



THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 31 No. 5 May 2021

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Last month I hinted that as we are resurrected from our “pandemic tomb,” we may be asked to consider being bolder – not careless, but bolder – with our institutional wealth. I realize some may wince at me calling the church wealthy because we have such a large investment account. However, I am quite sure there are very few churches in New England, especially away from big cities, with investment assets of \$8.5 to \$9.0 million. It qualifies as wealth.

Institutional wealth and individual wealth are different. I have no idea and no business knowing what anyone in our church has in the bank or earns from their work, retirement savings or other assets (if you are lucky enough to have them). As your pastor, however, I am keenly interested in how we as a Christian community, a local body of Christ, incarnate the values we claim. The much discussed decline of mainline Christian churches is often attributed by those who study that decline to a disconnect, perceived most clearly by those who see the church only from the outside, between “talk and walk.” We are well positioned to refute claims of tepid Christianity.



You have all heard the old saying about money and manure, i.e., they don’t do any good unless you spread them around. That is not an argument for being undisciplined. It is an argument to be even better stewards by sharing deliberately.

Years ago the prominent evangelical writer Jim Wallis went through his Bible and cut out all the passages having to do with poverty, hunger, and sharing. He held up his Swiss cheese Bible to show wealthy Christians how much they were neglecting the Biblical lessons if they neglected to share in meaningful ways.



Several years ago, we decided as a church to give \$50,000 to the Friends of the Hampshire County Homeless for transitional housing for young adults, which has been a wonderful success. At an April 18th meeting of the Outreach Grants Ministry Team, there was a spirited discussion about supporting the proposed Resilience Hub (for which the City recently obtained an option on the Roundhouse Building). This is very tentative at this point, but do not be shocked if a proposal emerges later this spring seeking congregational approval for a substantial gift to that cause. We will not always be in a position to be so generous, but now we are.

Last month I also wrote about the abatement project to remove old floor tiles that contained asbestos. They were safely removed and new tiles will be installed soon in the sanctuary, administrative office, first floor hallway, and downstairs classrooms. We expect that to be completed in May. Once we reopen, you will notice the renewal.

The process of re-opening is proceeding. Khalil, Sabra, Deb and I are in the office pretty regularly and have been for many months. David comes in to record music for Sundays. We have ongoing Buildings and Grounds activity all the time. MANNA is using the facility on occasion, and our Cathedral in the Night crew uses the kitchen every other month.

We are now planning and taking other steps to prepare for live streaming from the sanctuary as soon as we can after Memorial Day. Once Deb, David, the tech crew (which may be more than Cynthia and Greg by then), and has developed a system for coordinating the increased amount of technology involved, and once all the other support systems are ready, we will have our first “hybrid” worship service.

Here are some highlights, taken from a still in draft form reopening plan. They indicate what you can expect when you come to church for a combined in person and live streamed service (a “hybrid service”):

- Attendance in person will require pre-registration with the office.
- Registrants will be provided with a copy of the Covid Pre-Check Form (see page 11 of this Spire). Simply by attending on Sunday you confirm (a) that you have no answers that would require you not to come and (b) you will inform the church if you later develop COVID-19 symptoms.
- Face masks will be required to enter the building and must be worn at all times.
- There will be assigned seats for your household. You will need to maintain physical distance from all others not in your household, even from a friend you know is vaccinated. It is a system of mutual protection for groups when indoors.
- Even though we strive to follow public health guidance and provide a safe environment, we cannot say there will be no risk from coming out to a gathering of people in public. Think of this like going to the supermarket or drug store (only we have been closed for a year).

This whole process is often frustrating, confusing, and at times downright tiresome. And we endure it because we care for and about each other.

It is as if our whole society is gradually wading back into deeper and deeper water, for a recreational swim, after being terrified by a shark sighting. The sharks are real. We have a form of “immunity,” a protective net called vaccines, we are told will protect us well against almost all known species of the sharks. But there are occasional holes in the net. And new sharks keep evolving. So we will be as vigilant as the public health “life guards” tell us we should be until they blow the “all clear” signal for deep water swimming.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

— Teresa of Avila (attributed)

We are about half way through the fifty-day season of Eastertide. During the first forty days the lectionary texts in the Gospels reveal the resurrection appearances of Jesus to the Apostles followed by the ten days between Jesus' Ascension and the Pentecost event in Acts, Chapters 1 and 2.

