



THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 29 No. 10 December 2019

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Advent has been one of my favorite times of the year for as long as I can recall.

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.*

These lyrics from “O Little Town of Bethlehem” remind me why the Christian liturgical year starts on the first Sunday of Advent, weeks before Christmas. We might otherwise be drawn to start the liturgical year on Christmas day itself – a day full of festivity and, after all, a new birth implies a new beginning – but the liturgical year lays out for us a recurring set of mile markers, reminders that give us a way to re-experience the full range of the stories in the Bible and invite them to work on us and in us through all of the rituals and customs of the church year.



In the annual cycle we start by celebrating the incarnation: the quietly startling fact that God loves the world so much she is willing to take human form, enter life as we know it, and share our common lot. And all of this is made real in very humble circumstances, even if announced by a host of angels.

*No one may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

The Christian liturgical year starts weeks before the actual Christmas day because we need time to prepare. Forget shopping for presents. Forget stringing the lights outside or even buying a tree. We need time to prepare ourselves.

Acknowledging that we live in a world of sin is counter-cultural. Perhaps we can acknowledge that sin is present in corrupt practices in business or politics, or in drug deals across the street in Pulaski Park, or relationship betrayals, or any other easy target. What if we reframed the question by considering sin to be anything that separates us from God, anything that inhibits us from more fully realizing in our lives the best person we are called to be and the co-creating the best world for all. In short, what if we saw sin as not letting God as fully into our lives as we would anyone we love?

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.



In the full Christmas story, including the pre-birth narratives, one can trace a tension between a tendency to recognize (or not) and accept (or not) the presence and action of God in life as we know it. Sometimes characters struggle to recognize and accept, but once given assurance they then embrace the news. Consider Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds and how they interact with angels, those messengers from God. But sometimes there is simply no room at the inn, and God gets shut out.

We have the capacity, and can cultivate, deepen, and grow the capacity, to recognize and collaborate with the presence and action of God in our lives and the world. This is the full promise and potential of Emmanuel, “God with us,” the incarnation. God has made the first move. Now a lot is up to us. Be brave and open the door wide.

Wishing you a Christmas overflowing with blessings given and received. May the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Christmas be yours all through the coming year.

Michael

Special December Services

Saturday, December 7, 2019
4:00 pm
Worship and Advent Dinner

Sunday, December 8, 2019
Hot Chocolate Run—No Services

Sunday, December 15, 2019
10:00 a.m.
Nativity Sunday / Christmas Pageant
An inter-generational retelling of the narrative of the baby born in Bethlehem.

Sunday, December 22, 2018
10:00 a.m.
Festival of Lessons and Carols
In the tradition of Truro Cathedral, Cornwall, UK where readings and music are used to tell the stories of the Garden of Eden, the various prophecies about Jesus, and the birth of Jesus.

Tuesday, December 24, 2019
7:00 p.m.
Christmas Eve Service
A traditional candlelight service to celebrate the birth of Jesus and all that it means.

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Advent, that wonderful four-week season of preparation and expectant waiting during which we prepare our hearts, minds, and homes to once again celebrate the birth of the Christ child is upon us. The first Sunday of Advent falls on the fourth Sunday before December 25th. The liturgical color of the first, second and fourth Sundays in this season has traditionally been purple; however, in the recent past, many churches and denominations have begun using blue – a color symbolizing royalty. The color for the third Sunday is pink honoring Mary and her song of joy, the Magnificat. Themes of hopes, peace, joy, and love are typically reflected in the weekly liturgies and serve to remind us that through the Bethlehem babe, God birthed those themes as promises to a world waiting – and many would say – still waiting in darkness.

Advent wreaths, devotionals, litanies, Advent calendars, nativity scenes, Christmas trees, ornaments, outdoor and indoor lights are all very popular during this season. The Board of Faith Formation will once again have Advent Calendar Cards available for families with young children.

On our website at <http://edwardschurchnorthampton.org/faith-formation/at-home/> and <http://edwardschurchnorthampton.org/worship/seasons-of-the-church-year/> you will find resources for children, youth, families, and adults as well as an overview of all the seasons of the church year beginning with Advent.

