

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Edwards Church Community,

As we turn the page on 2019 and prepare for another lap around the sun in 2020, I wonder how we might get closer to our aspirational goals over the coming year. How might we more fully realize the vision we have claimed?

*Gathering at the crossroads of ancient faith and contemporary culture,
we are a Christian church asking God to open us to a new way.*



This year we have begun to live into the process approved at our last annual meeting for a more deliberate use of our inherited wealth. I know it makes some of us uncomfortable to use the term “inherited wealth,” but I cannot think of a more accurate term. As a church, even if not as individuals, we have the advantage of significant resources passed down from prior generations. Being deliberate about how we use them and share them is not only appropriate but mandatory if we are serious about following Jesus.

At the upcoming annual meeting scheduled for January 26, 2020, we will consider the proposal of the REACH team to change how we organize the work of the church. It feels like we are continuing to be open to new ways.

*Encountering the worlds joys and suffering,
we offer ourselves as instruments of love and justice.*

This community of faith has a well-deserved and growing reputation for walking the talk of service to the wider community. The participation of Edwards Church in the formation of the Survival Center, the MANNA Soup Kitchen, the Interfaith Emergency (“Cot”) Shelter, Cathedral in the Night, and other area non-profits is well known. Our ongoing support for them and other ministries and non-profits is evident in the volunteer hours and other forms of support we provide.

Our church’s support of refugees through the Circle of Care and our commitment to be a member of the support network for transgender asylum seekers are further extensions of our ongoing commitment to be instruments of love and justice. We have a lot to celebrate.



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.

*Knowing that the road is long, we choose to walk together.
Finding strength in our diversity, we call on all our talents to worship and serve.
Longing to find the holy in ourselves and others,
we listen for God's still-speaking voice.*

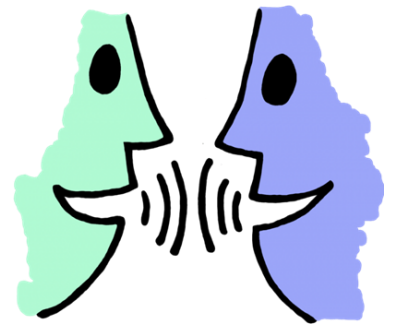
True confession: these three separate stanzas of the Vision Statement tend to merge in my thinking about our church community. They express commitment to walk together and to find strength in diversity. They acknowledge a longing for discovery, and they embrace listening as the way to satisfy that same longing.

We do not always agree, or we would not need to *choose* to walk together. Rather, we would simply do that without thinking about it. We need to declare that we *find strength* in our diversity, because in so much of the culture at large (which conditions most of our behavior) we avoid exploring real differences because of the risk it will devolve into more of the endless conflict we see all around us.

Our national government seems incapable of constructive dialog. What makes us believe we can do better? Maybe the fact that we are a Christian church, not the secular government, maybe the notion that we trust God to be with us and guide us as we open up to new ways. If we cannot practice together living the values we claim, then we may as well pack it up and go home.

Working through the details of greater sharing of our inherited wealth and revising our organizational structure are bound to bring up some differences. I believe this community already has all we need to face our differences as a source of strength. I also believe that doing it will require leaning into our longing to find the holy in ourselves and others. All we need is to become even better listeners, and we're open to that!

A recent article in the *New York Times* offers advice on "How to Argue on the Internet Without Losing Your Mind." The specific recommendations are: (i) practice empathy, (ii) stop if you're in a bad mood, (iii) take your time, (iv) pay attention to language, and (v) limit your replies. I recommend it to anyone interested in being a better dialog partner online or anywhere: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/12/smarter-living/how-to-argue-on-the-internet-without-losing-your-mind.html>



Similar notes were sounded by Lawrence Bacow, the President of Harvard University, who spoke last fall at a morning worship service about the university's need for and commitment to mutual respect while pursuing the truth. Those comments follow this letter in the Spire.

The need for guidelines, i.e., some sort of "rules of the road" for congregational conversations, is well recognized. Unfortunately, it most often arises in the wake of conflict that becomes harmful. One of the most effective tools churches have for keeping conflict constructive is a behavioral covenant, which is a written reminder of the community's shared commitment to certain values and practices, especially when approaching sensitive topics.

With other pastors in New England, Deb Moore and I have been fortunate enough to be on the staff of churches with these covenants. Both were developed with support from an organization called Walking in the Way of Peace. Our neighbors at Easthampton Congregational Church developed one in 2012 in the wake of some rough waters they had to navigate together. Not surprisingly, these covenants resonate with the advice in the NY Times article: start with empathy. Take your time. Watch your words.