Luke's account of two among Jesus' followers, Cleopas and his companion journeying from Jerusalem along the Road to Emmaus follow the accounts of the resurrection and empty tomb. On this road trip to and from Jerusalem and the revelation of the Risen One in the sharing of a meal, Cleopas and his companion came to understand and recognize what proclaiming, serving and witnessing in Jesus' name would be about. Like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of Jesus and the other women with them, the two had to put away *their hopes and expectations of Jesus* in response to *Jesus' expectations of his followers*.

Vows affirmed during the Sacrament of Baptism and our present Vision Statement (adopted, June 2015) continue to offer us guidance – and impetus - as we seek to be faithful disciples along the Emmaus Road we find ourselves traveling. Fortunately, ***knowing the road is long we choose to walk together.***

Amy Jill Levine, Hebrew scholar, co-editor of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, and Smith College graduate, notes on Luke 24:30-31 as it pertains to the opening of eyes: “revelation is connected with the breaking of bread in a fellowship meal; faith comes through revelation not Bible study, logic, or even a vision.” Whether we agree with her comment or not, it invites wonderful conversation and wondering. How do we as a faith community and individuals serve as revelatory disciples? What practices do we engage in that open our eyes to the Christ in our midst or ***a new way*** to love and serve God, each other and neighbor across multiple generations and cultures? What practices do we engage in to ***listen for God's still speaking voice as we long to find the holy in ourselves and others?*** How might we continue or in ***a new way offer ourselves as instruments of love and justice?*** The Thriving Congregation Team (Sarah Briggs, Sheri Cheung, Melissa Mattison, Karen Pohlman, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Michael McSherry and Deb Moore) has begun to explore ways to invite conversation about what it means to be a thriving congregation ***gathering at the crossroads of ancient faith and contemporary culture.*** Stay tuned!

With prayers for open hearts, eyes, ears, and minds as we continue the journey of faithful discipleship.

*Blessings,
Deb*

Calling all Gardeners and Aspiring Gardeners!

The Edwards Church gardens between the building and the public sidewalk, as well as the courtyard at the rear of the church, are enjoyed by our congregation as well as everyone who walks by or sits waiting for the traffic light at the intersection to turn green. Be a part of the team who brings this joy to all these folks! Those new to gardening as well as "seasoned" gardeners are welcomed and the gardening can be done on your own schedule in a safe manner. If you can help or want more information about what this would entail, please contact Debbie Davis at debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413.626.5117.

For inspiration, check out the beautiful colors in the garden this spring. Thanks to garden team member Fumiko Brown for the great pic!



Hidden Talents

The Holyoke Civic Symphony, under the direction of David Kidwell, will present its final virtual concert of the season on Sunday, May 2 at 3:15pm. The concert, entitled "Hidden Talents," will feature members of the orchestra playing instruments other than the ones they usually play in the orchestra. Maestro Kidwell will also highlight eight hidden gems in the city of Holyoke. The link to watch this free concert can be found on the orchestra's website: holyokecivicsymphony.org.

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. A long-term commitment is not necessary. Try it for a month and see how you like it!

New Way Fund Grants

The Outreach Grants Ministry Team has made the following grants:

1. \$5000 to the Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT), Pittsfield, to support a program to be carried out by BEAT's partner, the Rusty Anvil, connecting marginalized youths to nature by means of excursions to forests nearby and in Vermont. The program will benefit young people residing in Pittsfield who are members of the Black, indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities.
2. \$2000 to the First Church UCC of Phoenix, to support an interfaith program serving a weekly meal to asylum seekers who have been granted entry to the US at the southern border.
3. \$4000 for a "winter boots ministry" to purchase badly needed winter footwear for homeless and low-income residents who frequent our local sidewalks. Edwards Church partnered with Cathedral in the Night and Ted's Boot Shop to facilitate this program, which provided quality boots at a 20% discount. The arrangement substituted for a similar program normally carried out by the Friends of Hampshire County Homeless People, on hiatus this winter but now ready to resume operation.

Team members welcome suggestions from members of the Edwards Church Community at any time.