However, you prepare your heart, mind, and home for Christmas; I pray your journey through Advent into Christmas will be a blessed one.

Deb

Church School

Our schedule during December is quite a bit different from other months due to the special services in Advent:

December 1 ~ Communion Sunday – Intergenerational Worship

December 7 ~ 4:00 Intergenerational Worship; Advent Dinner, Caroling & Tree Trimming

December 15 ~ Nativity Sunday – Christmas Pageant – Intergenerational Worship

December 22 ~ Festival of Lessons & Carols – Intergenerational Worship

December 29 ~ Psalm 148 ~ Choose Praise



Prayers for in the Manger

During this Advent Season, you are invited to write a prayer of hope or longing on one of the ribbons - which will be in a basket on the table in the back of the sanctuary - and place it in the manger in the Chancel area.



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!



Join us on:

December 8 ~ 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Decorating Cookies for College Students

December 22 ~ 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Meeting in the Edwards Room

Annual Christmas Pageant

Our annual intergenerational Christmas pageant will take place on Nativity Sunday, December 15 during worship. A rehearsal will be held at 9:30 on Saturday, December 14. Sign – ups for narrators, angels, shepherds, and animals around the manger has begun. Costume fittings will take place after the Advent Dinner on December 7, as well as before and after the pageant rehearsal on December 14. Please see Deb Moore if your child or youth is interested in being part of the Christmas pageant.

Prayer Shawl Ministry New time – Same Days

Beginning November 26, the Prayer Shawl Ministry group is moving the timing of their gatherings to 3:00 – 4:30pm. The group generally meets the second and fourth Tuesday of the month and welcomes knitters, weavers, and crocheters of all levels of experience.

Bible Sunday

Congratulations to Caroline Prince who received her personalized Bible on Sunday, November 3!



Fellowship Time is Busy!

Hello Edwards Church! Here's another friendly reminder about the after-church fellowship hour, which has been well-attended this spring. Everything is there: Good company, a watchful deacon, hot coffee and tea, and – well, usually tasty snacks. But not always. Once in a while we have a pretty lean Sunday, hence this appeal. Please, when you get that gentle reminder that your alphabet group comes up, consider bringing a little something. Lots of littles add up to a generous and welcoming table.

Thank you, from the Deacons,

Tom Derr



December 1 - Last names with A-D

December 8 - No Sunday Service, Advent

Dinner Dec 7

December 15 - Last names with E-K

December 22 - Last names with L-P

December 29 - Last names with R-Z

Inreach Team

At the 2019 Annual Meeting, one of the outcomes from the New Way proposal that was voted on by the congregation, was to allocate a portion of the annual New Way Funds to a group that was called the Inreach Team. This group was challenged with the task to distribute the funds allocated for Inreach to programs and projects that would increase community and help to grow additional spirit and connection among members of the congregation. The group is not tasked with implementing projects or events, but to assist members of the congregation that have an idea that is related to the above goal where funds are needed to implement that idea. We have already started by allocating \$2,500 of this year's \$20,000 allocation to the Scholarship Fund which is being matched by funds allocated to Church Council.

We are very interested in hearing of ideas or events that people would like to do to enhance the feeling of community and teamwork in the church, but may require some funds to move the project forward. We will be setting up a means to forward requests for ideas and thoughts you might want to try via an electronic process. In the meantime you can contact anyone on the committee with your request until we have that up and running. We look forward to getting this process off the ground and seeing the creativity that we have in our congregation.

Pamela Lamlein
Dave Haughey
Jenny Huchison
Grace Del Vecchio
Leon Drzewianowski

Festival of Lessons and Carols December 22

The Edwards Church choir will present its annual Festival of Lessons and Carols service on Sunday, December 22 at 10am. This beautiful worship service combines readings from the King James Version of the Bible with carols and anthems sung by both the choir and the congregation. The Lessons and Carols format was begun in 1880 at Truro Cathedral in Cornwall, England, and it has continued since 1918 at King's College, Cambridge.

Of particular interest in this year's service is a new setting of "There is No Rose" by British composer Philip Stopford, who has become a favorite of the Edwards Church Choir. Stopford is the Director of Music at Christ Church Bronxville, outside of New York City.

