

# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 30 No. 6 June 2020

Dear Edwards Church Community,

“Let’s add patience to the list of requirements Governor Charlie Baker laid out on May 18 for restarting the state’s economy.” So begins a *Boston Globe* article about the re-opening process.

In a recent UCC Daily Devotional, Rev. John Edgerton writes about the struggles faced by Noah and his family. The rains that produced the flood lasted 40 days and 40 nights, Biblical code for long enough to feel it might never end.

Then the rain ended, but the flood did not. Noah and his family were still in the ark for 150 days, longer than we’ve been under any kind of stay at home order or physical distancing. People of faith have been here before. We how to share resources for coping and feeding our faith, so we can keep coping, feeding our faith, and loving our neighbor.



Here are links to two recent daily devotionals on the theme of becoming more patient by allowing yourself to grow the patience you need. The one about Noah’s ark from John Edgerton and another from Rev. Kit Novotny about dealing with children’s sense of time.

John: <https://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional-wait-how-long>

Kit: <https://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional-the-longest-shortest-time>

Taken together they challenge and comfort me, like a rod and staff, because they remind me that, with God’s help, I can always become more patient. Unfortunately it takes a bit of hard-won patience to have a foundation on which to grow more patience – like muscle mass or starter dough – especially when patience is wearing thin. But with faith, we can grow more patience. We may well need it.

Maybe you have noticed that the pandemic has exposed things – call them cracks in the system, any system – that were already there, just below the surface. Stress will do that. Flaws in a structure or a relationship are exposed by stress. A minor crack becomes a bigger gap. An inter-personal annoyance, relieved by leaving the house for work every day, or leaving the work place to go home, becomes an inescapable difference needing to be addressed.

Then there are persistent economic disparities that trouble us, just not enough to insist they be addressed structurally, because that would be “political” and there is always tomorrow. And there are those darn partisan political divisions that confront us daily, until we wish they would just go away. Perhaps what we fear from the pandemic is not just the disease, but the things it pulls from the periphery, plunks down center stage, and threaten to tear us apart.

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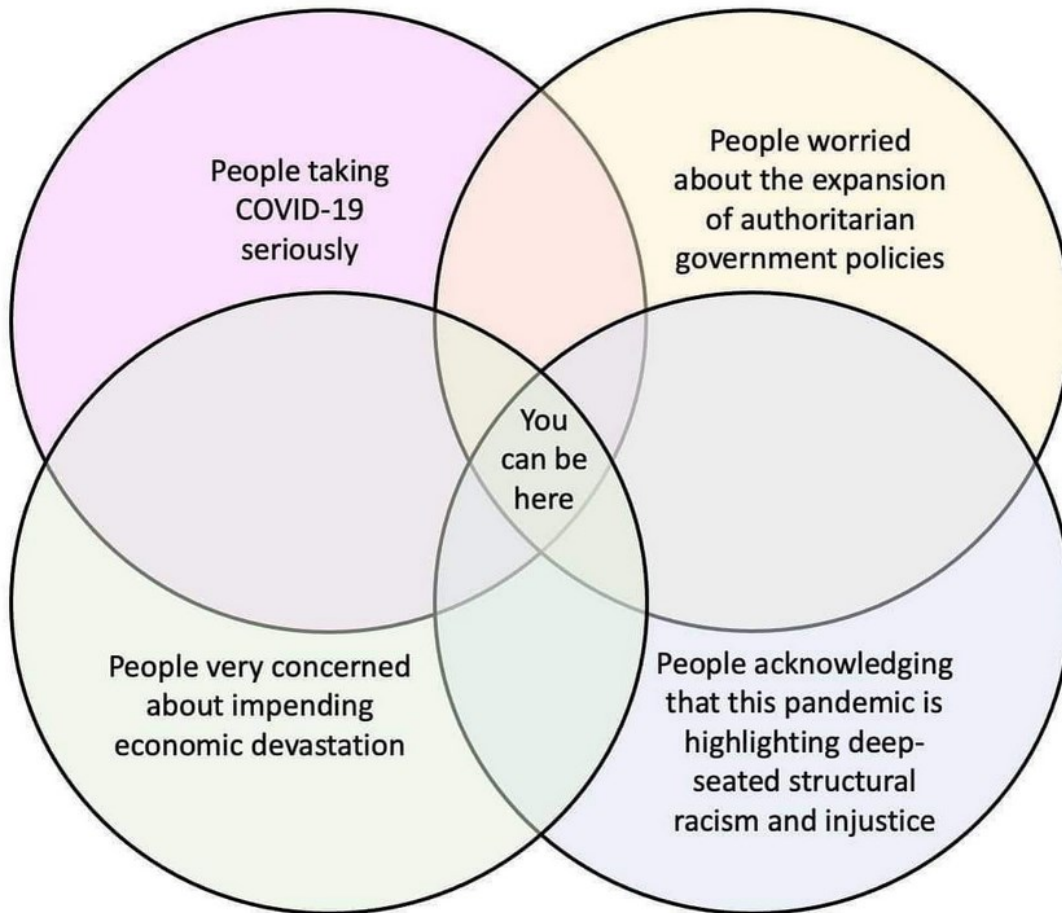
**Edwards Church is an Open and Affirming Congregation:**

