



THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Edwards Church Community,

It is not too soon to start planning for how we will come “back to normal,” as if the return of some members of our community to the sanctuary on Sundays will demonstrate that all is as it was and should be. The return of people to the sanctuary and gathering for communal worship will be signs of life returning to patterns that we enjoy. It will be genuinely reassuring. But what will we have learned and how will we have grown in the meantime, if all we did was survive?



A decade ago, my mother and one of my sisters were being treated for breast cancer at the same time. For Mom it was a recurrence of the disease that would ultimately end her life. For my sister (and all who love her) it was the sort of threat every family dreads. Even so, the minister of faith formation in the church she attends, who knows my sister very well, asked her the first time they were alone, “What new thing is God inviting you to learn?”

If one already accepts that illness and suffering happen in life, even to “good people” who do all they can to avoid it and do not “deserve” it, then a life-threatening illness is not a cause for complaint (Why me?) so much as a time to revisit basic questions. (Have I been living with the right priorities?) That faith formation minister and my sister knew each other well enough that the minister could offer the question lovingly, and my sister received it as an expression of spiritual support.

When Jesus first tells his inner circle that following him will also require facing death, they recoil, and with good reason. No one chooses death, at least not when they have a choice. But we all know that eventually we will die, and that how we live with that knowledge makes all the difference.



When Jesus says to Peter, the other disciples, and the crowd around them, “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it,” he is not being metaphorical. He is challenging them to take the first difficult step toward finding the depth of meaning they will discover in their lives when they bring their lives into his movement. He is also offering them the grace that will help them do it. Lent is the time in the Christian liturgical year set aside to ask ourselves what is holding us back from living “for the sake of the gospel.”

As individuals, we come to terms with our own conscience, or we don't. As a community, we are a gathered body of Christ with almost 200 years of history. We need to ask as fearlessly as possible what stands between us and living our collective life as a church "for the sake of the gospel". I think our 2015 vision statement is best understood as requiring that. And as individuals living in community, we need an ongoing dialog about keeping each other and our church focused on that. You and your church have moral claims on one another, or you are not really a church, you are a club.

In 2021, as we prepare to transition to the next phase of life with COVID (I'd love to say post-COVID, but we all know that could be premature) I hope we can focus on becoming an anti-racist church. As an overwhelmingly white mainline church, most of whose members are secure (in terms of work, housing, and food) and which has the added advantage of institutional wealth, we have a lot to consider.

The year since March 2020 has laid bare the reality of continuing racism in our country and world. I cannot imagine trying to deny it in the face of all we've seen. Undoing the embedded racism in our society can start with acknowledging "white privilege". If you are unclear about what white privilege is and how real it is, please read these primers:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/01/16/white-privilege-explained/>

<http://privilege.uccpages.org/>

Deb Moore can also direct you to a number of useful books, many of which can be found in the lending library started by our Justice Education Ministry Team, whose current focus is anti-racism.

Like the dawning realization that we are capable of being self-centered and don't always catch ourselves in the act (theologians call it acknowledging our sinful nature), merely being willing to accept the reality of white privilege and its impact on people of color in our society is just the beginning.

What are we willing to give up to dismantle the vestiges of legal, but nonetheless immoral, racism in the past? What social or economic advantages, what habits of thought, what attitudes are we willing to notice still alive in us and our world and actively uproot? What new commitments might we make and, with the grace of God, learn how to keep to free ourselves and our neighbors from those invisible but very real chains?



This Easter, may we rise to new life in Christ not only with renewed awareness of what God wants for us, but also what God wants from us, until God's love and justice is shared equally among all her children.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Psalm 139:1-5

O my Beloved, You have searched me
and known me!

You know when I sit down and
when I rise up;

You discern my innermost thoughts,
You find me on the journey and
guide my steps;

You know my strengths and
my weaknesses.

Even before words rise up in prayer,
Lo, You have already heard
my heart call.

You encompass me with love where'er I go...
from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan Merrill

Each of the liturgical seasons of the Church year are sacred and each offer opportunity for reflection, for wondering, for discerning, for journeying as disciples of Christ and as beloved children of our God. Lent, for many of us, beckons an intentional call to wilderness formation as we go through this period of forty days and forty nights (not counting Sundays).

“The only way out is through, but the only way through is in” is a line from a Carrie Newcomer song that has sparked reflection for me on several fronts before the beginning of this Lenten season and continuing into it. It is often said that we can’t get to Easter without going through Lent – Holy Week in particular, and I would agree. Christians are encouraged to consider engaging in a spiritual practice such as prayer, fasting (giving something up or taking something on), and almsgiving as we go through this liturgical season.

