphony.org).

## A Choral Celebration

On Sunday, May 7, the Edwards Church choir will join with other local choirs and the Holyoke Civic Symphony in a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The concert will conclude the yearlong celebration of the Holyoke Civic Symphony's 50th season. The choir of Easthampton Congregational Church and the choruses of Holyoke Community College and Holyoke High School will round out the chorus of over 120 singers. The concert will be held at Holyoke High School. Mark your calendars now for this exciting event!

## SNOW/INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

When storms of any kind occur it can raise the question whether we will be having our customary Sunday service or other events at that church. In the absence of a cancellation announcement, one should assume that the service or other event is being held. Cancellation announcements would typically include listing the cancellation with local news outlets (e.g., ABC 40 / FOX 6 or WWLP), and posting to the church web site and Facebook page. When in doubt, try calling the church to ask. Concern for personal safety should always come first, so even if there is no cancellation announcement, please stay home if you have any doubt.

## A Word About Fellowship Time

We often say, and experience, that Edwards church is a community, even a family, that one of its strengths is the friendship we celebrate each Sunday (and at other times, too) when we gather for worship. Many of us enjoy extending that friendly community in the fellowship time after worship, when the coffee is hot, the snacks are abundant (mostly), and the conversation relaxed.

Of course it doesn't happen automatically. The deacons set things up, our sexton Dave Jenkins readies the coffee, and ... YOU do the rest. The snack department depends entirely on your contributions. We try to spread this appeal out, so that only one quarter of the congregation gets it each Sunday; but when your part of the alphabet comes around, we hope that some of you (a few will do nicely) will bring a little something to share.

Grateful as always,  
*Tom Derr,*  
for the Diaconate

**March 5** - Last names with A-D

**March 12** - Last names with E-K

**March 19** - Last names with L-S

**March 26** - Last names with T-Z





## FIRST YOU DREAM

Soprano Mary Annarella and pianist David Kidwell will present "First You Dream," an afternoon of Broadway and art song, on Sunday, March 19 at 4:00 p.m. at Faith United Church, 52 Sumner Ave, in Springfield.

The concert is part of Faith United Church's Music for Missions series. Admission is free, but donations will go to Kate's Kitchen in Holyoke, a member of the Providence Ministries Service Network, serving free lunches 365 days a year.

The program will include current and classic Broadway songs as well as art song cycles by Mr. Kidwell and Gwyneth Walker.



For more information, please visit [faithunitedchurch.net/music-for-missions/](http://faithunitedchurch.net/music-for-missions/).

## Check It Out!

Have you checked out the church website ([edwardschurchnorthampton.org/](http://edwardschurchnorthampton.org/)) recently? New posts are going up all the time.

Complete worship service recordings and Rev. McSherry's sermons can be found under Listen to Services & Sermons. Choir highlights are under Listen to Music. And under News/Blog, you can read the church newsletter and blog posts by church staff. Be sure to check out Minister of Music David Kidwell's recent post about Spirituals.

## MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Thomas Bankman  
Matthew Buckley Wells  
Jon Frost  
Michele Carroll  
Elizabeth Henneman  
Alfred Griggs  
Ruth Griggs  
Gwenn Swift  
Courtney Aquadro  
Martha McCullagh



Taylor Cook  
Paula Mattison  
Ken Longstreeth  
Susan Benedisuk  
Eugene Sielski  
Rev. Michael McSherry  
Lynda Erickson  
Ronald Korza  
James Stokes-Buckles

**Note:** In an effort to protect the digital identities of our community members, we will no longer publish dates of birth in the newsletter. Please contact the church office directly if you would like to obtain this information.

## Save The Dates in Lent

**Ash Wednesday – March 1, 7pm**, we have a quiet, reflective service to mark the beginning of the 40 days. We begin with ashes to remind us of the humanity we share with Jesus, and that the path to new life always requires letting go of something.

**Palm Sunday – April 9, 9:40am**, after enjoying a delicious pancake breakfast in Addis Hall, we join with members of First Churches and St. John's in a liturgy of palms, recreating the atmosphere of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We will probably gather in Kosciuszko Park, across Main Street from the church.

**Maundy Thursday – April 13, 6pm**, we gather in Addis Hall for a pot-luck supper and communion. Just as Jesus gathered with those who were closest to him and gave them the sacrament of communion through which to re-member him, we gather to prepare to walk with him through the rest of Holy Week.

