

# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 31 No. 4 April 2021

Dear Edwards Church Community,

As we observe the second Easter during the pandemic, I wonder what the resurrected body of our church will look like in 2021 and beyond. For many of us, the experience of living through the last year has been a lot like being entombed, so resuming anything like our pre-pandemic lives will be a resurrection. Our new life, our “new normal,” will not be exactly like our old life. We cannot yet know all the particulars, but as it unfolds – and it will – we will recognize that new life is emerging.



In the gospel stories, none of the people who knew him best were able to recognize the resurrected Jesus right away. He was that different. But with a little help and time to process their thoughts and feelings together, the community that formed to follow Jesus adapted and carried on his ministry. “Christ died on the cross and rose as the church.” (Rev. Carl Scovel) They grew deeper in their commitment to him, each other, and the unfolding kin-dom he proclaimed.



Whenever we return to the sanctuary, it will look a bit different. Not as different as Jesus looked to his followers on that first Easter, but different. During the pandemic, the Building and Grounds Team has taken advantage of reduced foot traffic to address needed projects that would be harder during normal operations. One such project is replacing floor tiles that contain asbestos. As you can see in the B&G article on page 7 of this Spire, that project requires moving the pews, which inspired several members of our community to wonder if this could be an opportunity to explore a new way to use the space in which we worship.

Acting on a recommendation from the Worship Planning Team and others, we will be experimenting with the space occupied by the first few pews in the front of the sanctuary. By leaving them uninstalled for several months, we will have the opportunity to try different seating arrangements in a more flexible space. The desire to try this predates the pandemic. The experience of seeing the faces of others in worship this past year has also fed a desire to maintain that sense of intimacy when we return. Finally, there is hope that this will help address lingering physical access issues.

This is an experiment. Nothing has been decided, other than the willingness to try it. After all, “we are a Christian church asking God to open us to a new way.” There will be opportunities for further discussion and trying different arrangements, including the way it has been for decades, before any decision is made. “Knowing that the road is long, we choose to walk together.”



Just as we flex our adaptive muscles to experiment with the pews, we are being invited by external conditions to stretch our thinking about how we use the church’s wealth to give life to our vision. The pandemic has exposed persistent economic and racial injustices. We are also experiencing an historically high stock market. “Encountering the world’s joys and suffering, we offer ourselves as instruments of love and justice.” Can and should we be bolder – not careless, but bolder – in using our gifts to address our neighbors’ persistent suffering? Are not we, as a gathered community, called to love and serve the widest circle possible, since we are institutionally blessed?

Finally, during this pandemic year, the Care and Visitation Ministry Team has worked quietly and effectively to stay in touch with many members of our community. Some have been especially challenged by the pandemic. Others have “only” had to live through the isolation, boredom, and uncertainty. Whatever your experience, I hope you have felt the connection we tried to maintain. Some of that takes place in Sunday worship. The rest happens in different ways. If you feel your connection needs a booster shot, please contact me or Deb Moore. We need your help to do our best.

Michael: [minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) and (413) 531-9729  
Deb: [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) and (413) 275-5507

In the Spire last June, I mentioned that periods of great stress tend to expose existing flaws or weaknesses in any system. There is nothing predictive about that just a truism of physical, emotional, political, economic, and other systems. What I did not mention then is the flip side, that periods of great stress also tend to confirm, even deepen, existing strengths. As we emerge from the tomb of this pandemic, may we rise to the new life God has envisioned for us and incarnate it as fully as the Spirit empowers us. God has been with us in every moment while we’ve been entombed. We can and will rise to new life.

In faith, with hope, for love,  
*Michael*

## *From the Minister of Faith Formation*

Dear Beloved of God,

“A single crocus blossom ought to be  
enough to convince our heart that springtime,  
no matter how predictable is somehow  
a gift, gratuitous, gratis, a grace.”  
– David Steindl Rast –

At the time of this writing, Holy Week is just under two weeks away. During that week, we will remember Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the waving of palm branches and the events that would lead to his betrayal and death like his overturning tables on the grounds of the temple symbolically exposing the roots of an unjust economic and political system.

Full disclosure: when writer’s block stalled further composition of this offering, I embarked on a walk to and around one of my favorite outdoor sanctuaries - the Whiting Reservoir. A transformation occurs within me when I walk without intention to maintain or surpass a time previously set or to track steps on my Fitbit. My spiritual being becomes fully open to the Divine, the sacredness of all that is around, and the wonderings stirred – often by trees. For example, the one stripped of its bark and riddled with the tattoos left by the pileated woodpecker(s) who feasted upon the nutrition it offered to them. Or the one whose base seamlessly opened into four other sections, the arm of one which also fed woodpeckers the others which held migrant branches separated from their tree of origin for whatever reason. Multiple trees supported others in various stages of wellbeing.