*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.*

My dear old Dad used to pray aloud at dinner, when the table got too noisy, “God, give me strength, patience, fortitude, and long suffering. Actually, I already have the suffering, so just help with the rest.” Then he would smile at us and keep eating.

Consider this Venn diagram, which has been floating around social media:



I identify with the person who says, “**I take COVID-19 very seriously.**” I think we all know it is real, but because we are still learning about it, we give it different levels of respect. No one really knows what percent of infected people are likely to become symptomatic, need to be hospitalized, or die. But we do know that the virus is effective at spreading among humans, especially when they gather indoors.

The late Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.” COVID-19 is contagious. In four months it has killed more residents of the United States than the entire Viet Nam War. We do not have a vaccine to prevent the spread or effective therapies to reverse the symptoms. Physical distancing has been effective at dampening the spread. Those are facts.

I also count myself in this category: “**People very concerned about impending economic devastation.**” Who wouldn’t be? We all know people who have lost jobs. Many of us know businesses at risk, restaurants that have already closed forever. This devastation is not pending; it has started and is not over. No one wants suffering to continue, but I’m also not rushing to visit any restaurant or theater.

The first job of leadership is protection, preserving the lives and welfare of the people who have placed trust in their leaders. Among the hardest choices a leader can make is to deliberately disappoint those who have trusted them. Forced to balance competing interests, our political leaders carve a path between preserving lives and preserving businesses and jobs, trying to strike the right balance, which can only really be known after the fact. We all have opinions; some important facts are still unknown.

I am also one of these: **“People worried about the expansion of authoritarian government power.”** In some states, governors have been sued by groups of citizens or legislators to force the re-opening of businesses. The legal argument is usually based on the constitutional principle of separation of powers, with the complaint being that the chief executive has usurped the role of the legislature.

A chief executive needs to be able to act in an emergency to protect the people. At a point in time, when weeks or months have passed and the emergency is likely to last a lot longer, then the legislature can and should get involved to balance competing interests.

This is the premise of the long-ignored War Powers Act, passed to require U.S. Presidents to obtain congressional authorization to make war when there is no imminent threat. When a legislature is willing to wait while the executive acts, that is usually a good indication that it perceives one of two things. Either the chief executive is acting with the support of most citizens or the issues are so difficult the legislature will let the executive take the risk. When the legislature cannot act due to internal division, that allows the executive to assume more power with less checks on it.

Governors are not the only chief executives willing to exercise their authority in ways that stretch limits. The U.S. Supreme Court will be deciding in the coming months whether the President may exercise all the powers and enjoy all the privileges his lawyers claim. This controversy has been brewing for decades, with Presidents of both major parties pushing the limits, but recent events have brought it to a head.