**Good Friday – April 14, 7pm**, we will have the Service of Tenebrae (or Shadows), in which we share in the persecution, suffering and death of Jesus. Candles are extinguished and the sanctuary darkens, and we leave in silence at the end.

Watch for a possible midday event with other area churches.

**Easter Sunday – April 16.** Many of us have appreciated the sunrise service hosted by the Westhampton Congregational Church. Detailed information about that will be provided later. At 10am in our own sanctuary we will celebrate the Resurrection and declare "Christ is Risen" once more!

### Music at the Crossroads

The music committee is pleased to announce that its Vision Initiative for 2017 is a concert series entitled "Music at the Crossroads." The series will explore the crossroads of classical and contemporary music, and each concert will be a benefit for church-supported charities.

The first concert will be on Sunday, April 9 at 3:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. Soprano Patricia O'Connor, mezzo-soprano Lisa Woods, and pianist Michael Rheault will perform sacred music and Spirituals, as well as opera solos and duets. The concert is free, but donations will go to the Cathedral in the Night ministry.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

The Outreach Committee has received a request from the Interfaith Help Fund for someone to join their team of volunteers. The Fund makes small grants to individuals experiencing financial emergency such as falling behind in rent payments or utility bills. Those in need may apply for assistance at the Senior Center on Tuesday afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00. They are interviewed by a Fund volunteer who then writes a check to the landlord, electric company, etc.

The current team consists of members of the Unitarian Society and First Churches. Each person spends one Tuesday afternoon per month interviewing applicants. Training, support and fellowship are provided at a monthly potluck supper held at a downtown home. (It isn't necessary to attend every gathering.) The group would like to expand the interfaith nature of this important ministry to include a volunteer from Edwards Church. We have already helped in a modest way by donating \$500 in 2016. Another connection is that the Interfaith Help Fund and our own Minister's Help Fund sometimes cooperate in cases of dire need.

Please contact Jeanne Kocsis at (413) 727-8928 for more information.



## Edwards Church Council Minutes

February 8, 2017

**Voting members in attendance:** Leon Drzewianowski (Moderator); Carl Erickson (Member-at-Large); Heather Bell (Stewardship); Scott Anderson (Trustees); Harriet Smith (Clerk);

**Absent:** Linda Vincent (Music); Maryann Bankman (Member-at-large); Tom Derr (Deacons); Darleen Buttrick (Faith Formation); (Outreach); (P-C Relations)

**Staff in attendance:** Michael McSherry, Debra Moore, David Kidwell, Marc Waller, Heather Dandy

Meeting opened at 7:04 with a prayer offered by Deb Moore.

*Motion to accept minutes of January Council meeting as presented. Motion seconded. Majority in favor. 1 abstention. Motion to accept minutes approved.*

### **Joys and Concerns of Staff and Committees:**

Annual Meeting was awesome. Great conversation and discussion. The ease with which the congregation discussed and moved on the welcoming statement at Annual Meeting was impressive and positive.

Recently a young man was wandering the halls after service. Only one person chatted with him and invited him to fellowship. Concern that new people need to be greeted and invited to fellowship hour. Recommendation made that people attend Super Saturday, March 18 in Wilbraham. There's a welcoming/greeting people workshop. Suggestion made to list recommended workshops. It was stated that the church will pay the fee to attend Super Saturday.

Trustees meeting last night was the best meeting we've had. The new people on the board have jumped right in. It is refreshing to have such fantastic additions to Trustees.

Deacon Tom Derr slipped and fell in the woods on Monday afternoon. Nothing broken – joy, but recovery could take a while.

### **Committee Reports:**

Stewardship retreat in early March to plan out the year. Stewardship will touch base with those who haven't pledged for 2017. Thank you letters to go out this month. Google drive set up to be able to do some of the work virtually.

**Vision Implementation** – the Music committee discussed it at their meeting.

**Bathroom Signage and Gender Identity** – still working on it.

**St. Mary's Parking Lot** – no info packet yet.

**New Business** – Vice Moderator still needed.

**Hate Has No Home Here sign** – recommendation made to get these signs printed and posted on doors and possibly on the windows in the Sanctuary. Concern brought about whether we should be putting signs up on the Sanctuary windows. Suggestion made that we have postcards printed.

Refugees are going to be resettling but it is on hold for 90-120 days. Edwards Church is third in line for 1 family. Still looking for housing. Chris Hjelt and Annie Bissett are the co-leaders of our Circle of Care.

