

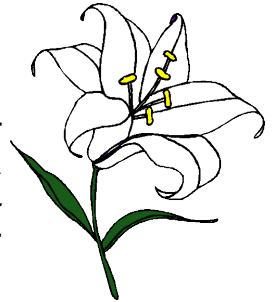
THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 30 No. 4 April 2020

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Soon the forty days of Lent will be drawing to a close. Are you ready for Easter? Are you ready to recognize the risen Christ, not in a familiar story or in a sanctuary decked out in dozens of beautiful white lilies, but in the setting of a worldwide pandemic? I know I am working overtime to be ready, not because I am your pastor, but because I have never in 65 short years seen anything like this.



Easter and the reality of resurrection do not tell us that we will never face death, the loss of our life or the lives of others. Rather, Easter and the resurrection tell us that there is a new life, another life after death, a life larger even than the life we are now living, and that by following Jesus and his teachings we can have an experience, a foretaste of that other life while we live this one. We can know in advance something of the realm in which God's love and justice is fully realized. We just need to let go of whatever holds us back from it, and that is the journey of Lent, the journey of faith.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Faith is taking the first step, even if you can't see the whole staircase." And who could? Could Jesus foresee every step in the life that would lead him through all the stories in the gospel to Calvary? I wonder. There are instances in which he seems to know a lot (he knows *everything* in John's gospel). And there are instances when he confesses not knowing.

His greatest lesson for us may be trusting the One who gave him life that he was not living it in vain. In the garden of Gethsemane, while his disciples struggled to stay awake, he wrestled with his own fears, his own uncertainties. This is not a pious Jesus, but Jesus in a painful struggle to keep going until the end. Finally, he accepted what was coming, so that in the end he was able to face death not unafraid, but more assured than afraid. "Father-Mother, into your hands I commend my spirit."

People entrusted to accompany individuals and their families near the end of life are graced with moments when they can bear witness to how the dying and their loved ones sometimes savor all the sweetness and meaning that life can hold, even as they pass through its most painful parts. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

We cannot be certain how Edwards Church, all our friends and loved ones, or our wider communities will fare in the short or long run. We can – and do – gather information, assess likelihoods and make responsible plans. But that is not a guarantee, just prudence.

In the end, we can only choose how to live with uncertainty. We can choose faith, which enriches our experience of this life with a foretaste of another. We can choose to trust that by orienting our lives toward a fuller realization of God's love and justice – what we call "everlasting life" and "the kin-dom of God" – we will more deeply connect all our lives to an unending life with God.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"



Blessings,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

In February, I attended a retreat on Self-Compassion at the Genesis Spiritual Life Center in Westfield led by Rev. Becky Crane. Two take ways from that retreat are:

- practicing self-compassion is a way to live out my life as a beloved child of God
- when tears fall, pay attention, something sacred is happening

A journaling exercise we were invited to think and pray about was prefaced with the question: What does God see when God looks at me? It was a profound and humbling exercise as I found myself moving from that of role: mother, daughter, sister, etc., to that of soul: the good, the bad, and ugly of it all. I filled three journal pages and during this Lenten season have continued to return and reflect on that which I wrote and am extremely grateful for the generous and everlasting love of our God.

As we navigate with online worship, meetings, and time together, I am very grateful to Cynthia Stanton and Greg Boucher for their expertise and guidance and to colleagues Michael, David, and Heather for their willingness and commitment to continuing to provide worship in a way none of us is accustomed to.

In this time of an unprecedented pandemic, please know that each of you are in my heart, on my mind, and in my prayers. Be safe and be well!!

*Blessings,
Deb*

Church School

Living the Seasons at Home Lent through Easter a supplement of the church school curriculum we are presently using is available on the table in the back of the sanctuary and can be mailed to you upon request.

As we worship virtually for a while, Deb will be providing families with good online resources via email and the weekly message. She will also be snail mailing some packets for families.

Please be sure and visit the Faith Formation At Home page on our website!

The following are the scriptures and themes families and individuals can explore at home:

- April 5 – Matthew 21:1-11 – Liturgy of the Palms or
Matthew 26: 14-27:66 - Liturgy of the Passion
- April 12 – John: 1-18 – Bearing Witness to God
- April 19 – John 20:19-31 – Trust and Rejoice
- April 26 – Luke 24:13-35 – Breaking Bread

Thank you to those who helped nurture the faith of our children and youth during March: Melissa Mattison, Kristen Deschene, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Sarah Briggs and to our child care providers: Kelly St. Martin, Sandra Rossi and Paula Mattison.



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.

Star Words

An all church invitation during these times:

During March 22nd's Chancel Step time, Deb introduced 4 star words that members of the church school and their teachers chose as ideas they might be attentive to. Those worshipping online were encouraged to notice where they witnessed and/or brought kindness, hope, love, and joy in/to others.