Stress deepens and exposes flaws in a system. Fixing them before lasting damage occurs requires patience with each other. One wonders if that is a lost art.

Finally, I need to say that I am also one of these: **“People acknowledging that this pandemic is highlighting deep-seated structural racism and economic injustice.”** Early in the pandemic, some said it would show how we are all the same, because people of every nation, race, ethnicity, class, religion, or other distinction are all human and share the same vulnerability. What the virus has really shown is how much we are not the same in terms of who is at risk. People who are poor and people of color are bearing a disproportionate burden in terms of illnesses and deaths.

Patience is a virtue. We all stand to benefit if we can be patient when needed. But there are still times when it is more faithful or necessary to act than to wait. We are forming an ad hoc team to plan for re-opening. There is much to consider and plan. Patience will help us there.

Meanwhile, the Outreach Grants Ministry Team has increased Edwards’ support for the Survival Center and is in close contact with MANNA, Cathedral in the Night and Friends of Children. As a church, we are responding by offering increased financial and other support to local non-profits that provide direct services to those most affected by the health and financial impact of the pandemic. Please pray for all of them as well.

We will get through this, together.

Blessings,

*Michael*



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

Dear Beloved of God,

During this pandemic time, I have been thinking and reading about hope quite a bit. Perhaps some of you have been as well. The word translated as hope from the Greek and Hebrew means a confident expectation, a trust. The dictionary defines hope (noun) expectation for a certain thing to happen; a feeling of trust, and hope (verb) wanting something to happen or be the case.

Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* writes about *Hope as an Obstacle*. “Hope is important, because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today. Western civilization places so much emphasis on the idea of hope that we sacrifice the present moment. Hope is for the future. Many religions are based on the notion of hope, and this teaching about refraining from hope may create a strong reaction. I do not mean that you should not have hope, but that hope is not enough. It can create an obstacle for you...not bringing you back to the present moment.”

As I think about hope liturgically, on the first Sunday of Advent we light the candle of hope reminding us of the expectant hope that God birthed through Mary into a darkened world. The dynamic hope and trust in God that Jesus brought to the marginalized in the society of his time. Throughout his ministry, Jesus modeled an expectation and trust in God’s desire for all.

I believe that among other things hope has the ability to change what we value. For me at least, the pandemic with all the protocols around physical distancing and staying home as much as possible, has given me pause to look deeply at what I value and make some changes. The coronavirus has brought a heightened awareness of the inequities and injustices so prevalent in our society. I pray that hope can give us the strength and courage to be repairers of the breaches that exist in our communities and our country as we move through this time. I am pretty sure our God expects that.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound  
In hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*~ Romans 15:13*

*Blessings,  
Deb*

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<sup>1</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*. Bantam Books, NY 1992. ppg 41 & 42.

### **Book Discussion**

A virtual book discussion based on the book *transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* by Austen Hartke will be offered in June. “Austen is the creator of the YouTube series *Transgender and Christian*, which seeks to understand, interpret, and share parts of the Bible that relate to gender identity and the lives of transgender individuals.”

Please let Deb Moore (ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) know by June 4<sup>th</sup> if you are interested in participating.

## Milestone Ministries during COVID 19

Several years ago, the Board of Faith Formation began honoring milestones in the lives of our members and friends such as baptisms, graduations, driver licenses, retirements, anniversaries, etc. In this pandemic time, while we are practicing physical distancing and other protocols, it is still important to honor these and other milestones. Please be sure to make Deb Moore aware of these or other significant life events that you would like to share with our faith community.

**Graduates** – from any public, private, or religious institution. High school, college, post graduate, elementary, middle school – where are you graduating from and what are your plans?

### CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to Gabriella Wilkerson who will virtually graduate from Northampton High School on June 21. Gabriella has been accepted at Wesleyan University

Congratulations to Rachael Frogameni graduating from Westfield State University

### Care and Visitation Team – Praying for Each Other and Praying Together

At a recent Zoom meeting the Care and Visitation Team, which works with Michael and Deb to cultivate the social and spiritual connections among individuals in our faith community, we decided two things. First, team members will pray each Wednesday, at 10 a.m., 7 p.m., or whenever they can, for people in our community whom we know with any concern (ongoing health challenge, loss of employment, or any other issue). These might, but need not be, the same as prayer concerns listed in the Sunday worship bulletin. Second, the Care and Visitation Team invites you to join them in these Wednesday prayers. Add your voice to ours, as we pray for individuals within our community, and for all around it. If you have a specific prayer request or know of someone who would appreciate a phone call or card please contact Deb Moore at [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) or Rev. Michael McSherry at [minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) and with permission we will let members of the Care and Visitation Team know.

## 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 June schedule:

June 14 – We will meet via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.

June 28 – We will meet via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.

### Living the Seasons at Home

*Living the Seasons at Home*, a booklet supplement to the present church school curriculum we are using will be mailed to individuals and families who would like one. For each Sunday scriptures are listed, a prayer, a reflection on the key scripture, an idea for enjoying life, and a thought to take with you are offered. This booklet covers the Sundays from June 7 through August 30. Please contact the church office if you would like a booklet mailed to you.

## Guided Meditation Offering



You are invited to join Linda Vincent and Deb Moore in a guided meditation offering via Zoom on the mornings of June 11 and 25 from 10:00 till 10:30. If interested, please join promptly at 10:00 as we will close the gathering at 10:05 to avoid disruption of the meditation.

Please email Linda (lcvincent56@gmail.com) and Deb (ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) to let us know if you would like to be included on the Zoom invitations.

## Prayer Shawl

We will meet via Zoom from 3:00 – 4:00 on June 9 and June 23



## Team Being Formed to Plan When and How to Re-Open: First Meeting Monday, June 1

The Elected Core Ministry Team is forming an ad hoc Team to Plan When and How to Re-Open. The first meeting of this team will be Monday, June 1 at 7:00 PM.

Approaching these topics raises questions such as: (i) what external authorities should we take into account (such as public health and denominational guidance); and (ii) what steps are involved in a plan to safely return to or modify those practices (like worship in the sanctuary) which we could recognize as our customs.

If you are interested in being part of this planning team, please contact Mark Dion at [frogy22@comcast.net](mailto:frogy22@comcast.net) or (413) 270-1875.

## Church School

Our abbreviated Church School will continue to be held via Zoom on Sunday mornings from 9 – 9:30. Our time together will offer an opening ritual, story, prayer including joys and concerns, and an activity.

June 7 ~ Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a ~ The Mountains Are Calling

June 14 ~ Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 ~ Sacrifices

June 21 ~ Matthew 10:24 – 39 ~ Solidarity

June 28 ~ Matthew 10:40 – 42 ~ Choosing a Braver Faith



*Thank you to the following who have nurtured our children and youth in their faith formation from September through mid - March: Melissa Mattison, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Carolyn Dion, Sarah Briggs, Michelle Prindle, Kristen Deschene, Mariana Haughey, Darleen Buttrick; and to our childcare providers: Kelly St. Martin, Jack Mattison-Gulotta, Madeline Gorman, Diane Roeder, Paula Mattison and Sandra Rossi.*

## Message from the Elected Core Ministry

- We will remain closed through the end of June and then re-evaluate the situation
- We are aware [MASS.GOV](https://www.mass.gov) "Phase-One" has allowed "Places of Worship" to open again under strict guidelines
- The Southern New England United Church of Christ (SNEUCC) has provided us with extensive guidance on the how and when
- There are over twenty items from ([MASS.GOV](https://www.mass.gov)) that must be created/changed/adhered to before we consider opening back up
- The new ad hoc team will be meeting within the next few weeks to go over all the information and present their recommendation to the ECM
- Our main concern is the safety and well-being of everyone

## Bible Study Continues

On Wednesdays at noon, the Bible Study team has been meeting on Zoom. Michael sends out the weekly scripture readings generally following the lectionary and those readings are then part of worship on Sunday. Discussion, reflections and shared Biblical background have been thoughtfully and inspirationally shared. If you would like to join in the midweek study, notify Michael or the church office to be included in the Zoom invitations.

