

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 30 No. 10 December 2020

Merry Christmas, Edwards Church Community!

I know it is only Advent, but this year I need to start really savoring where the season is going! May the spirit of Christmas buoy you and me and all whom we love in the days to come. May all that Christmas means – faith, hope, joy and love, family and friends, sharing what we have with those who are struggling – may all these positive values that we hold close with Christmas warm our hearts and minds, imbue our attitude toward daily life, and guide our living through the year ahead.



*He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.¹*

As Christmas approaches, we who have celebrated many a Christmas are drawn to the songs, sights, and smells that awaken memories of Christmas past and excite us for our Christmas present. I recall cookies – my mother’s and my daughter’s and the

wonderful cookies that some of you bake – and other favorite ways to savor the holiday. Maybe, like me, you too enjoy singing louder and with more abandon than at any other time of year. Stay “tuned” for a virtual Christmas carol sing. We cannot gather for an Advent dinner in Addis Hall, but we can still sing our favorite carols at the same time, even if not physically together!

This Christmas I am thinking more than most years about a favorite folk song, “Christmas in the Trenches” by John McCutcheon², and the human impulse to make peace whenever possible instead of war, to build up and not tear down. I am thinking of what at least one member of our community calls the “Christ spirit” in all of us and how, when invited, that spirit can overcome fear and anger to rebuild old structures and begin creating new ones to increase that peace.

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.

Living through a life-threatening pandemic, we wonder when it will be safe to resume our life, lived in ways anything like before – going out just for fun with people we haven't seen in person for over a year, shaking hands with a stranger, embracing a friend to say hello or good-bye. Living through a time of intense partisan division, when violent encounters erupt over long simmering political differences, we wonder how to avoid a cataclysmic showdown, how a new beginning might emerge.

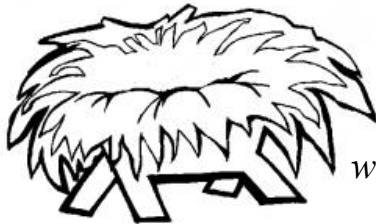
*He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.³*

*We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!⁴*

rites and customs reshaped by current conditions. This is not a new phenomenon, but the details are new for this time in history.

This Advent we will observe many of the familiar rituals and customs we have developed to prepare for and celebrate the arrival of Emmanuel, of God with us. Our observances will be adapted to the threatening background of disease, our

All our preparations – the baking and decorating, the wrapping and mailing, the quiet reading of a daily devotional and time set aside to consider how the “Christ spirit” lives in some of the most surprising people and places – come down to this:



*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still, the dear Christ enters in.⁵*

May your Advent preparations be so full of good intentions that they leave room for the reliably surprising gift from God, which is her presence in our lives all year long.

With hope, peace, joy and love,
Michael

-
1. Madeleine L'Engle poem “The First Coming.”
 2. For a wonderful rendering of the song, try this recording of a performance at the WW II Museum, which includes historical background: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIxxqJlnH2m8&list=RDCIxxqJlnH2m8&start_radio=1&t=0
 - 3-4. Madeleine L'Engle poem “The First Coming.”
 5. Third verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” lyrics by Phillips Brooks.

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 hope, 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.

This Advent is certainly one of expectant waiting: waiting for a vaccine for COVID-19; waiting for students and teachers to return to the classroom for in person learning; waiting for a time when we can be back in the sanctuary; waiting for a time to be with family members who don't live in our household. The list goes on and on. I find it helpful to remind myself that our steadfast, loving, and ever-present God is in the mix.

Part of my spiritual practice this Advent will be to focus each week on the theme that corresponds with the week and be intentional about looking for or experiencing that each day. For example, during the first week, I will intentionally look for signs of hope, journal about them and give thanks in prayer for the signs of hope that I have witnessed or experienced. The same will happen with the themes of peace, joy, and love.

This Advent and Christmas will be very different, and it can still be meaningful. I would love to hear how you and your family will make meaning of this season. Perhaps you might email your plans to the office and we could share them in a weekly message.

Blessings of hope, peace, joy and love as you journey through Advent and into the season of Christmas.

Deb

Scholarship Ministry Team

The Scholarship Ministry Team is pleased to announce that Edwards Church will offer scholarships to applicants who are active participants in the life of Edwards Church and are seeking to broaden their education in formal or informal ways. To request an application, please email Deb Moore at: ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org



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!

