

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 30 No. 9 November 2020

Dear Edwards Church Community,

To acknowledge the pain I sense many of us, in and beyond the Edwards community, carry but do not often acknowledge out loud, I recently chose a quote from Psalm 13 as the message to display on the sign out front. The psalm begins:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long? (Psalm 13: 1 - 2)

One person who thanked me for that open recognition of a broadly shared interior pain is a retired local physician, someone whose daily work gave him a lifetime of stories about “where it hurt” when people came to see him.

Walter Brueggemann, a leading Christian scholar of the Old Testament, writes in his wonderful short book *Praying the Psalms* about how the psalms give us a way to express our feelings to God when our feelings are close to overwhelming. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Countless faithful Jews had already prayed those words from Psalm 22 long before Jesus cried them out on the cross.



The literary genius of Mark and Matthew using those familiar words to describe that moment comes in how it signals the promise of resurrection. Psalm 22, well known to the early audiences of their gospels, proclaims near its end that God hears our cries. God responds in ways often impossible to see while we are still walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Though still in the future, those greener pastures exist.

Because we are, like our Jewish friends and neighbors, “people of the book,” even if ours has a few more chapters, we know there is more to the story than what we are going through right now – whether that is the pandemic or the election, unemployment or growing demands at work, the love of family we have not seen in way too long or family we need a day or more to rest from. Those greener pastures are real.

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”;
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. (Psalm 13: 3 - 4)

Bravery is not the absence of fear but being willing to go on despite our fear. Faith is not the absence of all doubt but being willing to trust in a promise not yet fully realized, when we have experienced enough to believe that it will be realized someday.

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.

I will probably not live to know my greatgrandchildren. My first grandchild was born when I was 64. The odds simply do not favor it. But barring an untimely death, odds are good I will get to watch little Mac and any siblings or cousins he may have grow up and become young adults. That gives me more motivation to stay healthy, because even in the growth and change since his birth 19 months ago I see a bright, engaging young boy full of potential emerging. I want to know the person he becomes and each step along his way. Nothing could be more natural or more of a blessing.



Some of you lived through the introduction of the polio vaccine. You recall how families worried about the fate of children born before that vaccine became widely available. You remember how we, as a society, recovered from the accident involving several bad batches from one manufacturer. Others recall the number of people, especially children, stricken with measles and its side effects before that vaccine became widely available. We know from history how this works. Greener pastures are coming into view, just over the next hill.

When I consider the projections provided by politicians (less weight) and public health experts (more weight), I “guesstimate” we are most likely to see vaccines widely available sometime in the warmer months of 2021. Given current skepticism in some quarters about those vaccines, when we might achieve herd immunity remains unclear.

But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13: 5-6)

I trust God and God’s people, and not just because the Bible offers examples of how God keeps God’s promise to be with us and help us. I trust God because I have learned from experience that God gives herself to us when we give ourselves – our focus and energy, our talents, and in some cases even the “shirt off our backs” – to relieve personal suffering and uproot systemic injustice.

“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. Encountering the world’s joys and suffering, we offer ourselves as instruments of love and justice. Longing to find the holy in ourselves and others, we listen for God’s still-speaking voice.” We are finding our way and finding God by serving all God’s people.

Stay safe and stay well,

Michael

Pastoral Care in the Pandemic

There is no manual for how to proceed in a pandemic. From March until May, we mostly avoided seeing church members in person, other than outdoors and remaining physically distanced. Since then we have encouraged anyone and everyone to consider a porch visit, a walk along the bike path or in a park, or otherwise meeting anywhere outdoors where talking is easy and the air refreshing.

As we move back into cooler weather, we will be encouraging you to try Zooming with us for visits. (And yes, we know some of us are Zoomed out.) There is nothing like being 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! Feel free to email anytime or call us at the church office or on our cell phones. Calls left on the church voicemail system are automatically forwarded to us by email.

Michael minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-531-9729

Deb ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-275-5507

May God bless and keep us all!

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

What to do about Thanksgiving and then Christmas? Questions that many (including me) are wondering about. For sure these two holidays will be different from year's past in our churches and in our homes mostly due to COVID-19.

I hope some of you were able to watch 400 Years: Truth & Healing for the Next Seven Generations last Sunday which chronicled the racism toward Native people particularly in New England. Rev. Kelly Gallagher, one of our Associate Conference Ministers stated: "The Pilgrims came in their superiority to make disciples of all nations. The Doctrine of Discovery gave Christians, in the name of Christ, justification to take the land. The dehumanizing of Native people by Christians led to their genocide, and much more. It is this nation's original sin. Christianity became a tool to claim authority. All is not lost, we have the capacity and teachings to behave differently. We need to repent, reform, and repair."