Please join us in worship on Sunday, December 22 for this beautiful and meaningful service.

Holyoke for the Holidays

David Kidwell will conduct the Holyoke Civic Symphony in its annual holiday concert on Sunday, December 8 at 3pm at the United Congregational Church of Holyoke (300 Appleton Street). This is a free concert, but donations are gratefully accepted.

The featured work on the program will be the Organ Concerto in G Minor by Francis Poulenc. Roberta Morkin, organist at UCC Holyoke, will be the soloist, playing the historic E. M. Skinner Opus 322 pipe organ.

The rest of the program will consist of Christmas and holiday music, as well as Hanukkah selections from the Mak'hela Jewish Chorus of Western Massachusetts.

For more information, please visit the orchestra's website: www.holyokecivicsymphony.org.



Children's Choir

Rehearsals for the Edwards Church Children's Choir will continue in December. We welcome children in early childhood and the elementary grades to join us for handbell ringing and carol singing as we prepare for the annual Christmas pageant. We will be meeting on Sunday, December 1, right after fellowship from 11:30-Noon; on Saturday, December 7 from 3:30-4:00 pm, Saturday, December 14 during Nativity Sunday Pageant Rehearsal, and on Sunday, December 15 at 9:30AM. We will make a musical offering to the congregation at the annual pageant on Sunday, December 15.



Christmas Caroling at Rockridge

The Edwards Church Choir will be singing Christmas carols at the Rockridge Retirement Community on Saturday, December 14 at 3:30 p.m. All are welcome! We will be indoors and carol books will be provided. We will sing for about 30 minutes. Rockridge is located at 25 Coles Meadow Road in Northampton, off Route 5 near the State Police barracks.



THANK YOU

*Thank
you*

Dear Edwards Church,
Thank you very much for the dedication and hard work you put into EVERY meal! I love what you do as a church for the community! Thank you for exuding God's Love and Mercy, It really shines through you!

~ A Community Member staying at the Interfaith Cot Shelter

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Ben Cheung, who earned his black belt in Indonesian martial arts at Spirit of the Heart! He has been training since he was six years old.



"The frightened shepherds become God's messengers. They organize, make haste, find others, and speak with them. Do we not all want to become shepherds and catch sight of the angel? I think so. Without the perspective of the poor, we see nothing, not even an angel. When we approach the poor, our values and goals change. The child appears in many other children. Mary also seeks sanctuary among us. Because the angels sing, the shepherds rise, leave their fears behind, and set out for Bethlehem, wherever it is situated these days."

- Dorothy Soelle

DRAFT Edwards Church Council Minutes
November 13, 2019

Council Members Attending: Leon Drzewianowski (Moderator), Janet Tucker (Deacons), Carl Erickson (At-Large), Jeanne Kocsis (Outreach), Nancy Flickinger (Music), MaryAnn Bankman (At-Large), Jon Dietrich (Trustees), Jim Stokes-Buckles (Vice Moderator & Faith Formation), Debbie Davis (Stewardship)

Others Attending: Sandra Rossi (REACH Team)

Staff Attending: Michael McSherry (Senior Minister), Deb Moore (Minister of Faith Formation), Mark Waller (Treasurer)

Michael opened the meeting with prayer at 7:00pm.

Joys and concerns:

- There was a clog in the grease trap of the kitchen today. It was all taken care of by the plumber, and then Filos allowed us to dump the grease in their grease buckets.
- Filos was very responsive to removing some vines from the side of the building.
- Michael has a new great-niece, Charlotte, who is reported to be extremely cute.
- Tom Bankman is back at work after a good recovery.
- There were 16 kids in church school last Sunday, a large amount by recent standards!

Minutes of the October meeting

- Minutes were accepted without correction.

New Way Inreach review team

- Leon provided an update. The team met on Oct. 22 for the first time.
- The team voted to commit the first \$2,500 toward the scholarship fund for this year. Council has previously committed to funding up to \$5,000 for scholarships this year, so this leaves Council responsible for the remaining \$2,500 of the \$5,000 limit, if needed.
- There was further discussion of what the Inreach and other New Way funds might be used for.
- Leon will confirm whether the allocation percentages for the New Way funds continue to be the same year to year. (This year it was 25% each for Outreach, Inreach, Building expenses, and Council's discretion).

