

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Edwards Church Community,

Happy Groundhog Day! No, I mean it, really. The arrival of February means we are at – and soon will pass – an important milestone: the low point of the year, at least for many of us: Groundhog Day. What a year it’s been! “How long, O Lord, how long?” How many more weeks of this must we endure?



Here is how we can absolutely tell that things are becoming more normal. The holidays are behind us, winter has settled in, and we are all (or almost all) wishing the next 2-3 months would just be over tomorrow. Really over. And we know deep down that they will take the same amount of time to pass as they always do. But it may feel like more.



How to hang in there through the passage of time? How can I tolerate the slow melting of time over my urgent need for the return of normal life, of a way of life I will be able to embrace as LIFE, and not merely getting by?

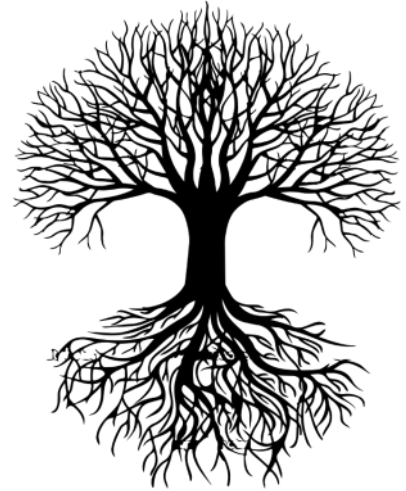
The last year has been brutal. The virus has killed millions around the world and experts project we will lose many more before it is over. We all wish it were over. But the patterns of life itself, science as we come to understand the science of this virus, and the resources of our faith all point in the same general direction.

Winter is the time of forced hibernation, of slowing down, way down for a period of deep R&R. Although the patterns of modern life – which insist on a consistent (and consistently more productive) work week, a consistent delivery of education (with measurable progress) as if it were a product one ordered from Amazon, and consistently positive economic news, as if history were something we were meant to fully control rather than to fully participate in, doing the best we can.

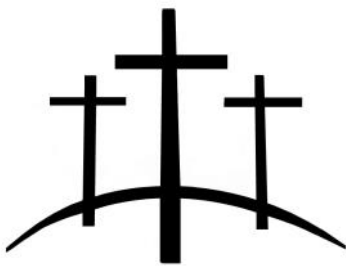


In a recent episode of the radio show - podcast "On Being" (<https://onbeing.org/programs/katherine-may-how-wintering-replenishes/>), writer Katherine May explains how she finds comfort and consolation in the deep R&R that nature gives itself every winter. We humans, after all, are deeply rooted in nature. God came to us in Jesus fully human to show, through incarnation, the extent to which God loves and identifies with us. The liturgical season of Epiphany, which we are ending, reminds us of that, among other things. The gospels are replete with mentions of Jesus taking time to rest and to restore his spirit with prayer. He also seems to have enjoyed dinner with wine and good company, so I guess he too would struggle with physical distancing!

Katherine May has cultivated the capacity to “winter” as needed, to recognize in herself the signals that she needs the sort of R&R that nature enforces on the natural world as a matter of survival and preparing for the next cycle of growth. To get to the other side of the vaccine roll-out, and to the maximum extent you can adjust your movable commitments, I hope you will make time and take time for occasions to be gentle with yourself and “winter” on purpose.



Take a walk in the crisp midwinter afternoon. Close the “office” door for 10 minutes and daydream, meditate, or pray. Call a friend. Make a pact with your partner, if you have one, to be “wintering buddies,” taking over whatever needs attending while the other attends to the self-care we all need. These need not be “spa days” to be effective, but they do need to happen with enough regularity to help you over the long haul. This sort of “wintering” can serve to keep you in touch with the truth that humans are not only deeply rooted in nature, we are also, as the French paleontologist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it, “spiritual beings having human experiences.” Keep in touch with both sides of your nature and we will all come through this together.



Soon we begin the season of Lent. This year I recommend giving up nothing but whatever prevents you from taking on those practices that will help you to “winter” more effectively. The scripture recommended for the first Sunday of Lent is a repeat of the story of Jesus’ baptism, followed by his time in the wilderness and the proclamation of his ministry: “Now is the time of fulfillment, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and put your faith in the good news.”

We repeat this cycle on a regular basis as an acknowledgement that our nature – as spiritual beings having human experiences – requires that we periodically return to the roots of our connection to God. We have hints of timeless meaning expressed in timebound lives. Keep putting your faith in the good news. That new life is already beginning.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Psalm 139 vs. 23-24

“Search me, O my Beloved, and know
my heart!