Jim Peters of the Wampanoag Tribe from Mashpee stated that "the white man is our most formidable opponent; you gave us the Bible; your system is unforgiving."

The event included chanting and song in the Native tradition as well as hope for transformation.

The Congregational Library & Archives, located in Boston, for the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the landing at Plymouth produced two discussion guides titled *Plymouth's Pilgrims: Their Church, Their World, and Ours*. One discussion guide is for Churches and the other is for Youth Groups and/or Confirmation Classes. Each guide contains four sections.

Section 1: They Were One Body in Christ

Section 2: They were a People of the Book

Section 3: They Were Colonists; They Were Colonizers

Section 4: They Were Congregationalists

You can view the guides and download them for free at: congregationallibrary.org.

The Justice Education Team will continue to explore a statement on Indigenous Lands acknowledging that the land we live on was first inhabited by Native people.

Personally, I haven't thought about Christmas yet. I do know my Thanksgiving will be very different this year as I continue the journey of education, repentance, reformation, and reparation. My faith demands it.

Stay safe and well.

Blessings,

Deb

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.

The Church school ministry team is reviewing responses to the survey sent out in September.



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!



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. Here are the dates for November and December:

11/8 , 11/22

12/13

Guided Meditation Offering



We are thrilled to begin offering this spiritual practice once again! Join Linda Vincent and Deb Moore on the mornings of November 5 and December 3 via Zoom from 10:00 – 10:30. If interested in participating, 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.

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



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

The History of Anti-Black Racism in America

Amherst College is offering a four-part online lecture series titled The History of Anti-Black Racism in America. The lecture series is open to the public; registration is required. All lectures, except the last, are at 7:00p.m. Remaining lecture dates and titles are:

11/17 From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime (at 5:00 PM)

Thank you to Sarah Briggs for bringing this excellent opportunity to listen to the history of our Black siblings to our attention. More detailed information about presenters and content description can be found at https://www.amherst.edu/news/campus_community_events/virtual.

Faith Formation Leadership Program 2020-2021 Year

This is a two-year certificate program that originated with the Massachusetts Conference and is now sponsored by the Southern New Conference of the UCC. Sessions are offered in person and via Zoom. Topics to be presented in this upcoming year are:

Boundary Awareness for Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Leaders

Making Disciples – Theories and Practices for the 21st Century

Youth Ministry 101 – Practices for a Sustainable Ministry

Networking in Youth Ministry – Resources & Social Media

Developing Faith – Ages and Stages

Faith Formation 101 – Practices for a Sustainable Ministry

Living into the Mystery – Worship and Sacraments in the UCC

For detailed information go to <https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-leadership-training-and-certification>. For personal experience references please speak to Jim Stokes-Buckles or Deb Moore.

Virtual Choir Has Begun

The Edwards Church Choir will be singing four virtual anthems this fall. Members are rehearsing over Zoom every other Thursday at 7pm. The first and second anthems were presented during the September 27th and October 25th worship services.



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.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

C. Rutherford Platt
Grace Lively
Elizabeth Young
Krisinda S. Semb
Heidi Kinner
Susan Banas



Paul C. Gustavson
Louise P. Montague
Samuel A. Grant
Jody Kinner
William Roeder
Lindsey Ann Wells
Susan Anderson

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!

Learning about Transgender Issues

Transgender Folks and Christianity – Edwards Church is an Open and Affirming congregation in the UCC. Did you ever wonder what that means and how it plays out in the life of the church? On **Saturday, Nov. 21**, author Austen Hartke will lead a 2 hour workshop (11am-1pm) introducing all who attend to greater awareness of issues affecting transgender folks in general and especially transgender folks in relationship to Christian churches. A graduate of Luther Seminary's Master of Arts program in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Studies, Austen Hartke has spoken at conferences all over the country.

transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians – A group discussing this book by Austen Hartke had its first meeting on Oct. 26 and will meet again on Zoom on Monday Nov. 2 and Nov. 9, each night at 6 PM. Please consider joining us. Contact Deb Moore at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org for a copy of the book.

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. We are continuing our ministry (Angel Tree) with the foster children from "18-Degrees" (formally Berkshire Family and Child Services) and are working on other ideas that will be different but still festive and invite you to share suggestions. 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



As Advent approaches, the ECM is committed to continuing our congregational traditions in new ways. The Edwards Christmas tree, fully decorated and lit inside our front wall of windows, is a sight to behold, lifting the spirits of many as they walk by or wait for the traffic light to change. This year, we will still trim our Christmas tree, just a bit differently than before! The tree will be assembled, and a masked and gloved volunteer will separate ornaments into individual groupings.