During his time of wilderness formation, we are told that Jesus fasted from food and drink. We can imagine that as he journeyed through this time Jesus prayed, even called out to God for guidance in discerning what God would have him be about and how God would form him for that to which God called him. We can imagine, like the psalmist, that Jesus was aware God knew his strengths and weaknesses, and that God would guide him and encompass him with love.

I recently learned from a friend that the space the early Christians named where Jesus was in the wilderness translates as ‘quarantine.’ For a year, the world has been in varying degrees of quarantine and many have faced temptations of one sort or another. Personally, after nearly ten months without the touch of another human being, my greatest temptation is to get in my car, drive to Southeastern Mass and hug Ryan, Ashleigh, Matthew and Jenn. It wouldn’t stop with them, however; as I would be further tempted to visit each of my siblings and their kids to do the same.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke each provide us with an accounting of Jesus being led or driven into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil with power, principalities, and protection.

“The only way out is through, but the only way through is in...again.” The songwriter adds the word ‘again’ the second and third times she sings the line. In my Lenten reflection during this pandemic time, my heart and mind have been drawn to the imposed quarantine, wilderness time, all those who have been oppressed, excluded and still are by the racist policies, injustices, and the systemic inequities our Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and LGBTQ+ siblings have endured again and again for generations as the power, principalities and protection have benefited those in the dominant culture.

“The only way out is through, but the only way through is in...again.” In my Lenten wilderness formation this year, I pray that the God who knows my strengths, weaknesses, and my heart call, will guide my steps during my continued journey in, through, and out towards helping to bring about God’s vision of shalom for all. I pray the same for this faith community as we continue to live into our Vision Statement, listening for God’s still-speaking voice as to how God would form, reform, transform us in the process.

May God guide your steps and encompass you with love during this time of wilderness formation.

Deb

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!

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.

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption by Byran Stevenson. The author presents a stark understanding of the racial inequities that characterize both law enforcement and the justice system. "Injustice is not easy to notice when it affects people different from ourselves; that helps explain the obliviousness of our own generation to inequity today. We need to wake up. And that is why we need a Mandela in this country." -Nicholas Kristof, The New York Times.

So you want to talk about race by Ijeoma Oluo. "An actionable exploration of today's racial landscape, offering straightforward clarity that readers of all races need to contribute to the dismantling of the racial divide." Hari Kondabolu

The Words of Desmond Tutu: Selected and Introduced by Naomi Tutu. Contains photographs, chronology, and over 100 excerpts from speeches, sermons, and writings.

For youth in grades 6-12, their parents and teachers:

This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons On How to Wake Up, Take Action, And Do The Work by Tiffany Jewell, Illustrated by Aurelia Durand. "A book that brings together kids, families, teachers, and administrators in conversation." Matthew Winner, The Children's Book Podcast. (parents: please let Deb Moore know if you would be interested in exploring this book in family clusters).

For young children:

Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky. by Faith Ringold. "Cassie and BeBe learn of the great-great-grandparents' long journey from slavery to freedom, guided by the voice of Harriet Tubman."

Whoever You Are by Mem Fox, Illustrated by Leslie Staub. A story that weaves its way around our earth, across cultures and generations celebrating the bonds that unite us all.



Open and Affirming Ministry Team (ONA)

Join the Open and Affirming Team on March 21st (time: TBA) for a discussion of the UCC film, *Call Me Malcolm*. Malcolm, a 25 year old seminary student shares his story and that of other transgender people as he explores his faith, love, and gender identity. “The good news of Malcolm’s story is the way in which shame and fear are overcome by grace, compassion and knowledge.”

You can stream this film for free on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh4Pv10IFyc> or it may be borrowed on DVD from Edwards Church by contacting Deb Moore.

ONA March Reading / Film Suggestions

Sister Outsider, by Audre Lorde, Black lesbian feminist, poet, and cultural activist of the 70s and 80s; This collection of her essays and speeches on sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, and class that puts forward the idea of social differences as a vehicle for action and change is still meaningful today.

The Black Flamingo, by Dean Atta; This young adult book tells the story of a gay, mixed-race teen growing up in London, coming out, and beginning to learn who he is and where he fits in.

Both books are available from local libraries or as an e-book download from C/WMARS.

Disclosure, 2020 (1 hr. 47 min.) Rated TV-Mature; inspiring Netflix BLM documentary featuring Laverne Cox’s candid interviews of more than two dozen transgender members of the tv/movie community. Director Sam Feder’s aim was to show the connection between the history of transgender representation in film and television, society’s beliefs, and the reality of trans lives.

Calling All Graduates!