In order to stay safe and healthy, we will continue to meet via Zoom on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month at 11:30 until further notice. The date for the December meeting is:

12/13

(No meeting 12/27)

Guided Meditation Offering

We are thrilled to begin offering this spiritual practice once again! Join Linda Vincent and Deb Moore on the morning of December 3 via Zoom from 10:00 – 10:30. If interested in participating, please join promptly at 10:00 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.



College Students

We will continue to meet via Zoom on the first Sunday of the month at 1:00 p.m.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

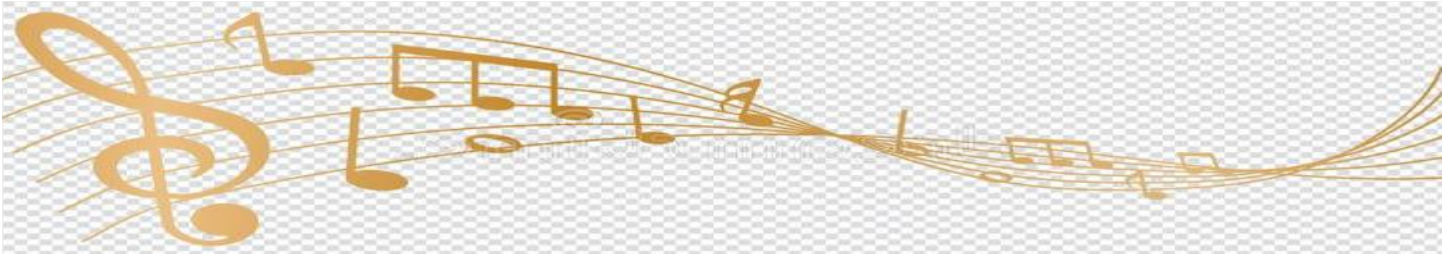
We will meet via Zoom from 3:00 – 4:00 on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. We welcome all knitters, weavers, and crocheters. If you would like to join us, please email Deb Moore at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org



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.





Christmas Caroling

Minister of Music David Kidwell will be leading Zoom Christmas caroling on Saturday, December 5 at 7pm. Grab your laptop, pour some eggnog, sit in front of your Christmas tree, and sing all of your favorite carols. Be on the lookout for the Zoom invitation.

Holyoke Civic Symphony Virtual Concert

The Holyoke Civic Symphony will present its second virtual concert of the season on Sunday, December 13 at 3:15pm on YouTube. The concert is free and is entitled "Home (of course!) for the Holidays." Maestro David Kidwell has put together a wonderful assortment of classical and holiday pieces for all to enjoy. The link to watch the concert will be available in early December at www.holyokecivicsymphony.org.

Virtual Choir

The Edwards Church Choir is continuing to work on virtual anthems. Rehearsals are on Zoom at 7pm on the first Thursday of each month. Anyone who enjoys singing (and doesn't mind technology) is invited.

Since everything takes place online, choir participation is not limited by geography. You also don't have to worry about parking or driving after dark! And since each anthem project starts fresh at the beginning of the month, it's possible to jump in anytime. Please email Minister of Music David Kidwell (music_minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) for more information.

Festival of Lessons and Carols

One of the most beloved Christmas traditions for many churches is the Festival of Lessons and Carols. Ours will be held during the Zoom worship service on Sunday, December 20. It won't be quite the same, but we will still have readings tracing the arc of the Christmas story interspersed with congregational hymns, solos, and a virtual anthem. Please join us for this very special service.



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!

Sanctuary and Christmas Plans

Dear Edwards Church Congregation,

We hope everyone looks to God's love and guidance for comfort as we navigate these trying times in our lives. With the continued uncertainty of the health crisis we currently expect to remain closed for in person use of the sanctuary until at least March 2021. The decision not to re-open is made based on public health concerns about how the virus spreads.

We still intend to celebrate the holiday season. We plan to put up our Christmas tree with all the lights and trimming as a sign of hope for all who pass by Edwards Church. Stay tuned!

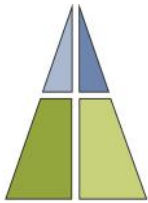
If anyone wants to talk about the personal or spiritual difficulty of the continuing pandemic, please reach out to Michael McSherry at (413-531-9729) or Deb Moore at (413-275-5507). To discuss those difficulties or the decision to postpone in person worship, you can also contact any member of the ECM at ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org

God Bless you.