When out for a walk and if you have your cell phone or camera with you, take a picture where you witnessed one of the above star words. Send your photo to Heather Dandy at info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org and she will post them on our Facebook page. Sharing with words just in case you didn't get a picture is ok as well. Perhaps we will put together a collage.

New star words will also be introduced into the mix.

Important Safe Conduct / Safe Church note: *Parents, please be sure that if your photo includes your child/ children/youth that you have filled out the media/internet release portion on the church school or youth group registration form granting permission for the photo to be shared.*

Please do not submit photos that include children not attending Edwards Church. If you are unsure if you granted permission or filled out the registration form please email Deb at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org



Register now for Summer Camping Opportunities!

Silver Lake Conference Center in Connecticut:

<https://www.silverlakect.org>

Star Island off the coast of New Hampshire: <https://starisland.org>

Pilgrim Lodge on Lake Umbagog in Maine:

<https://www.pilgrimlodge.org>

Horton Center in the White Mountains of New Hampshire:

<https://hortoncenter.org>

Faith Formation Leadership Training Program

The Faith Formation Leadership Training Program is a two-year equipping ministry of the Southern New England Conference. It is open to all from local churches from any UCC Conference, serving both lay persons and authorized ministers who want to further their education and understanding about faith formation. Classes are offered onsite at Hadwen Park Congregational Church in Worcester, and online via Zoom. Topics covered include Youth Ministry, Mission for All Ages, Engaging our Sacred Scripture's Story, UCC: History, Beliefs & Identity, Faith Formation, and Worship.



Southern New England Conference

United Church of Christ

Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

Jim Stoke-Buckles has been a participant in five classes thus far and Deb Moore has previously taught the UCC: History, Beliefs, & Identity class. A brochure is posted on the Faith Formation bulletin board. If interested, please contact Jim Stokes-Buckles or Deb Moore for more information 2020-2021 schedule of classes which will begin in the fall.

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 is our April schedule:

Deb will be in touch with some possible online gatherings.

How We Gather for Worship – Holy Week and Easter

This year Palm Sunday is April 5 and Easter Sunday is April 12. We will celebrate them both and the important days between them, because that is part of who we are and what we do together as a Christian community. What is different – in these days of constantly adapting to the pandemic – is how we will gather.

At its meeting on March 25, the Elected Core Ministry Team, our new governing body, determined that we will continue to worship over the internet at least until the end of April, consistent with the Commonwealth's school closure directive. Look for weekly emails, our website and Facebook page to have information about how to connect in worship and other ways.



An Update from the Finance Ministry Team

The Finance Ministry Team reports directly to the Elected Core Ministry (ECM) which under our new pilot structure is the administrative and fiduciary governing body of the church. An important part of the work of the Finance Ministry Team will be monitoring the church's operations from a financial perspective, seeing how a current year's existing budget supports operations, helping to prepare each coming year's budget, and generally "minding the store" when it comes to finance.

We can report that as of March 24, our first meeting after being appointed by the ECM, the church remains on a sound financial foundation. Our revenue and expenses are in line with expectations. In fact, since the annual meeting in late January, when we had a \$28,000 shortfall in pledges, we have received an additional \$18,000 in pledges, substantially closing the gap.

We know, especially in uncertain times, it may become necessary for some members of our community to reduce or even stop making regular financial contributions to the church. We also hope that everyone who can do so will continue to mail their pledge payments to the church office. It may take us a few more days than usual to deposit your contributions, but Heather will be coming in twice a week for certain tasks, including that.

We are all aware of how uncertain and scary things are. As a society we are engaged in a massive public health mobilization, trying to minimize the impact of the pandemic on lives and the economy. We will do everything we can to keep you informed about how the church is holding up financially. On a more personal note, we urge you to be in touch with each other and Michael and Deb.

Your Finance Ministry Team,

Heather Bell Leon Drzewianowski

Laura Frogameni Dawn Scaparotti

With staff support from Marc Waller and Michael McSherry

Ministry Team News

Volunteer Coordinators

Greetings! We are delighted to share with you that Edwards' Elected Core Ministry (ECM) has agreed with our offer to be Volunteer Coordinators for our church community. As former members of the REACH team we feel it's important that we assist in the transition to this new model of participation. We'll work closely with the ECM to support connections to mission aligned work for all of us. If you want to reach us you can do so through the information below. Or you can email [t h e n e w ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org](mailto:the new ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org) address. They'll pass along the message to us. In light of the new restrictions on gathering together, we will strive to support Ministry Teams in creating connections and doing some work/prep work as folks are able to do so. Stay tuned!

Yours truly,

Debbie Davis
413-626-5117
debradavis1217@gmail.com

Laura Frogameni
413-270-0287
LauraFrogameni@gmail.com

Greetings from the Green Team!