We are already on our way, because we have already chosen to walk together, to find strength in our diversity, and to listen for the voice of God in each other.

Wishing us all peace, health, and deepening faith in the New Year,
Michael

“How can we profess to be seekers of Veritas, seekers of truth, if we shame and shun those who disagree with us? How can we urge forbearance and generosity in others if we are unwilling to practice it ourselves? How can we have any hope for the wider world if we cannot model in our community the reasoned debate and discourse we wish to see elsewhere? Yes, the issues we are confronting today—as a University, as a nation, and as a planet—need our urgent attention. Yes, they are deserving of our thoughtful consideration. Yes, they are worthy of impassioned argument. But we cannot allow them to create in each of us a righteousness that abhors concession and compromise. When we succumb to the lure of moral certitude, when we stifle disagreement in our community by ignoring and ostracizing dissenters, we lose our ability to make meaningful change.”

Lawrence Bacow, Harvard University President, in a reflection during morning services at Memorial Chapel at Harvard, from Harvard Magazine, Nov.-Dec 2019, “John Harvard’s Journal – The Community’s Conversations,” at 21

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don’t try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.



~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Prayers for the Manger had some common themes this year:

Peace in our families;

Peace and clarity for all those with addictions;

Peace, hope, joy and love;

Hope peace compassion and love;

For families who have lost someone to drug overdose-peace and understanding;

May those who are lonely, feel the love of those around them;

Prayers for WK as he goes to be with God and the family to be in a state of love as he passes;

Prayers for S.;

Love;

May 2020 bring peace to our community;

Peace & Harmony, Love, Compassion for all of Planet Earth;

Prayers for the hungry, the homeless;

For those seeking refuge and asylum;

Love God;

Healing;

With gratitude for having mom here for another Christmas!

I pray for the people in camps and children away from their families;

Always say positive things. Memories are key;

God is always with us;

Hope-Love-Peace-Joy-Happy;

Love.

Holy One, may all these prayers and more be so. Amen.

As Advent gives way to the Christmas Season and then to Epiphany, may God continue to break into the world through each of us, rebirthing the promises of hope, peace, joy, and love for all people and all of creation.

Deb

Christmas Pageant

Thank you to the 27 children, youth, young adults, and adults who offered as their gift to God that morning, a joy-filled reenactment of the annunciation and birth narrative. Thanks as well to Darleen Buttrick, pageant director; Dan and Michelle Prindle, children's choir directors; and Shauneen Kroll and Sandra Rossi, costumers. If you are interested in participating in any way, it isn't too early to let me know!

CPR Training

Save the date: February 9 – CPR Instruction with Mark Dion following worship in Addis Hall. Everyone is welcome to attend, highly recommended for church school teachers and nursery caregivers. More information to follow in the next edition of the Spire and weekly bulletins.



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:

January 12—11:30-1:00 p.m.

January 26—We'll attend Annual Meeting, then gather in the Edwards Room

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the following who were awarded Edwards Church Scholarships on Sunday, December 22:

Claire Cheung
Elena Frogameni
Rachel Frogameni
Gwenn Swift.

Funding for these scholarships was made possible through the New Way Funds.

Church School

The following are the scriptures and themes members of the church school and their teachers will be exploring this month:

January 5 ~ Communion Sunday ~ Intergenerational Worship

January 12 ~ Matthew 3:13-17 ~ Loved; the Baptism of Jesus

January ~ 19 ~ Isaiah 49:1-7 ~ Called

January 26 ~ Matthew 4:12-23 ~ Blessed



Prayer Shawl Ministry New time – Same Days

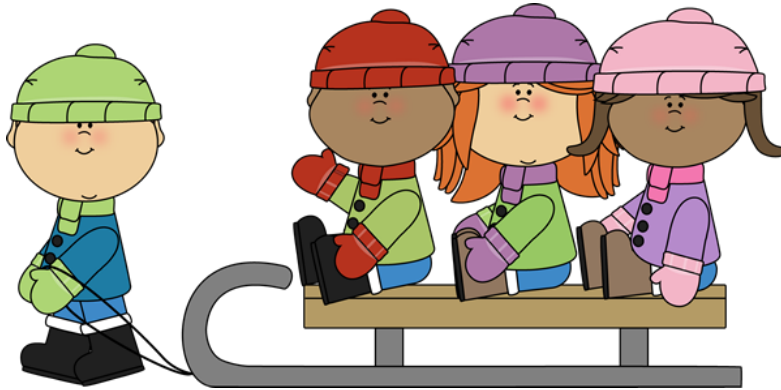
Prayer Shawl Ministry group has moved the timing of their gatherings to 3:00 – 4:30pm on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month and Knitters, weavers, and crocheters of all levels of experience are welcome.