Sincerely,

The Elected Core Ministry

Mark Dion Sheri Cheung Shannon Farrand-Bernadin
Melissa Mattison Laura Frogameni Ella Stocker Leon Drzewianowski



Ministry Team News

Justice Education Team Update

After adapting to life in the virtual world, we're pleased that we have made wonderful progress laying the foundation for the Justice Education Team. We have drafted a mission statement and chosen a bible verse to support it--both are below. In the spirit of education, **we are seeking** your reactions and thoughts. Please feel free to reach out to any of us.

Mission Statement: Acknowledging the many injustices in our community both past and present, we come together to educate ourselves and others, and to inspire reflection based on our Christian values and a commitment to faith-based action.

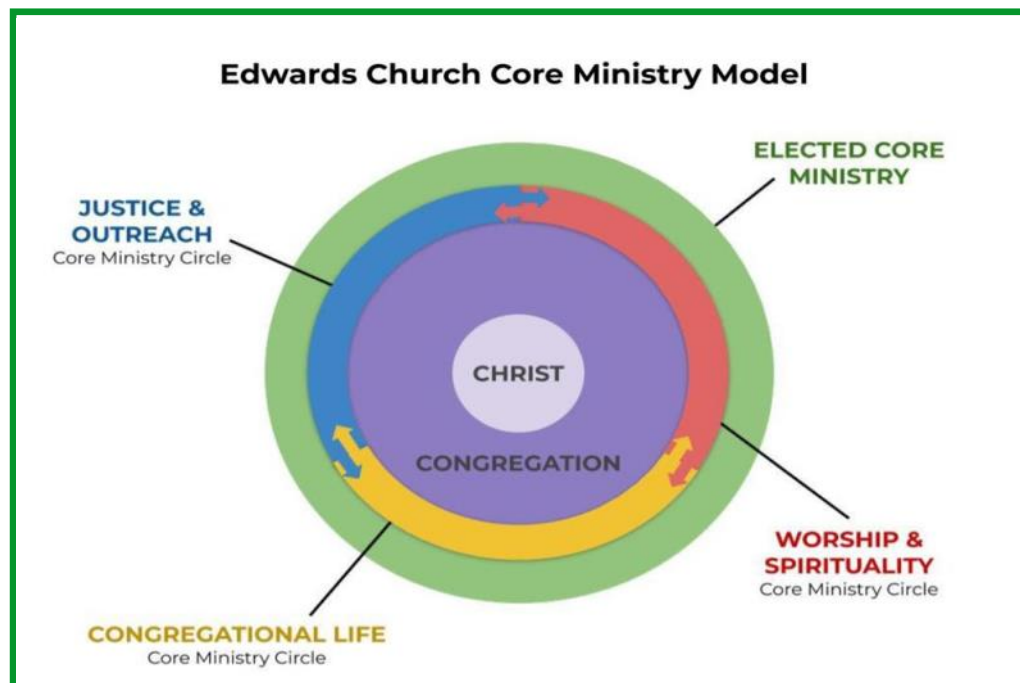
Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Through the winter we will be creating a web page with resources for education, reflection and action. And, we also hope to offer a virtual event (or two). Be on the lookout for more opportunities to engage with Justice Education!

Sheri Cheung, Clair Cheung, Heather Bell, Tom Derr, Mariana Haughey, Deb Moore, Michael McSherry

Cathedral in the Night Ministry Team

Thanks to all the Cathedral in the Night Worship Team members who provided sandwiches and desserts or who picked up these goodies from volunteers homes on Sunday, October 4th! Pastor Steph Smith of Cathedral and her volunteers were grateful for so much good food to share with their congregation! Our next time to partner with Cathedral will be on Sunday, December 6th.



Prayer for a Thriving Congregation

Holy Spirit, come and be with us, and hear our prayer:
May this team inhabit a safe space and a brave space.
May this be a space of equality, of support, of hearing and seeing one another.
Help us ask what the team needs; make us larger than our roles.
Remind us that we are equals who celebrate our diversity and difference,
And make us as candid with one another as we are loving.
Let us not judge, but rather seek to wonder and to understand.
Bless us with a balance of accountability and grace.
Fill our hearts with truth, our minds with clarity.
Humble us with the gravity our work, and
Lift us up with the lightness of laughter.
Make ours a thriving team,
Within a thriving congregation.
Amen.