During this walk (which did take longer than usual), I was drawn in a more compelling way to the trees downed at their very base, roots exposed for all to see. Admittedly, there have been many times that while taking notice of “another downed tree,” I just continued walking. On this afternoon, I ventured from the well-traveled path to really look at the uprooted bases of several of the trees, one of which was taller than me. While most of the exposed roots dangled from their bases exposed to the elements, others appeared to remain embedded in the earth not fully uprooted. I wanted to touch the roots, feel the gnarly knots, the thin fibers. I wanted to listen and hear what it was like for them to be underground nurturing the life flourishing from them and to now be separated from that into which they were rooted. I wondered about the blessings and the trauma the trees and the roots experienced. I still do.

On the day we celebrate as Palm Sunday, another political group was making an entrance into Jerusalem from the opposite direction of those following Jesus. Representatives of the Roman empire who clearly did not want their systems to be uprooted fearing the loss of what they were living and profiting from were there to ensure their sovereignty.

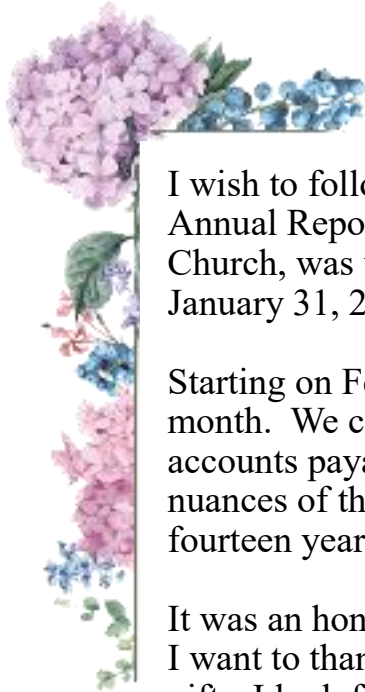
During this pandemic year in which our personal, vocational, and church lives have been uprooted, the inequities rooted in our systemic racist policies on multiple levels have been re-exposed in heightened awareness and pronouncement. Most recently and close to home was the reported incident at the JFK Middle School.

One of the things I have learned and experienced whenever deeply looking at and exploring the history of why we do what we do in whatever setting we find ourselves, is that triggers can bubble up exposing fears, trauma, gnarly knots, slender fibers, lament, severed roots and those still embedded in the foundational ground in which they were planted. “Holy troublemaking” as John Lewis referred to it is a long journey to reconciling and repairing them. A journey not only measured by SMART goals but also measured by the transformation in the way we relate to and live with one another, God, and the world – SHALOM.

As a faith community soon to journey into the fifty days of Easter, we continue in an experimental period with a new governance structure. Our Adhoc and ECM Teams are engaged in discussions around how and when to safely return to worship. Our Building and Grounds Team has been overseeing multiple upgrades to our building. Our Justice Education Ministry Team is focusing on antiracism and white privilege; the ONA (Open and Affirming) Ministry Team is pursuing what that means and evaluating our Welcoming Statement; both teams have and will make opportunities for further exploration available. Our Outreach Grants Team is exploring new possibilities within and beyond the community. In various settings we wonder in what manner existing ministries, some well-adjusted to Zoom, will continue. The Thriving Congregations Team (more to come) will delve into what it means to be a congregation that thrives in relationship to one another, God, and the world.

I wonder what new way(s) our journey through Eastertide to Pentecost and beyond the pandemic might expose, uproot, and lead us to.

Blessings,  
*Deb*



## TREASURERS CORNER

I wish to follow up on my retirement announcement in the 2020 Annual Report. Sabra Aquadro, a life-long member of Edwards Church, was voted to the treasurer position at our annual meeting on January 31, 2021.

Starting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, Sabra and I worked together for the entire month. We covered most aspects of the job, including payroll, accounts payable, and financial reporting. We discussed the many nuances of the treasurer functions that I had discovered over my fourteen years. I remain available to Sabra as questions arise.

It was an honor to serve as your treasurer, starting in March of 2007. I want to thank Reverend McSherry and the church for my retirement gifts. I look forward to attending University of Massachusetts basketball games next fall.

Sincerely,  
Marc Waller



### 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 [musicminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:musicminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org). A long-term commitment is not necessary. Try it for a month and see how you like it!

## Elected Core Ministry (ECM) Team

Dear Edwards Church Congregation,

It has been a year since we suspended gathering in the sanctuary and began worshiping together online. We are truly blessed to have the love and support of God and all of you. The ECM and Ministers with the help of the “When and How to Reopen Ad Hoc Team” have completed policies, procedures and research to support a safe and gradual reopening of the sanctuary. There is a light at the end of this tunnel.