Whether you are graduating from high school, college; a public, private, or religious institution, please contact the church office and let us know where you are graduating from and what your plans are.

We will list these milestones in upcoming Spires so that your church family can celebrate with you!

Our Generosity Matters to our Neighbors

Recently we requested donations of non-perishable food for refugee families living in the Valley who had become food insecure as a result of the pandemic. The response was fantastic. Below is a thank you letter sent to PVIRAG, a group in which Edwards Church members and staff participate, which forwarded both the request and the thank you to us.

Dear members of PVIRG,

Many thanks to you for the incredible support and donations of nonperishable goods to Jewish Family Service of Western Ma. The bags overflowed, my arms were sore (a GOOD sore!) from the weight of the donation bags as we loaded them into cars and the display that we laid out for our clients was beautiful. We have held two client pick up days this week and the response has been wonderful. Clients have left with flowing bags of groceries that they have chosen themselves from the laden tables.

These touches make such a difference- not only with needed food but also with the demonstration of a community group that cares and walks the walk!

We are grateful to all of you for spurring this on. As winter and the pandemic drag on, it is a ray of light to know that you came together to get this done!

Thank you again.

Warmly,

Maxine Stein, CEO, Jewish Family Service of Western Ma.

“Being Trans and a Person of Faith”

Thursday, March 11, 6 p.m. EST, via Zoom

Registration link: <https://umass-amherst.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwof-urpjkpHt2zINANeqIQRopxEEMT0qFMa>

A panel discussion with:

Joy Ladin, professor of English at Stern College for Women at Yeshiva University, and author of *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders* and *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*

Louis Mitchell, co-founder and executive director of Transfaith and an ordained United Church of Christ minister

Tynan Power, co-founder of the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity and moderator of the TransMuslims email group

Z Shane Zaldivar, ecumenical and non-denominational outreach pastor, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, and former Marine

Sponsored by the UMass Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and the UMass Stonewall Center. Co-sponsored by Amherst College's Queer Resource Center and Holyoke Community College's Rainbow Forward

Snowstorm Spurs Cathedral in the Night Mission Team to Quick Action



"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." The U.S. Postal Service motto was reappropriated on Sunday, February 7th by the Cathedral in the Night Mission Team. With a storm predicted that could bring 5 or more inches of snow that afternoon, the team of 26 volunteers quickly pivoted and made arrangements to get sandwiches and desserts ready early so the Frogameni family could collect food items from everyone's homes prior to the worst of the storm. All the

delicious food we delivered was especially appreciated by the Cathedral in the Night congregation on that cold, wet day. Thanks to all team members for your flexibility and "can-do" attitude! The next date on which Edwards Church will serve as a worship partner with Cathedral in the Night will be Easter Sunday, April 4th. Want to learn more about our team? Contact Debbie Davis at debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413.626.5117.



Save the Date: Super Saturday Spring 2021

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

For more information and to register visit www.sneucc.org. Please let Michael and Deb know if you plan to attend. Should you register please submit your receipt to Sabra Aquadro for reimbursement.

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. All family members welcome!

You Bet Your Brass!

The Holyoke Civic Symphony's third virtual concert will premiere on YouTube on Sunday, March 7 at 3:15 pm. This free concert will feature performances by local brass players as well as an archive video of the full orchestra.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS



Thomas Bankman	Martha McCullagh
Matthew Buckley Wells	Taylor Cook
Michele Carroll	Paula Mattison
Elizabeth Henneman	Ken Longstreeth
Alfred Griggs	Eugene Sielski
Ruth Griggs	Rev. Michael McSherry
Gwenn Swift	Lynda Erickson
Courtney Aquadro	James Stokes-Buckles

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:

3/14 & 3/28



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.



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.

College Students

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



March 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	1 7 Ad Hoc Reopening	2	3 12 Bible Study 6 Thriving Congregations	4 10 Guided Meditation 7 Building & Grounds 7 Choir Rehearsal	5	6 3 Circle of Care
7 Daylight savings begins 9 Church School 9:55 Worship (Communion Sunday) 1 College Students	8 5 ONA	9 3 Prayer Shawl 6:30 Justice Education 7 Finance	10 12 Bible Study 7 ECM	11 4:30 Care & Visitation	12	13
14 9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	15 SPIRE Deadline 6 Thriving Congregations	16 6:30 CE Community of Practice	17 12 Bible Study	18 7 Building & Grounds	19	20
21 9 Church School 9:55 Worship (Time TBD) ONA film discussion	22	23 3 Prayer Shawl	24 12 Bible Study	25	26	27
28 9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	29	30	31 12 Bible Study	1	2	3