The Thriving Congregation Team was formed to steer the congregation's participation in a 4-year process of engaging in deliberate renewal, offered by Vibrant Faith (www.vibrantfaith.org) and underwritten by a grant from the Lily Endowment. This renewal is spiritual, not intellectual. It is based on practices that cultivate and form faith, experiences that foster relationships across generations and households, between and among people and God, stretching our perspective and deepening our understanding.

To get there, our team will look at the current spiritual practices of our community and will be wondering – and engaging you in our wondering as the initiative unfolds – how we might use our current practices and adopt others to thrive in faith. As an indication of where we are in the larger process and where we may be headed, we share the prayer above, which was crafted by Jim Stokes-Buckles and adopted by the team as a prayer we will use to open our meetings and remind us of the covenant we have made to anchor our process.

In faith, your Thriving Congregations Team:

Sarah Briggs

Jim Stokes-Buckles

Sheri Cheung

Deb Moore

Melissa Mattison

Karen Pohlman

Michael McSherry



Advent & Christmas Eve

Nov. 28 – Sat. Christmas Tree Decorating – An email will already have been sent by the office before you read this, but all will be invited to sign up for a turn decorating our wonderfully tall Christmas tree. If you do not receive the emails from the office but would like to schedule a visit to decorate the tree, contact Khalil in the office at (413) 584-5500 (or info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org). For weekend access, contact Michael McSherry at 413-531-9729 to see what can be arranged.



11-29 – Advent Sunday 1 – weekly worship

12-5 – 7:00 PM - Christmas Carol Singing – Were it not for the virus, we would be gathering for the Advent Dinner, decorating the Christmas tree and, at the other end of the sanctuary, folks would gather in pews near the piano to call out favorite carols. David will play the piano from home this year. Look for the Zoom invitation in your email.

12-6 – Advent Sunday 2 – weekly worship

12-13 – Advent Sunday 3 – Nativity Sunday / Christmas Pageant – Weekly worship will include a Christmas Pageant video, recorded by families in the safety of home.

12-20 – Advent Sunday 4 – Festival of Lessons and Carols – “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.” Everything adapts to the pandemic circumstances, while the reality of the Christmas story transcends them. Hear that story interspersed with congregational hymns, solos, and a choral anthem.

12-24 – 7 PM – Christmas Eve “Candlelight” Service – While we cannot yet gather in the sanctuary, we can gather virtually from our homes with candles prepared and darken the room (or just dim the lights) and recreate the feeling when the light of the world came as a newborn: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” It may not be the way we are accustomed to celebrating, but love will still come down at Christmas!

Pastoral Care in the Pandemic

As we move through winter, we encourage you to try Zooming for visits. (And yes, we know some of us are Zoomed out.) There is nothing like being physically in the same place together. We miss it too! But to protect our own health and the health of others we will visit, we feel this is simply a matter of following public health advice by avoiding being inside with people outside one’s household whenever possible.

Of course, we are still happy to talk on the phone, to walk outdoors, or even sit on your porch or patio – weather and warm coats permitting! Please email anytime or call us at the church office or on our cell phones.

Michael minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

cell: 413-531-9729

Deb ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

cell: 413-275-5507

May God bless and keep us all!

DECEMBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
			12:00 Bible Study 6:00 MANNA 6:30 Faith For- mation	10:00 Guided Medi- tation 7:00 Choir Rehears- al 7:00 Building & Grounds		3:00-4:00 Circle of Care 7:00-8:00 Christmas Caroling
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Music Minis- try Team 12:00 Music at the Crossroads 1:00 College Stu- dent 5:00 CITN	3:00 Prayer Shawl Ministry 7:00 Finance Team Meeting	12:00 Bible Study 6:00 MANNA	4:30 Care & Visita- tion 7:00 ECM			
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9am Church School 9:55am Worship 11:30 Youth Group	5:00 Open & Af- firming	6:30 CE Communi- ty of Practice SPIRE deadline	12:00 Bible Study 6:00 MANNA 7:00 Justice & Edu- cation	7:00 Choir Rehears- al 7:00 Building & Grounds		
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
9am Church School 9:55am Worship	6:00 Thriving Con- gregation Team	3:00 Prayer Shawl Ministry	12:00 Bible Study 6:00 MANNA	7:00 Christmas Eve Service	Christmas!	
27	28	29	30	31		
9am Church School 9:55am Worship			12:00 Bible Study 6:00 MANNA			