Try me and discern my thoughts!
Help me to face the darkness within me,
enlighten me, that I might
radiate your love and light!”

from Psalms for Praying an Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan C. Merrill

This reflection for the Spire was begun on January 7, the day after the insurrection on our nation’s capital building and continued being formulated after the inauguration on January 20, and will probably continue to ruminate and expand in my mind and heart for a very long time.

Day 3 of Week 1 in Joyce Rupp’s six-week guide to deepening compassion *Boundless Compassion: Creating a Way of Life* is titled *Behind Every Scar – A Story*. In the opening pages, she quotes Rabbi Michael Paley who, reflecting on Moses’s only being allowed to see God’s back when what he really wanted to see was God’s face, commented: “In our relationships with other people, we often ask to see their faces but maybe we should ask to see their backs so that we can see the world, maybe only for an instant, the way they see it. Then we can offer them true understanding – a genuine gift.”¹ Rupp offers insight gleaned from Krista Tippett who, during a speaking engagement at Drake University, stated: “when we are with someone whose vision differs significantly from others, we should ask the question of the person: ‘where does it hurt?’”² Or perhaps we do some internal wondering (my variation) asking ourselves “where is the hurt/the concern in this individual?”

January 6, 2021 was a dark day for our country; many suggest it is a scar on democracy as well as on our country. My not so medical understanding of a scar is that it is a result of and a reminder of a wound. Perhaps, like me, some of you sport some bodily scars and can remember what caused them and eventual healing. One of mine reminds me of an encounter with thorns while attempting to prune a rosebush. A couple of others remind me of surgery to excise cancer.

The psalmist asks God to help him face the darkness within. The raw, deep, cancerous, and centuries old wounds of racism, white nationalism, antisemitism, phobias of all types, etc. continue to cast a deep darkness on our country and world.

Christina Feldman in her book *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World* states: “Compassion is not just a spiritual exploration: it also has political, ethical, and environmental implications. The ethical dimension of compassion would suggest that privilege carries the responsibility of bringing to fruition the safety and ease of all those who are banished to the shadows of life through poverty and oppression. Compassion invites us to participate in the healing of the world.”³ Both Feldman and Rupp offer similar pathways to healing from their faith traditions.

“...enlighten me that, I might radiate your love and light!” the psalmist exclaims. Over 2000 years ago Jesus came to bring hope, peace, joy, and love into a darkened world. His ministry was spent showing and teaching us the way to be light in a world riven with systemic injustices.

The prophetic words of twenty-two year old poet Amanda Gorman speak to us:
“We will rebuild, reconcile and recover and every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful will emerge, battered and beautiful

When day comes we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it
If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

May we be followers of the light of Christ praying and acting to excise the thorns and cancer that have deeply wounded and oppressed so many. May the scars serve as reminders of the lamenting, repenting, reconciling, and repairing that needs to happen for healing to occur and also tell the story of that unfolding. May we, with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, be brave enough to be light.

Faithfully and with hope,
Deb

1. Rupp, Joyce. *Boundless Compassion: Creating a New Way of Life*, 24.
2. *Ibid.*, 25.
3. Feldman, Christina. *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World* pg. 55.

Sing Virtually with the Choir!

The Edwards Church choir will continue to make virtual anthems through the first half of 2021. New members are always welcome! And since everything is being done remotely, choir participation is not limited to geography.

The choir meets on Zoom once a month on a Thursday evening to rehearse the upcoming anthem. The Minister of Music and the section leaders make a guide video for other choir members to sing to. The only technological requirement is that you must have two devices: one to watch the guide video and one to record yourself. You can use any combination: two phones, phone and tablet, tablet and laptop, etc. It's a pretty easy process, and the end result is very rewarding and moving.

If you or someone you know would like to try virtual choir, please contact David Kidwell at music_minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org. A long-term commitment is not necessary. Try it for a month and see how you like it!

Dreams of the Beloved Community Responses

Prior to the Sunday when we honored the Rev .Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Michael and Deb invited thoughts from members of the congregation and church school about their dream of the Beloved Community realized. The following are responses we received.



My Dream for the Beloved Community

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Our community excludes no one.

There is time and talent to create art, music, and writing, with leisure for all to enjoy these creations.

The earth is easy to plow for farmers and food is abundant. Wholesome food grows wild, in abundance, to sustain anyone.

Builders have all the tools and supplies needed for plans to direct the construction. Anyone can develop the skills needed to build and enjoy the satisfaction of work well done.