Leon will be away in March. Scott Anderson will run the March Council meeting.

**The next Council meeting will be held on March 8 at 7 p.m.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m. with a closing prayer by Leon.

Respectfully submitted,  
Heather Dandy  
Administrative Assistant



# THE WAR IN SYRIA

## What Lies Ahead, and How We Can Help



**Sunday March 26**  
**3:30 pm – 5:00 pm**

**Edwards Church**  
**297 Main St., Northampton**

**Join us** for a discussion with a distinguished panel of experts on the war in Syria, now in its sixth year. The panelists will provide an overview of the current situation in Syria, the impact of the Trump Administration's policies on Syria, and the war crimes that have been committed, including a case being brought before a Spanish national court. The discussion will also include actions that we as a community can take to advocate for and offer support to the Syrian people.

### Speakers include:

**Stephen Rapp**, former US Ambassador At-Large for War Crimes Issues, 2009-2015

**Mouaz Mountain**, Director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force in Washington DC, and Political Director of United for a Free Syria.

**Steven Heydemann**, Janet W. Ketchum 1953 Professor of Middle East Studies, Smith College

**Nadia Alawa**, Founder and CEO, NuDay Syria

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian, Interfaith Fellow for Climate Justice at Congregation B'nai Israel.

This event is sponsored by the Valley Syrian Relief Committee, in conjunction with: Edwards Church, the Peace & Justice Committee of First Churches of Northampton, the Tikun Olam Committee of the Jewish Community Center of Amherst, Congregation B'nai Israel, Second Congregational Church of Greenfield, Haydenville Congregational Church, First Church of Deerfield, Islamic Society of Western Mass., the Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence, Temple Israel of Greenfield, and St. John's Episcopal Church.

For further information, please contact Michael Kane of the Valley Syrian Relief Committee, 413-596-0403, or [mikaneconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:mikaneconsulting@gmail.com).

# MARCH 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Abbreviations: AA = Alcoholics Anonymous AF = Augustine Fellowship NPC = Northampton Parents Center FF = Faith Formation PVIRAG= Pioneer Valley Interfaith			1	2	3	4
	Refugee Action Group RVS= River Valley Sangha VMSG = Valley Men's Support Group		10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 4:30pm Friends of the Homeless Mgmt. Comm. 6pm MANNA 7pm Ash Wednesday Service	9:30am Refugee Resettlement Panel 7pm Choir Rehearsal 7pm MANNA Board of Directors Mtg.	6:30pm AA	11:30am MANNA 3pm Circle of Care Team Meeting
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
8:45am Bible Study 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Communion 11:15 Fellowship (A-D) 11:15 Music Committee 11:30 Stewardship Retreat	2pm PVIRAG 6pm RVS 7pm VMSG 7pm Diaconate Mtg.	7pm AF 7pm Trustees Mtg. 7pm Great Spiritual Migration Book Disc.	10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 5pm Board of Friends of the Homeless 6pm MANNA 6:30pm Girl Scouts 7pm Council Mtg.	7pm Choir Rehearsal	6:30pm AA	10:30 Refugee Resettlement Panel 11:30am MANNA
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
8:45am Bible Study 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (E-K) 2pm Youth Group Writing Letters to Syria at Lander-Grinspoon Academy	6pm RVS 7pm VMSG	4pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm AF 7pm VMSG	10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm MANNA 6:30pm Girl Scouts 7pm Great Spiritual Migration Book Disc.	6 pm Members in Discernment 7pm Choir Rehearsal	6pm Cot Shelter 6:30pm AA	11:30am MANNA
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
8:45am Bible Study 9am Choir Rehearsal 9:30am Hymn Sing 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (L-S) 4pm Christians at the Border Book Discussion	6pm RVS 7pm VMSG	7pm AF 7pm CE Community of Practice	10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm MANNA 7pm Outreach Mtg. 7pm Great Spiritual Migration Book Disc	7pm Choir Rehearsal	6:30pm AA	8:30am CE Certification Program 11:30am MANNA
26	27	28	29	30	31	
8:45am Bible Study 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (T-Z) 11:30 Youth Group 3pm Panel Disc. on Syria 4pm Mindfulness in Relationship	6pm RVS 7pm VMSG 7pm Labyrinth Walk	4pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm AF 7pm VMSG	10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm MANNA 6:30pm Girl Scouts	7pm Choir Rehearsal	6:30pm AA	