Adult Faith Formation Offering

The first two sessions are January 22 and January 29 from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. in the Edwards Room. The book *The Bible and the Transgender Experience: How Scripture Supports Gender Variance* by Linda Tatro Herzer will form our time together. As this faith community grows into the Trans Asylum Seekers Ministry, you are invited to enter into a timely discussion around what it means to also grow into our ONA covenant as an Open and Affirming Church. Dates for the final two sessions will be set during our first session. Books will be ordered on January 6; please let Deb Moore know if you are interested in participating.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jean Koester
Sharon Carlson
Jillian Grant
Todd Rossi
Susan Canning
Paul Voss
Lawrence Mattison



Gerald Krywicki
Linda Smith
Julie Abel
James Cope
Marjorie Tauer
Nathan Korza
Laura Frogameni

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!

Mystical Experiences for Those of Us Living Ordinary Lives

Sunday, March 1, 2020, 4:00-5:30

A mystic is often regarded as a person who is special and different than the rest of us – someone who has an extraordinary capacity to experience God or the Divine. Centuries ago they lived in monasteries as monks or nuns or they lived alone in remote locations, in either case not taking part in usual day to day life.

More recently though there has been a recognition that there are “everyday mystics,” and further, some famous religious figures have asserted that every one of us is meant to be a mystic. Carmelite friar William McNamara wrote, “the mystic is not a special kind of person; each person is a special kind of mystic.”

You are invited to join a gathering to share your experience of God. Maybe you don't think of yourself as a mystic, but perhaps you remember some of those *unforgettable* times that you experienced something deep in your core that felt sacred or holy. Would you be willing to share these religious and/or spiritual awakenings? And to listen as others share?

Our group will have a time for sitting meditation, a reading, and sharing. Please let Linda Vincent or Deb Moore know if you are interested.

Edwards Church Volunteers and Cathedral in the Night Congregation Share Faith and Food in the Snow



In the middle of our first snowstorm of the year, a bunch of hearty Edwards Church volunteers ventured out to prep food for and attend the December 1st Cathedral in the Night service. While the snow fell outside, we took the sandwiches and desserts that volunteers made and put them in metal trays to protect them from the elements. Meanwhile, trays of lasagna and mac & cheese were bubbling away in the oven. When we stepped outside to load the cars with food, several inches of snow had already fallen. We pulled up to the Cathedral worship space, in front of First Churches Northampton, as the sun set and the snow thickened.

Under an open-sided tent, Pastor Steph offered a sermon about the bravery of Mary in serving as the virgin mother. Steph's message gave us an opportunity to contemplate Mary's tremendous faith that allowed her to put aside fear and doubt to carry out God's will. Given the weather, there were about 25 people who attended instead of the usual 50+ attendees. But, that meant that we were able to give Pastor Steph four lasagnas and some mac and cheese to freeze and use for a Sunday when they don't have a worship partner.

Also, we took extra sandwiches down the street to the staff at the Interfaith Cot Shelter. These came in handy as they were making arrangements to provide shelter for more people than usual due to the storm.

A couple days later, a lovely thank you email from one of the Cathedral in the Night congregation members was sent to us. Please know that all we do to support Cathedral's important ministry in our community is both needed and noticed! Thanks to everyone who has helped make our partnership with Cathedral in the Night possible!

With gratitude,
Debbie Davis and
Grace Del Vecchio





CALL TO ANNUAL MEETING

All members are called to the 187th Annual Meeting of Edwards Church on **Sunday, January 26, 2020** after the worship service in Addis Hall. (Snow date: February 2nd)

Reminder to Committee Chairs: Reports due Friday, January 3rd

Annual Meeting booklets will be available beginning Sunday, January 12th

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



- January 5** - Last names with A-D
- January 12** - Last names with E-K
- January 20** - Last names with L-P
- January 26** - Last names with R-Z

Communion Table Flowers

The gift of flowers for the communion table in our sanctuary is a wonderful way to express your love for the church and for each other. You may select from the following Sunday dates: January 5, 12, 19, and 26. Please call or email Janet Hemminger at (413) 584-1635 or chuck.hemminger@gmail.com to select a date.