## SUMMER BIRTHDAYS

### JUNE

Linda Vincent  
Judith Cardell  
Mark Smith  
Jonathon Tucker  
Matthew Teague  
Maryann Bankman  
Thomas Derr  
Robert Daniels  
Jennifer Korza  
David Kidwell  
Mary Lyons  
Sarah McCullagh



### JULY

Beth Firmin  
Melissa Mattison  
Christian Schmidt  
Jon Dietrich  
Phyllis Taylor  
Ellyn McAllister Schmidt  
Lyle Phipps  
Carl Erickson  
Ron Korza



### AUGUST

Glenn Gulotta  
Florence Howes Semb  
Alexandra Webb  
Mark Dion  
Carolyn Dion  
Jeffrey Prince

**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!

# Ministry Team News

## **Edwards Church Ministry Teams Are Zooming Everywhere!**

Yes! Things are happening with our newly launched Core Ministry structure! Ministry teams are actively meeting via Zoom and are engaged in doing the work of our church. Here's a sampling of the some of the things that have been happening:



Garden Ministry Team members Fumiko Brown (left) and Barbara Kirchner (not pictured) cleaned flowerbeds for summer planting on May 16.

The **Elected Core Ministry** Zooms together every other week to address the church's operational concerns and discuss how to support our ministry teams.

Members of the **Outreach Grants Ministry Team** have met via Zoom to make decisions about providing financial assistance to local non-profit agencies that are on the front line of helping members of our community who are most negatively impacted by the effects of the coronavirus.

**Care and Visitation Ministry Team** members are Zooming every other week. They check in with church members through phone calls, cards, and emails. Names of those we are given permission to share beyond the team are printed in the Sunday bulletin. The team invites you to join them in prayer from wherever you are on Wednesdays at either 10 a.m. or 7 p.m.

In mid-May, the **Garden Ministry Team** began their seasonal care of the front garden and courtyard by removing tulip bulbs, planting annuals, clearing weeds and trimming plants.

The **Worship Planning Ministry Team** gathered together on Zoom to help plan the Palm Sunday, Easter and Pentecost Sunday services.

The **Choir Ministry Team** meets via Zoom every 10 days or so for fellowship and support, and several members have partnered with David to offer their gift of music for our worship services.

**Youth Group** meets twice a month on Sundays at 11:30 a.m. via Zoom.

**College Fellowship** for our Edwards Church college students takes place once a month via Zoom.

The **Church School Ministry Team** will continue offering Church School via Zoom Sunday mornings from 9:00 - 9:30 a.m. Our time together begins with an opening ritual, sharing our joys and concerns, prayer, the sharing of a Bible story. After that, a church school teacher leads those virtually present in a craft.

The **Transgender Asylum Seekers Ministry Team** is actively seek long-term rental housing for three asylum seekers who are already here in the Pioneer Valley, living in safe but temporary locations. If you have leads on housing possibilities, contact Rev. McSherry.

The efficient **Buildings and Grounds Ministry Team** has tackled a long list of repairs and modest upgrades to our facilities by meeting once or twice a month for an hour or less. Recently they received a reserve analysis report that addresses many aspects of our physical plant and which will serve as a valuable roadmap in planning how best to budget and care for our physical assets.

The **Quilt Ministry Team** outfitted themselves with matching masks featuring fabric that somehow has made an appearance in every quilt they have produced! They will share fellowship and support with one another via Zoom, until it is safe to gather together again.

The **Finance Ministry Team** and the **Investment Ministry Team**, which are teams appointed by the Elected Core Ministry, are actively meeting to attend to our church's financial plans and health.

**Prayer Shawl Ministry Team** meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month from 3-4 p.m. via Zoom. Knitters, crocheters, and weavers of all levels are welcome.