On November 28th (and 29th, if needed) individuals and households will have the opportunity to decorate the tree during twenty-minute time slots. Each person in a household group will sanitize their hands upon entering the building, and wear masks while inside. Before leaving they will sanitize all chairs, ladders and other surfaces that were touched. After one group leaves, the sanctuary will remain empty for twenty minutes, prior to the arrival of the next group.

Look for emails in the coming weeks with information about how to sign up.



Ministry Team News

Message from the Elected Core Ministry

Greetings!

We are putting the finishing touches on a church wide survey. Please keep an eye out for it as we need your input!

We were delighted to host the first Core Ministry Circle meetings this fall. Team members within each circle - Justice & Outreach, Congregational Life, and Worship & Spirituality - met to connect with each other personally and with regard to the work of their Circle.

ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org is our address if you'd like to be in touch!

Faithfully,

The Elected Core Ministry

Mark Dion

Sheri Cheung

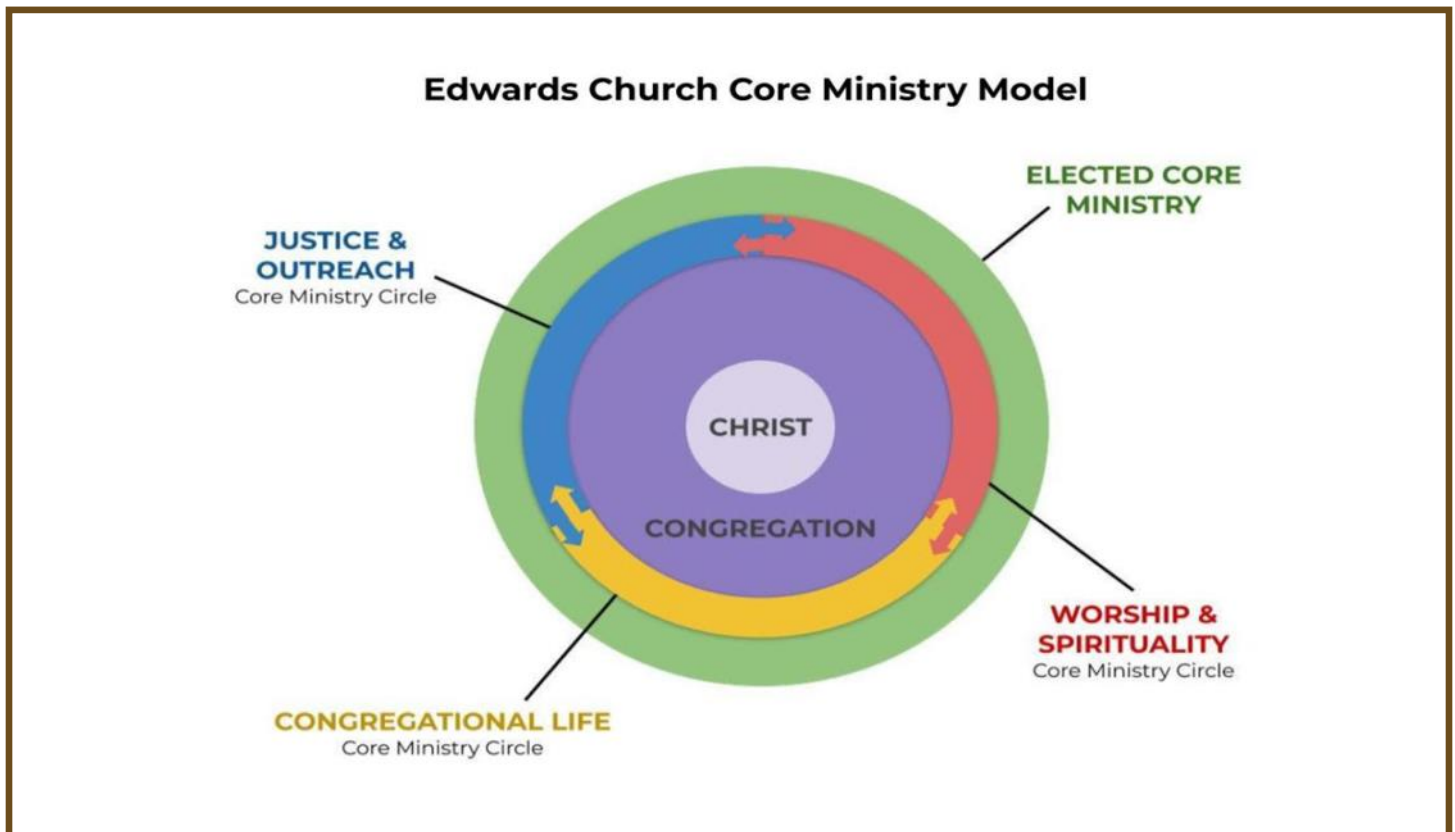
Shannon Farrand-Bernadin

Melissa Mattison

Laura Frogameni

Ella Stocker

Leon Drzewianowski



ANGEL TREE
CONTINUING AN IMPORTANT CHRISTMAS TRADITION

Every year Carolyn Dion organizes our **annual participation in a Christmas gift drive for children in foster care**. Just days ago she received information about this year's drive. In order to respond with an impact similar to our usual response, **we need to act quickly**. Marylou Spaulding, Administrative Coordinator for 18 Degrees (formerly Berkshire Children and Families), explains that, due to the virus, this year they are requesting gift cards for use at Amazon, Target and Walmart instead of actual wrapped gifts.



If you wish to support this recurring ministry, please be sure the gift card clearly indicates the dollar value. (Gift cards usually come with a separate dollar amount receipt. We recommend taping that receipt to the card.) **To have your gift card(s) included in the packet Carolyn will deliver to 18 Degrees, please drop them off at the office or mail them to be delivered no later than November 18.**

Marylou Spaulding wrote to Carolyn:

“In this crazy year 2020, so many things have changed about the way ordinary business and celebrations of holidays are carried out. Here at 18 Degrees we are mostly remote with only a few of us in the office. Our social workers are not able to visit homes according to DCF regulations. They are meeting on Zoom or outside.