Heather Bell, Mariana Haughey, Jack Hjelt, Rob Hutchison, Barbara Kirchner, Jeanne Kocsis, Shauneen Kroll, Hazel Waller

Ex officio: Debra Moore, Michael McSherry

Hannah Berube, Wayne Smith and Greg Hayes: Live from the Sanctuary

Sunday, May 9 at 7 PM

In this special live-streamed Mother's Day presentation, clarinetist Hannah Berube, cellist Wayne Smith and pianist Gregory Hayes perform two of the greatest works composed for their trio of instruments - Beethoven's 1798 Piano Trio No. 4 in Bb, op. 11, "Gassenhauer-Trio;" and Brahms' 1891 Trio in A Minor, Op. 114.

Donations will be split between the performers and the sanctuary work of the Unitarian Society of Northampton.



For more details, visit the series website: <https://livefromsanctuary.org/>

ONA Suggestions for May

Pride is celebrated in Northampton in May and if it weren't for Covid, this year would be Noho's 40th celebration. Watch out next year! Celebrate Noho Pride with these books about the rainbow flag and Pride celebrations for children and the young at heart, available at local libraries.

Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag, Rob Sanders (2018) Read Aloud Picture Book | Brightly Storytime, 8:35 minutes.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LU2daQ2exs>

The Rainbow Flag | Bright, Bold, and Beautiful, Michelle Millar Fisher (2019) The story of how Gilbert Baker and his friends created the Rainbow Flag in 1978. Available only through CW/MARS.

Rainbow, A First Book of Pride, Michael Genhart (2019) Children from diverse families demonstrate the meanings of the colors in the rainbow flag and then come together at a Pride parade.

This Day in June, Gayle E. Pitman (2014) This book welcomes readers to experience a pride celebration in rhyme. Includes a Reading Guide with facts about LGBT history and culture and information on how to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity in age-appropriate ways.

A film recommended by an Edwards' teen:

The Half of It, 2020 (1hr. 45 min.) PG-13. When smart but cash-strapped teen Ellie Chu agrees to write a love letter for a jock, she doesn't expect to become his friend - or fall for his crush. A coming-of-age comedy-drama by Alice Wu available on Netflix.



Earth Day Announcement

The Investment Committee of Edwards Church in Northampton recently directed its financial advisor, Raymond James, to divest three remaining petroleum-related stocks from the church's investment portfolio. The committee had discussed this move at several previous meetings over the past year or so. Stock holdings of other petroleum-based energy companies had been divested earlier, so this most recent action is the culmination of an on-going process of aligning the church's investments with its values – protecting and honoring the Earth and its people.

The committee is using the proceeds from the divestments to purchase stock in three renewable energy companies. These firms are providing energy from wind, solar, and hydro sources, as well as promoting electric vehicle technologies. These enterprises will help reduce carbon emissions and aid in the fight for a healthier climate.

Justice Education

The Justice Education Team continues to gather resources to share with the Edwards Church community pertaining to race and systemic racism. Here are some recommended books (and short descriptions about them) for adults and children as well as information about a highly recommended local art exhibit. Reach out to Khalil in the office if you would like to borrow one of the resources. If you are interested in learning what other books/DVD's we have for children and adults on the topic of justice, you can reach out to Deb Moore.

Eric Carle Museum: February 7 – July 3, 2021: Picture the Dream: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Children's Books. The exhibit features eighty artworks based on three themes: A Backward Path, The Rocks are the Road, and Today's Journey, Tomorrow's Promise.

The books listed below, most featured in the exhibit, and preceded by an * are available for borrowing from our library.

**Hands Up!* by Breanna J. McDaniel, Illustrated by Shane W. Evans. Every day, Viv raises her hands up in moments of joy and triumph. When she gets a little older, she joins with her community in a protest march where they put their hands up together in resistance and strength. (ages 4-8 years)

Lizzie Demands a Seat! Elizabeth Jennings Fights for Streetcar Rights by Beth Anderson, Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. The story of an African American woman who, in 1854, fought back against a New York City street car company for unjustly denying her entry to a street car.
(ages 7-10 years)

**Pass It On: African American Poetry for Children* Selected by Wade Hudson. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. Featured poetry by Langston Hughes, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Gwendolyn Brooks and others. (ages 4-8 years)

**Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o, Illustrated by Vashti Harrison. Sulwe (pronounced *sool wei*) "has skin the color of midnight and just wants to be beautiful and bright like her mother and sister. A magical journey in the night sky opens her eyes and changes everything. A whimsical and heartwarming story that will inspire children to see their own unique beauty." (ages 4-8 years)

**We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices.* Forward by Ashley Bryan. "Features essays, letters, poems, and stories from fifty of the foremost children's authors and illustrators." (Ages 8-12)

This month's featured DVD's also available for borrowing:

42 The Jackie Robinson Story (PG-13) 128 minutes. 2013. DVD

If Beale Street Could Talk (R for language and some sexual content) 119 minutes. 2019.

Blue Ray and DVD



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:
5/9 & 5/23



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 9:55:00-10:30 through June.

Please email Linda Vincent (lvincent56@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.

May Birthdays



Jody Gerbasi
Ann Abel
Sarah Briggs
Janice Longstreeth
Sally Griggs
Debra Davis
Lynda Kamik
Janie Thurber
Barbara Kirchner

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

cell: 413-531-9729

Deb ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

cell: 413-275-5507

May God bless and keep us all!



Progress Pride Flag

Have you noticed the new rainbow flag with chevron flying outside the church and wondered what it's about?

The familiar rainbow Pride flag has been evolving since its creation in 1978, when Gilbert Baker's first version was flown for the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. Baker used 8 colors with symbolic meanings for the stripes in the original hand-sewn flags. When mass production began in 1979, two colors were dropped and one color replaced leaving 6 stripes in a natural rainbow pattern, becoming the internationally recognised symbol of the LGBTQ community.

In 2017, the rainbow Pride flag was recreated as the More Color, More Pride flag by Amber Hikes to fly at Philadelphia's City Hall during Pride month. Her inclusive flag added a black and brown stripe at the top to represent LGBTQ people of color who have been marginalized in society, as well as in LGBTQ communities and their own ethnic communities.

In 2018, Daniel Quasar designed the Progress Pride Flag. LGBTQ communities around the world have been adopting this flag as incidents of hatred and discrimination toward people of color and transgender people have increased, raising awareness that intersectional inclusion must be a part of the fight for equality. Edwards' Church has chosen to display this new flag in a visible location outdoors to express solidarity with LGBTQ people. Our original rainbow flag will have a new location indoors. Daniel's idea was to keep the original rainbow flag, but add the right pointing chevron to show forward movement and indicate the continuing need for progress. The light blue, pink, and white stripes represent transgender and non-binary people and the brown and black recognize people of color. The black and the red colors of the flag can also represent those living with or having died from AIDS and the prejudice surrounding them. He says the intent of his new design "... forces the viewer to reflect on their own feelings toward the original Pride flag and its meaning as well as the differing opinions on who that flag really represents ... and also how you might be able to impact the community as a whole through its message."



An integral part of the Edwards Church COVID Safety Protocols is screening each person who enters the church building for virus risk and collecting their contact information for contact tracing. The form on the following page is used for that purpose.

EDWARDS CHURCH SELF CHECK

Please complete this Self Check if you are planning to participate in any activity within the Edwards Church building. If you answer yes to any of the items listed below please stay home or go home.

Circle Y for Yes, Circle N for No, fill out current contact information and then sign below to attest to your choices

Do you or someone in your household have any of these symptoms?

- Y N A fever (temperature 100F or more) or chills
- Y N A new cough
- Y N Runny nose/congestion
- Y N Shortness of breath
- Y N A sore throat
- Y N Fatigue
- Y N Muscle/body aches
- Y N A headache
- Y N New loss of taste/smell
- Y N Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

-
- Y N Have you been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by your doctor or a local public health official?
 - Y N Have you been living in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19?
 - Y N Have you been caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19?
 - Y N Have you been within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more?
 - Y N Have you been coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g., sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19?
 - Y N Have you been coming in direct contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 while that person was symptomatic?

*Please provide your contact information below to help us assist with contact tracing if necessary.

() Check here if your current contact information is on file with the church.

Full Name: _____

Address (City, State, and Zip Code): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**You may skip this step if you have indicated your current contact information is on file with Edwards Church*

May 2021

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