Cloth is made from thread that never breaks from fibers grown with loving thoughts. Dreamers create clothes that suit every body at any age.

And every body can be loved.


Because we are all beloved in the community, the needs of body and soul are gathered or given.

Mourners live by the shore. The sight, smell, and sounds of the ocean give comfort. Every wave takes away a few tears, tears remembered by the sea.
Each tide marks the healing of time. We wait with them.


Strife and contention in the beloved community are constrained to the place of debate and judgment, built upon the ground of knowledge and surrounded by mercy. Persuasion is weighed by facts, not beliefs. Some conflicts resolve but other issues quickly fill their place.

Tricksters and thieves have a special island. They can only take from themselves.


In the beloved community, all see God in each other and God rules over all.




I envision the Beloved Community taking a long time to develop. It could start with God flipping a switch and from that day on each day some number of people anywhere in the world would newly become aware of the divine spirit within them, connect to that spirit and thereafter live their lives accordingly. That way each day the balance between good and evil in humanity would tilt a little more toward good, and the aspects of good (love, forgiveness, tolerance, acceptance, justice, peace, sharing, etc.) would be more and more expressed throughout the world. I can see the smile on God's face.



We pray for a time of healing initiated by our government leadership; putting aside our fears of one another and the unknown to show that we can accomplish changes for the good of all people in this country.



Be kind to everyone
Help others who may feel sick be well
Share our food
Practice the Golden Rule



“Walk together with our siblings from all denominations to ...”

“... feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, free the oppressed, welcome the stranger, love the neighbor, and fill the whole world with the love of our blessed redeemer, Jesus. And, as we continue to do so, we will walk in the courage to denounce and dismantle theologies and systems of oppression and hatred, replacing them with theologies of freedom, peace, justice and love.”¹

The Elected Officer of the United Church of Christ
The Rev. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President
The Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister
The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, Associate General Minister

1. Excerpt above from the [January 7th response from our UCC national leaders'](#)

Justice Education Ministry Team

The Justice Education Team has been gathering resources to share with the Edwards community about race and systemic racism. Here are five books (and short descriptions about them) that we currently have and you can borrow from our growing collection. Reach out to Khalil at the office if you want to check one out! If you're interested in knowing what other books we have for children and adults on the topic of justice, you can reach out to Deb Moore.

***Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates.** In this letter to his adolescent son, Coates shares the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences. He wrestles with questions like, "what's it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it?"

***Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X. Kendi.** "A deep (and often disturbing) chronicling of how anti-black thinking has entrenched itself in the fabric of American society and not solely through ignorance, but through a rationalization of inequity in institutional practices." – Atlantic

***How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi.** "An essential work for anyone who wants to go beyond awareness of racism to the next step: contributing to the formation of a just and equitable society."

***White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin Diangelo** The author, "an antiracist educator, explores how white fragility develops, how it protects racial inequality, and what we can do to engage more constructively."

***Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children In A Racially Unjust America* by Jennifer Harvey.** "Dr. Harvey offers age-appropriate insights for teaching children how to address racism when they encounter it and tackles tough questions about how to help white kids be mindful of racial tensions while understanding their own identity and the role they can play for justice."



Open and Affirming Ministry Team (ONA)

Expand your heart and mind with one or more of these LGBTQ films or book for Black History Month:

I Am Not Your Negro, 2016, (94 min.) Rated PG-13. Raoul Peck's documentary inspired by James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript, *Remember This House*; available on DVD at local libraries, streaming from Kanopy with your library card, or Amazon Prime

Major! 2016, (90 min.) Rated 16+. A documentary of the life of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a transgender woman and veteran of the Stonewall Rebellion, who for over 40 years has fought for the rights of trans women of color; available on Amazon Prime or ask your library

Umi & Uma, Nyesha and Samantha Davis-Williams, (2018). A children's book about two moms raising a baby written from the perspective of the two moms; available online from several vendors or ask local book stores

Their podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/two-mommies-and-a-baby/id1448039770>

Save the Date & Watch for More Information

Super Saturday - March 13 & March 20, 2021

And It Came to Pass, Luke 2:15

Living Into the Fulfillment of God's Promises

Scheduled Speaker for this event is Rabbi Elan Babchuck



Edwards Church Survey - 65 respondents

In November, the ECM surveyed the community, distributing 10 questions by email and mailing paper copies to those homes where we know there are individuals who do not use (or prefer not to use) email. The responses are shared below, other than the written responses to the final open-ended question, inviting comments or questions.