REACH

- REACH team brought a Bylaw Proposal (2nd Draft) to the Council for consideration.
- There was extensive discussion about the proposal and its implications for the organization of the church. There were many questions, and also affirmation that the REACH team has done great work.
- The council voted unanimously to support this proposal being brought to Annual Meeting. REACH will continue to make minor edits as needed and to begin asking current committee members if they are willing to "carry forward" their work.

REACH for Pizza event debriefing

- There was some discussion about how the event on Oct. 27th went.
- One suggestion was to hold another event prior to Annual Meeting to give people an opportunity to hear more detail about the REACH proposal.

(continued on next page)

Draft Council Minutes (continued)

Nancy reported that the Music at the Crossroads event on Oct. 11th went very well. Thanks was expressed for the very talented musicians we have in our midst.

New Initiative to have Edwards Church act as a sponsor for transgender asylum seekers.

- Michael presented the idea of the congregation sponsoring a transgender asylum seeker. He provided information about the process of sponsorship, based on meetings he has attended. Janet moved that the council approve Edwards Church becoming an official sponsor for this purpose. Council approved the motion after discussion.

The next council meeting will be held on December 11, 2019, at 7:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Jim led the council in a closing prayer.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jim Stokes-Buckles

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Pamela Lamlein

Shannon Small

Jane Rausch

Jensen Kroll

Sheri Cheung

Alex Koester

Sarah Pease

Betty Ann Krywicki



Katherine B. Cook Scott

Hazel Waller

Diane Roeder

Susan Voss

Wendy Zadworny

Greg Boucher

Jared Koester

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.

Is your birthday missing? We'd like to include everyone, so please call the church office and let us know your birthday!

DECEMBER 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Communion Worship 11:15 Fellowship (A-D) 11:30 Children's Choir 11:30 Music Committee 11:30 Trustees Meeting 11:30 Tree Setup & Decorating 11:30 Care & Visitation Team	2 2pm PVIRAG 6pm RVS 6:30pm REACH	3 7pm SAA	4 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 4:30pm Friends of the Homeless Mgt. Comm. 6pm MANNA 6:30pm Faith Formation 7pm Outreach Committee	5 6:30pm MANNA Board of Directors Mtg 7pm Choir Rehearsal	6 6:30pm AA	7 11:30am MANNA 3pm Circle of Care 3pm Choir Rehearsal 3:30pm Children's Choir 4pm Worship 5pm Advent Dinner
8 Hot Chocolate Run 11:30 Youth Group	9 6pm RVS 7pm VMSG	10 3pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm VMSG 7pm SAA	11 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm MANNA 7pm Council Meeting	12 7pm Choir Rehearsal	13 6:30pm AA	14 9am Rehearsal – Nativity Sunday Pageant 11:30am MANNA
15 9am Choir Rehearsal 9:30 Children's Choir 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (L-P) 3pm Advent: Becoming Sanctuary for Each Other Concert	16 12pm MIDWIG 6pm RVS	17 6:30pm CE Community of Practice 7pm SAA	18 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 5:30pm Board of Friends of the Homeless 6pm MANNA	19 7pm Choir Rehearsal	20 6pm Cot Shelter 6:30pm AA	21 11:30am MANNA
22 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (R-Z) 11:30 Youth Group	23 6pm RVS 6:30 Deacons Mtg. 7pm VMSG	Christmas Eve 24 6pm Choir Rehearsal 7pm VMSG 7pm Christmas Eve Service 7pm SAA	Christmas 25 10am AA Women's Group	26 7pm Choir Rehearsal	27 6:30pm AA	28 11:30am MANNA
29 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (Deacons & Council)	30 6pm RVS	31 7pm SAA				
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Abbreviations: AA = Alcoholics Anonymous NPC = Northampton Parents Center FF = Faith Formation PVIRAG= Pioneer Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group RVS= River Valley Sangha SAA= Sex Addicts Anonymous VMSG = Valley Men's Support Group</p> </div>						