*Therefore, we have decided to not carry out our regular gift giving process. We all had that down to a science and we were great! I'm sure those in need are still in need, maybe even more than usual. If people still want to do something, **we are asking for gift cards to Amazon, Target and Walmart.** We hope to get this going as soon as possible so that either our social workers or the parents themselves, depending on the situation, can order on-line for the children or go to a Target or Walmart. With COVID on the rise again we want to keep everyone safe.*

I also ask that each card is easily identified by the amount so that I can distribute them evenly. We know that online shopping will be crazy and want to make sure the gifts are there for the children when it counts.

In the case that you forgot.... 18 Degrees is where the sun stands in the sky at the first sign of daybreak. Although it's just out of sight below the horizon, that first light lets us know that a new day is coming! Our work is to help young people, adults and families find their way to new beginnings - and although the way forward may not always be clear, we walk with our clients along the way as we help and hope for better days ahead. We also wanted to reflect that we don't just serve Berkshire County. We actually serve all of Western Mass. We are the same people with the same clients wanting to bring them to better and brighter days in the future.”

Christmas is a great time for spreading cheer and spreading the Good News that God is with us. What better way to share that news than sharing whatever good fortune we can? Thank you, and Merry Christmas!

NOVEMBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 9am Church School - Zoom 9:55am Worship – Online 1pm College Student Gathering	2 6pm Book Group	3	4 12pm Bible Study – Zoom 4pm Thriving Cong. (Cohort Mtg) 6pm MANNA	5 10:00am Guided Meditation 7pm Choir Rehearsal	6	7 3pm Circle of Care
8 9am Church School - Zoom 9:55am Worship – Online 11:30 Youth Group	9 6pm Book Group	10 3pm Prayer Shawl Ministry 7pm When & How to Re-Open Ad Hoc Team	11 Veterans Day 12pm Bible Study – Zoom 5pm ONA 6pm MANNA 7pm Finance Team	12 4:30 Care and Visitation 7pm ECM Building & Grounds	13	14
15 9am Church School - Zoom 9:55am Worship – Online	16 6pm Thriving Congregation Team Spire Deadline	17 6:30pm CE Community of Practice	18 12pm Bible Study - Zoom 6pm MANNA 7:00 Justice & Education Team	19 7pm Choir Rehearsal	20	21 11am-1pm Austen Hartke Webinar
22 9am Church School - Zoom 9:55am Worship – Online 11:30 Youth Group 12:00 Music at the Crossroads Meeting	23	24 3pm Prayer Shawl Ministry	25 12pm Bible Study - Zoom	26 Thanksgiving OFFICE CLOSED	27	28 Christmas Tree Decorating- Time TBA
29 9am Church School - Zoom 9:55am Worship – Online Christmas Tree Decorating- Time TBA	30					