1. Since we stopped worshiping together in person, how often do you watch our virtual/online service?

As often as I can	56.92 %
At least twice a month	15.38 %
Occasionally	21.54 %
Not at all	0.00 %
(I do not have the technology/ equipment)	
Not at all	6.15 %
(virtual/ online does not work for me)	
2. Since we stopped worshiping together in person, my attendance described in the last question is:

More often than it was before the pandemic	18.46 %
About the same as before the pandemic	49.23 %
Less often than it was before the pandemic	32.31 %
3. Once we open again for in-person worship, what best describes your feelings towards returning to the sanctuary?

I am ready to return as soon as possible.	3.08 %
I am ready to return as soon as possible as long as COVID19 safeguards are in place.	36.92 %
I plan to wait several additional weeks before I return.	6.15 %
It may be quite some time before I feel comfortable enough to return.	33.85 %
I am not sure.	20.00 %

4. The church will abide by all Massachusetts guideline for “Houses of Worship” but what other precautions do you expect our church to take for in-person worship? (check all that apply)

Pre-Registration through church office required, to support contact tracing if needed	54.69 %
Physical distancing maintained during arrivals and departures	85.94 %
Masks worn at all times, other than individuals with medical conditions exempting them	90.63 %
Instrumental music but, until we have vaccines fully distributed, no singing and no choir	68.75 %
Limited handouts (bulletins etc.)	45.31 %
A “no-touch” approach to collect the offering	65.63 %
Sanctuary seating that maintains social distancing	89.06 %
Doors either held or propped open to encourage no-touch surfaces	65.63 %
One-way flow of traffic into and out of the Sanctuary and the rest of the church (one entrance and one exit)	73.44 %
An abundance of Hand-Sanitizer stations	71.88 %
I do not expect extra precautions	1.56 %
Other	9.38 %

5. Are you interested in returning to smaller in-person get togethers? (Ministry team gatherings, Bible study/Book Club, etc.)

Yes, with no restrictions	0.00 %
Yes, but with certain safeguards in place	30.65 %
Not right away	69.35 %

6. What is your age?

less than 18 years	0.00 %
18-29	6.15 %
30-49	9.23 %
50-69	38.46 %
70+	44.62 %
I prefer not to answer	0.00 %
We have multiple ages in our household	1.54%

7. Would you be interested in helping out with: (check all that apply)

Virtual Worship Services?	44.74 %
“Drive-by” visits?	31.58 %
Planning for outside worship and/or other activities right away or in the warmer weather?	36.84 %
Sharing the leadership role on a Ministry Team you are on?	10.53 %
In the preparation for re-opening of in-person activities? At the church when in-person activities resume? (Extra people will be necessary)	23.68 %
	55.26 %