Many thanks, Janet Hemminger

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.

DRAFT Edwards Church Council Minutes
December 11, 2019

Council Members Attending: Leon Drzewianowski (Moderator), Carl Erickson (At-Large), Jeanne Kocsis (Outreach), Jon Dietrich (Trustees), Mark Dion (Pastor-Congregation Relations), Jim Stokes-Buckles (Vice Moderator & Faith Formation)

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

Leon opened the meeting with prayer at 7:05pm.

Joys and concerns:

- Mark & Carolyn Dion will deliver the more than 50 gifts collected for the angel tree to the organization 18 Degrees tomorrow. A picture of all the gifts is on the church's Facebook page. Gratitude is expressed to all those who contributed gifts.
- The Advent dinner on Saturday evening was a wonderful success. It was noted that attendance may have been slightly lower than last year. There was some discussion of how and when children may run around in the sanctuary.
- St. John's Episcopal Church had its kitchen renovations approved by the board of health, therefore some Manna meals will be served there once again starting tomorrow.
- Michael shared that a member of the church deeply appreciated receiving flowers from the chancel arrangement recently.
- Michael also shared that he received heartfelt thanks and appreciation from a man whom the church has assisted on numerous occasions.

Minutes of the November meeting were accepted without correction.

REACH

- The council received a written update from the REACH team. The team has met with committees over the last month to discuss how their work will be carried forward if the new structure is approved at Annual Meeting.
- REACH team plans to have a full presentation with these details for the next council meeting, and then for the whole church community after worship on January 12.
- Note that at November's council meeting, the council voted unanimously to support the REACH proposal being brought to Annual Meeting.

First Night

- Michael will seek volunteers to help out at First Night.
- There was some discussion of details and best practices for hosting that event.

Capital Expense Building Reserve Fund

- Trustees provided an update on capital expense planning. Based on expert advice there is anticipated to be a need for up to \$500,000 over the next several years for maintenance and proactive upkeep of various building systems.
- The Investment Committee will discuss setting aside this money out of the Investment Funds as a separate fund.

The next council meeting will be held on January 8, 2020, at 7:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.

Michael led the council in a closing reflection.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jim Stokes-Buckles

JANUARY 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
Abbreviations: AA = Alcoholics Anonymous CoDA = Co-Dependents Anonymous NPC = Northampton Parents Center FF = Faith Formation	PVIRAG = Pioneer Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group RVS = River Valley Sangha VMSG = Valley Men's Support Group		10am AA Women's Group 6pm M ^A NNA	6:30pm M ^A NNA Board of Directors Meeting 7pm Choir Rehearsal	6:30pm AA	9am REACH 11:30am M ^A NNA
9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Communion Worship 11:15 Fellowship (A-D) 11:30 Music Committee 11:30 Trustees Meeting	2pm PVIRAG 6pm RVS	7pm SAA 7pm Faith Formation	8 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 4:30pm Friends of the Homeless Mgt. Comm. 6pm M ^A NNA 7pm Council Meeting	9 7pm Choir Rehearsal	10 6:30pm AA	11 11:30am M ^A NNA 3pm Circle of Care
12 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Communion Worship 11:15 Fellowship (E-K) 11:30 Youth Group 11:30 REACH Team Presentation 3pm Nerissa Nields Concert	6 6pm RVS 7pm VMSG	7 3pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm VMSG 7pm SAA 7pm Outreach Comm.	15 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 5:30pm Board of Friends of the Homeless 6pm M ^A NNA	16 7pm Choir Rehearsal	17 6pm Cot Shelter 6:30pm AA	18 11:30am M ^A NNA
19 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (L-P) 11:30 Care & Visitation Team	Martin Luther King Day 20 1pm MLK Day Celebration 6pm RVS	21 6:30pm CE Community of Practice 7pm SAA	22 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm M ^A NNA	23 7pm Choir Rehearsal	24 6:30pm AA	25 11:30am M ^A NNA
26 9am Choir Rehearsal 10am Worship 11:15 Fellowship (R-Z) 11:30 Annual Meeting & Soup Luncheon 11:30 Youth Group	27 6pm RVS 6:30 Deacons Mtg. 7pm VMSG	28 3pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm VMSG 7pm SAA	29 10am AA Women's Group 12 pm Bible Study 6pm M ^A NNA	30 7pm Choir Rehearsal	31 6:30pm AA	