We are continuing to follow recommendations and guidance from the CDC, Mass.Gov, Southern New England Conference of the UCC, and the Northampton Public Health Department. At this time we cannot commit to a firm timetable for returning to in-person worship. We do hope to open as soon as safely possible and we are committed to continue a virtual worship afterwards. To start, we will open the church building for individuals or household pods to visit the sanctuary for prayer and quiet reflection. Information on specifics will follow.

The Building & Grounds Team is moving ahead with removing the old vinyl asbestos tile flooring in the Sanctuary and replacing it with new vinyl flooring. All the pews have been removed, and an abatement contractor has just been selected to remove those old tiles. We will then be installing new flooring in the pew area.

If you would like to talk about the personal or spiritual challenges 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 gradual transition to hybrid and in person worship, you can also contact any member of the ECM at [ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org](mailto:ECM@EdwardsChurchNorthampton.org)

God Bless you

Sincerely,

The Elected Core Ministry

Mark Dion

Sheri Cheung

Jack Hjelt

Margaret Allen

Laura Frogameni Ella Stocker

Leon Drzewianowski

## Building & Grounds

While the physical church has been closed, the Building and Grounds team has undertaken quite a few projects – from small to large. As you drive on Main Street, you will notice a new flag pole installed extending from the front of the church with the Progress Pride Flag that the ONA team purchased. Inside, new carpet tiles have been installed in the Edwards Room and adjoining ramp, as well as in the minister’s office and the Heritage Room. The Edwards Room also had some damage on an interior wall which was repaired and the entire room repainted.



The B&G team also has hired a firm to remove the asbestos tile in the church. The largest areas involve the sanctuary as well as the nursery and adjoining classroom on the lower level. As we are not holding services in the sanctuary at this time, all the pews were removed and placed on the carpeted areas. It is quite a sight. Nearly a dozen pews have damage to their inner bases with visible cracking that will need to be repaired before placing the pews again. This will happen after the new vinyl flooring is installed. It looks to be a busy April for the physical church. Though we all miss worshipping in person, we hope you will enjoy the improvements that are taking place.



-Janet Tucker on behalf of Building & Grounds

## Open and Affirming Ministry Team (ONA)

Celebrate National Poetry Month with these links to bios and poetry from three LGBTQ authors with local connections or a young adult book recommended by one of Edwards' teens.

Mary Oliver: [“What is it you plan to do with your one wild & precious life?”: The Life-saving, Ecstatic Poetry of Mary Oliver](#) and reading her own poems: <https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/sets/mary-oliver-reads-her-poems>.

Ocean Vuong: <https://www.oceanvuong.com/about> and suggestions from his book, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, 2016: <https://poets.org/poem/self-portrait-exit-wounds>

Joy Ladin: <https://onbeing.org/programs/joy-ladin-finding-a-home-in-yourself/> and some selected poems: <https://eoagh.com/three-poems-by-joy-ladin/>

*The Mighty Heart of Sunny St. James*, Ashley Herring Blake (2019). The story of a girl who's had heart surgery and feels like she's restarting her life as she sets new goals, reconnects with her mother, makes a new friend, and uses poetry as self-expression. "A heartwarming and engaging tale that treats Sunny's emerging sexual identity with care, authenticity, and age appropriateness." *School Library Journal*, starred review

## 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 some recommended books (and short descriptions about them) for adults and children as well as a Ted Talk. Reach out to Khalil at the office if you would like to check one out. If you are interested in learning what other books we have for children and adults on the topic of justice, you can reach out to Deb Moore.

*Begin Again: James Baldwin's America And Its Urgent Lessons For Our Own* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr. "Searing, provocative, and ultimately hopeful...One need not agree with everything in these pages to learn much from them. *Begin Again* challenges, illuminates, and points us toward if not a more perfect union then at least a more just one." Jon Meacham.

*Caste: The Origins of our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson. "This Pulitzer Prize-winning and bestselling author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human division."

*Long Time Coming: Reckoning With Race In America* by Michael Eric Dyson. "A brilliant and fiercely eloquent work that traces the roots of racism from slavery and Jim Crow to police brutality and the plague of Black killings in our own day." Robin Diangelo.

*My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem MSW, LICSW, SEP. "This book presents a call to action for Americans to recognize that racism is not only about the head, but also about the body. The author presents an alternative view of what we can do to grow beyond our entrenched racialized divide and takes readers through a step-by-step healing process based on the latest neuroscience and somatic healing methods.

Ted Talk: The Danger of a Single Story / Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

For Children:

*You Are So Wonderful* by Jacqueline J. Lewis. Illustrated by Jeremy Tugeau. "A gorgeous invitation for every child to notice and celebrate their differences. What better gift can we give our children than to learn how to love themselves and the world?" Valarie Kaur, founder of the Revolutionary Love Project.