(Yes, we are all wearing a shade of green though this wasn't planned - just good luck;)

Pictured from left to right are Jude Almeida, Heather Bell, Maureen Sturman, Laura Frogameni and Paul Betram. Not pictured is team member Rob Hutchinson as his son's sport team made the playoffs that Sunday.

We met for a little while during Fellowship to discuss our new Green Team which is a part of the Congregational Life Core Ministry Circle. We are interested in working on ways to help our church building and our habits be more environmentally friendly. This could include figuring a way to compost our coffee grounds and cups after Fellowship hour, finding an alternative to plastic Communion cups and/or doing a green survey of the whole church building/system. Please feel welcome to connect with any of us about Edwards Church's care for environment.

Message from the Elected Core Ministry

Dear Edwards Church Community,

We have been working closely with Michael, Deb and David as we navigate and move forward as a faith community. Our primary focus and concern has been on the current health crisis. Following the CDC, State and City guidelines we have temporarily cancelled all groups from meeting at the church. MANNA staff will continue to use the kitchen to prepare meals for **takeout only**.

Dates in late March and early April that were reserved to meet with the Core Ministry Team leaders have been rescheduled to 5/31/20, 6/7/20 and 6/14/20. We will be contacting team leaders to finalize.

Please email the ECM with any questions, ideas, concerns etc. The Elected Core Ministry's email address is: ECM@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

Peace,

Sheri Cheung
Melissa Mattison

Mark Dion
Ella Stocker

Leon Drzewianowski
Shannon Farrand-Bernardin

Laura Frogameni

Open and Affirming Ministry Team?

- Interested in assuring that Edwards Church offers an extravagant welcome and ongoing affirmation to our siblings in the LGBTQI community?
- Want to brainstorm with others on what we can do to make our weekly worship opening statement come alive? "No matter who you are or where you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here."

Want a way to channel your pride parade energy into a similar cause since the Northampton Pride parade has been postponed due to the Corona virus social distancing protocols?

If you said yes to any of these questions, please contact Deb Moore and Debbie Davis who are convening a group of Edwards community members to discuss the possibilities, most likely via a conference call or video chat group to begin this spring. We look forward to hearing from you!

Deb Moore (ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org);

Debbie Davis (debradavis1217@gmail.com)

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Karen Pohlman

Frank Heston

Janet Tucker

Ted Anderson



Phyllis Flandreau

Richard Aquadro

Carla Bee

Michael John Masamitsu

Karen Hogan

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!

New American Family, three years in the making.



On February 17, your Circle of Care and others who are supporters of our Iraqi family gathered at the home of Linda Vincent and Tom Derr to celebrate the third anniversary of our family's arrival in the United States. We shared many stories from this journey we have all taken together. It is wonderful to see how capable and independent Jasimiyah, Yousuf and Ayoob are today.

In February, the family moved to an apartment in Springfield. Every aspect of the move from finding the apartment to leases and utility transfers to finding new doctors has been accomplished with great confidence by our family. The apartment provides more room for Yousuf, Ayoob and Jasimiyah, is located near friends and close to a middle eastern market.

We are all aware that making a transition to a new country works best when folks can have a foot in both worlds. For our family one foot is at the mosque, with friends from the region and culinary favorites. The other foot is in jobs and schools, American friends, and everyday patterns with medical personnel, shopping and just navigating life in general.

In the meantime, we join the family with concern for a daughter and her family still in Bagdad. We are always grateful to hear that they are safe. The eldest son's family, now in refugee status in Turkey, are working their way through the long refugee interview process. We hope that one day we can welcome them to the U.S.



At the Springfield Symphony with Sarah

Thank you for your support for these new Americans.

APRIL 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Abbreviations: AA = Alcoholics Anonymous NPC = Northampton Parents Center FF = Faith Formation PVIRAG= Pioneer Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group</p> <p>RVS= River Valley Sangha SAA=Pioneer Sex Addicts Anonymous VMSG = Valley Men's Support Group</p> </div>						
Palm Sunday 5	6	7	8	Maunder Thursday 9	Good Friday 10	11
10am Worship 5pm CITN			12 pm Bible Study- Zoom 6pm MANNA 6:30pm ECM			11:30am MANNA
Easter 12	13	14	15	16	17	18
10am Worship		7pm Finance Team	12 pm Bible Study- Zoom 6pm MANNA 6:30pm ECM		6pm Cot Shelter	11:30am MANNA
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
10am Worship			12 pm Bible Study- Zoom 6pm MANNA 6:30pm ECM			11:30am MANNA
26	27	28	29	30		
10am Worship			12 pm Bible Study- Zoom 6pm MANNA 6:30pm ECM			