The **Interfaith Cot Shelter Ministry Team** provided a meal to the Cot Shelter in March. In April the Shelter moved to the high school where arrangements were made by the city to provide meals.

The **Cathedral in the Night Ministry Team** provided a hot meal, sandwiches and cookies to Pastor Steph Smith on Palm Sunday. On Mother's Day, they delivered 61 rolls of toilet paper and almost 100 masks to CITN. See related article and photos on page 10.

The **Bible Study Ministry Team** meets via Zoom every Wednesday at noon. Interested in participating? Contact Michael McSherry at (413) 584-5500 or [Minister@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org](mailto:Minister@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org)

The **Meditation Ministry Team** recently began offering Guided Meditation via Zoom every other Thursday morning, to which all are welcome. Email Deb Moore for more information: [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)

Though the **Music at the Crossroads Ministry Team** had to cancel it's plans for spring concerts, they will meet together virtually in June to discuss possible plans for fall.

**Thank you to all of our Ministry Team volunteers** who are keeping Edwards Church members engaged with each other and our community!

Interested in learning about or participating on any of these teams or learning about other teams that are not listed here? Please contact the **Volunteer Coordinator Ministry Team** (Debbie and Laura) by email at [Volunteers@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org](mailto:Volunteers@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org) or by phone/text:

Debbie Davis  
413-626-5117

Laura Frogameni  
413-270-0287

## Cathedral in the Night Ministry Team Branches Out!

Following our regular practice of providing a hot meal to our Cathedral in the Night (CITN) neighbors the first Sunday of every other month, three volunteers (all from the same household in order to follow social distancing guidelines) prepped and delivered lasagna, sandwiches & cookies to CITN on April 5.

In May, the Edwards CITN Ministry Team branched out beyond preparing meals. Two team members, Ann Parker & Janet Tucker, sewed a total of over 100 masks (WOW!), and we collected 61 rolls of toilet paper from four team members' households – all of which was delivered to Pastor Steph Smith on May 10. These items were added the hot meal “to-go” bags that are provided to CITN congregation members on Sunday afternoons in front of First Churches. Check out these photos of team members at work!



Janet & Mike Tucker delivering lots of masks for CITN.



Chris & Jack Hjelt dropping off TP rolls from their household to add to those donated by Jeanne Kocsis, Cynthia Stanton, and the Davis/Del Vecchio household.



Grace Del Vecchio (not pictured), Debbie Davis and their housemate, Michele McHale, made lasagna & sandwiches for Cathedral in the Night on April 5.

# JUNE 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 7pm <b>When and How to Open the Church Ad Hoc Team Meeting</b>	2 7pm <b>Finance Team</b>	3 12pm Bible Study - Zoom 6pm MANNA	4 6:30pm ECM 7pm <b>Building &amp; Grounds Team</b>	5	6
7 9am Church School - Zoom 10am Worship – Online 1:00 College Student Gathering 5pm CITN	8	9 3pm <b>Prayer Shawl Ministry</b>	10 12pm Bible Study - Zoom 6pm MANNA	11 10am Guided Meditation - Zoom	12	13 4pm Circle of Care – Zoom
	15	16 6:30pm CE Community of Practice	17 12pm Bible Study - Zoom 6pm MANNA	18	19	20
21 9am Church School - Zoom 10am Worship – Online 11:30 Youth Group 2pm <b>Care &amp; Visitation</b>	22	23 3pm <b>Prayer Shawl Ministry</b>	24 12pm Bible Study - Zoom 6pm MANNA	25 10am Guided Meditation - Zoom	26	27
28 9am Church School - Zoom 10am Worship – Online 11:30 Youth Group 2pm <b>Care &amp; Visitation</b>	29	30				

Abbreviations:  
 AA = Alcoholics Anonymous  
 NPC = Northampton Parents Center  
 FF = Faith Formation  
 PVIRAG= Pioneer Valley Interfaith  
 Refugee Action Group  
 RVS= River Valley Sangha  
 SAA=Pioneer Sex Addicts Anonymous  
 VMMSG = Valley Men's Support Group