## **Worship Planning Ministry Team**

Greetings from the Worship Planning Team! Our team met in March to discuss plans for worship services during the remainder of Lent, including incorporating some special features into our Good Friday and Easter Sunday services that take advantage of options afforded us by gathering via Zoom and YouTube. Also, could the possibility of small outdoor gatherings for worship and fellowship be in our foreseeable future? Maybe! We're discussing gatherings that would augment, not replace, our existing virtual Sunday morning worship. Stay tuned to The Spire and the Ministers' Weekly Email Messages for more news on this front as it develops.

Of course, we all look forward to the time when we can safely return to worship service in the church sanctuary. With that in mind, and having heard a wish from a number of folks in our community for a section of individual chairs in the sanctuary that would allow for more flexible seating arrangements, we are exploring a period of experimentation with that concept. Have questions or ideas for our team? Contact any of the ministers or members of the Worship Planning Team. Khalil in the church office can provide you with contact information.

Thanks and "see" you virtually for worship!

Paul Bertram  
Debbie Davis  
Tom Derr  
Barbara Kirchner  
Sandra Rossi  
Ella Stocker  
Jim Stokes-Buckles  
Our ministers: Michael, Deb and David



### **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!



## Circle of Care Ministry Team

### Our Iraqi Refugee Family Celebrates the 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their arrival in the US

Four years ago, on February 17, 2017, we gathered at Bradley Airport to greet our Iraqi refugee family: the mother Jasimiyah Hussein and two of her sons, Yousuf Al Dulaimi and Ayoob Al Dulaimi. At the airport, Jasimiyah shared that it was her birthday, a fitting day to begin a new life.



And so began the journey we have shared with this family as they made their transition to the United States. We have watched them move three times. First to housing on Village Hill, then to a house in Holyoke and now to an apartment in Springfield where they live today. Jasimiyah's health remains stable despite the challenge of Post-Polio Syndrome and recent Gall Bladder surgery. A talented seamstress and decorator, she has transformed their apartment into a lovely oasis reflective of their Bagdad home. Yousuf is his mother's care provider, works in food delivery and takes classes at Springfield Technical Community College. Ayoob has been driving trucks for some time and is now licensed for the big rigs. He works in the Pacific Northwest for Amazon transporting items between their distribution centers. When we visit, we always hear stories about where he is working, but this year he surprised us by walking in the back door with smiles and hugs. He was home to help celebrate his mother's birthday.



Each year, on the anniversary of their arrival, your Circle of Care has joined our family in an anniversary/birthday celebration. This year COVID created a new challenge. But Sarah Briggs and Jack and Chris Hjelt took a birthday cake, a large basket of specialty food items and a beautiful bouquet of flowers to their home on behalf of our Circle. We always ask for news about the daughter and her family in Iraq and the family of the eldest son who are in refugee status in Turkey. We are awaiting the day when they can be reunited with their family in the U.S., and we can meet them in person. We rejoice in the wonderful ways they have adapted to the U.S. and give thanks for their presence in our lives.

*Mark Dion, Nancy Flickinger, Deb Moore, Sarah Briggs and Jack and Chris Hjelt*

# April Birthdays

Karen Pohlman

Frank Heston

Janet Tucker

Karen Hogan

Richard Aquadro

Carla Bee

Michael John Masamitsu

**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

Spring has sprung, and we hope to enjoy more outdoor visits, as there is nothing like being physically in the same place together. We miss seeing you!

We are both in the process of becoming vaccinated. Once we are, physical distancing and face covering will continue for some time. But we look forward to the options vaccination may open. Stay tuned. We will be following public health advice.

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

Michael [minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)

cell: 413-531-9729

Deb [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto: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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of the month at 11:30 until further notice. Upcoming dates are:  
4/11 & 4/25



## 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](mailto: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](mailto:info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)) and/or Deb Moore ([ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto: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 9:55:00-10:30 through May.

Please email Linda Vincent ([lvincent56@gmail.com](mailto:lvincent56@gmail.com)) and Deb Moore ([ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto: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.

# April 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				<b>1</b> 10 Guided Meditation 7 Building & Grounds 7 Choir Rehearsal	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b> 4 Circle of Care
<b>4</b> 9 Church School 9:55 Worship (Easter & Communion Sunday) 1 College Students	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> 5 Thriving Congregations	<b>7</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b> 9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> 3:00 Prayer Shawl 7 ECM	<b>14</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>15</b> SPIRE deadline 7 Building & Grounds 4:30 Care & Visitation	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>18</b> 9 Church School 9:55 Worship 1 Outreach Grants	<b>19</b> 5 ONA	<b>20</b> 6:30 CE Community of Practice	<b>21</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> 9 Church School 9:55 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> 3:00 Prayer Shawl	<b>28</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	