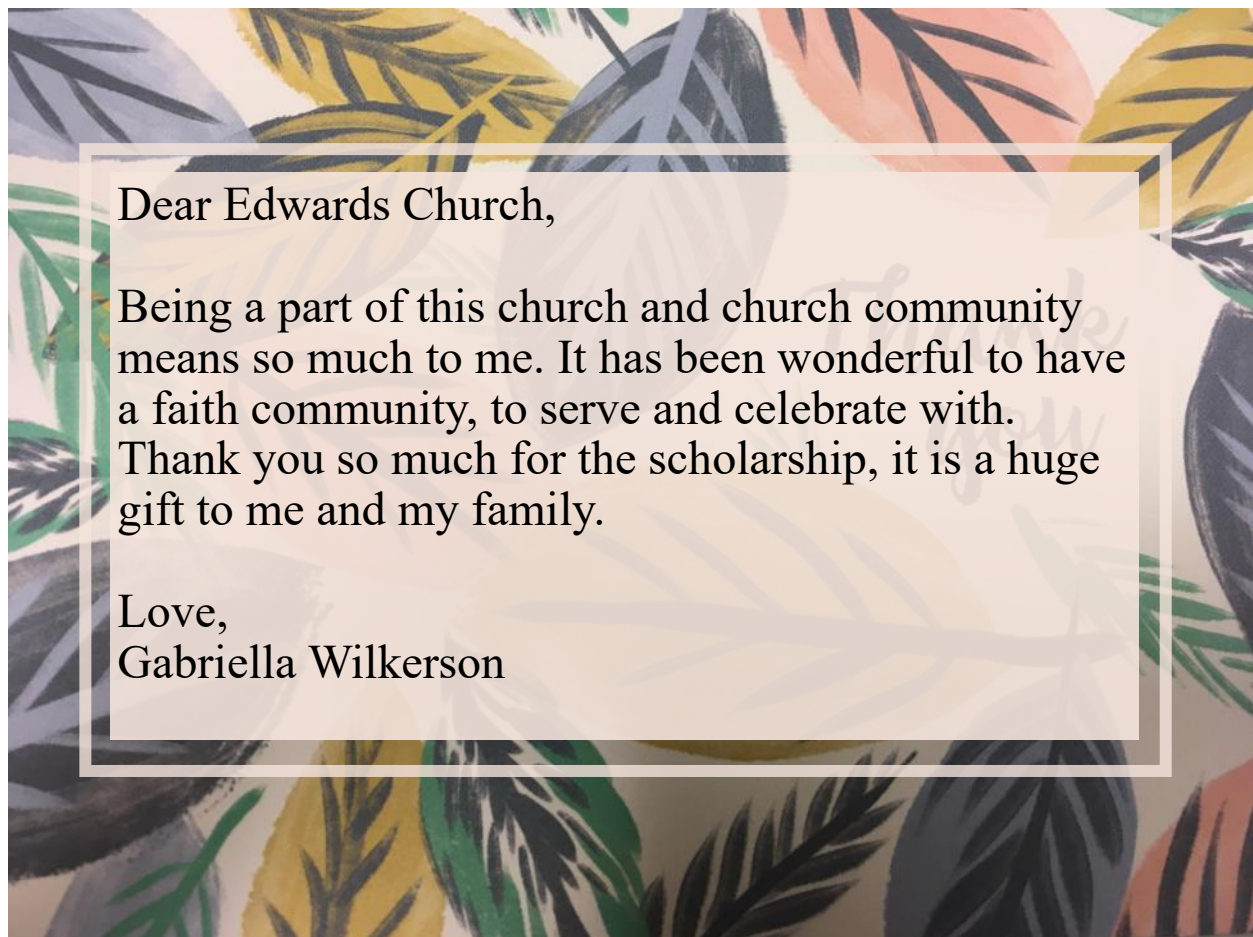
8. Due to circumstances related to Covid-19,
I need to revise my 2020 pledge:

Yes 4.84 %
No 95.16 %

9. Would you like a call from a minister?

Yes 13.33 %
No 86.67 %

10. Comments and Questions (open response): [Responses not shared here.]



Church School

Church School continues via Zoom on Sunday mornings from 9:00 – 9:30. We begin with an opening ritual, share a Bible story or appropriate related storybook, participate in an activity, share our joys and concerns, and conclude by praying together. Family pets welcome!





Dan Shanahan Sandra Rossi

Luke Longstreeth Marc Waller

Ruby Smith Kimberly Schlichting

Margaret Allen Marc Abel

Deanna O'Connor Tracy Teague

Brian Swift

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!

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!



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, *and per request of members of the youth group*, we will continue to meet via Zoom on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month at 11:30 until further notice. Upcoming dates are:

2/14 & 2/28



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

If you or someone you know would like a prayer shawl, especially during this pandemic time, please contact the church office (info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) and/or Deb Moore (ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) and arrangements will be made for pick up or delivery.

College Students

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




Guided Meditation Offering

By request, this ministry engaging the spiritual practice of guided meditation will continue via Zoom on the first Thursday of the month from 10:00-10:30 through May.

Please email Linda Vincent (lcvincent56@gmail.com) and Deb Moore (ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) to let us know if you would like to be part of this group and we will make sure you get a link to the offering. We also encourage those participating to join the Zoom gathering at 9:55 to avoid disrupting the meditation.

February

2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7 Ad Hoc 7 Civic Symphony Violin Rehearsal		12 Bible Study	10 Guided Meditation 7 Choir Rehearsal 7 Building & Grounds		3 Circle of Care
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
9 Church School 9:55 Worship 1 College Students	5 ONA 6:30 Book Discussion Group	3 Prayer Shawl 5:30 Justice Education 7 Finance Team Mtg	12 Bible Study 7 ECM	4:30 Care & Visitation		
14	15	16	Ash Wednesday 17	18	19	20
9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 	Spire deadline 6 Thriving Congregations	6:30 CE Community of Practice	12 Bible Study 7 Ash Wednesday Service	7 Building & Grounds		
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
9 Church School 9:55 Worship	6:30 Book Dis- cussion Group	3 Prayer Shawl	12 Bible Study			
28						
9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group						