



THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Edwards Church Community,

This is NOT a letter about Nellie, our new puppy. I am merely using her as a handy illustration. This IS a letter about timing, about recognizing where one is in a wider context, and checking our assumptions against changes in context. All that and how we dance with the movement of the Spirit.

Frances and I were talking about whether and when we might get a new dog even before the pandemic. We said goodbye to Maggie, our last dog, in July 2018 and were starting to feel ready around Christmas 2019. Late spring 2020 was our tentative timing, but then last spring competition for rescue dogs and puppy sales skyrocketed. We need any furry companion to be one that will not trigger an allergy. Having comfortably shared our home with one Wheaten terrier for years, we knew that could work. After trying for months to adopt a hypo-allergenic rescue dog, we took the plunge with a breeder.



The last time we brought a puppy into our lives was 16 years ago, when we had three teenagers still in the house. Now we're in our mid 60's and those teens all have homes and pre-pandemic dogs of their own. Bringing a puppy into our lives this time is both harder and easier. Harder because we're a little older and there are fewer helping hands. Easier because we're a little older and have done this before. We approach it with more patience and experience, in part because we must, but we are also wiser and more efficient.



Think back to February 2020, back before the sudden lock downs, the widespread fear of the novel Corona virus sweeping the globe, and the spontaneous outbursts of gratitude for essential workers. Do you remember wondering if it were possible to develop and deploy even one safe and effective vaccine in under a year? Do you remember not having to worry about “variants” or “mask shaming”? We were not naïve. We simply had not yet learned how to survive and then thrive under these new circumstances. We are all still learning and, with God's help, we will be still learning for as long as we live.

The world knows more than it did during the pandemic of 1918, but none of us have been in this situation before. Most of us have had to work through serious challenges in our personal lives and most of us have lived through serious challenges to our social, economic, and political systems – but usually not all at once. Science has evolved immensely in the last century. What about human beings and our systems?

The pandemic has taxed all of us, sometimes in ways that we have in common and sometimes in ways unique to our lot in life. Most of us now just want relief in some form. Relief from fear, which might come from being vaccinated, assuming that being vaccinated is safe for you and available to you. Children under 12 are still not eligible, and even for some who are technically eligible, the vaccines may not be safe or effective for a variety of reasons. Relief may come in a return to some sort of normalcy, but the path to that normalcy may not be the same for all.



During the pandemic, I have often been reminded of two things. First was the importance of remembering that – unless they tell me – I have no idea what someone else has been through, either that day or in their life before that day, so tread gently. The other was that extreme pressure, like the pressure of the last year, can expose and even deepen preexisting flaws.

The flaws we find in each other we may choose to take in stride or address as firmly or gently as the context requires. Bryan Stevenson, the deeply compassionate advocate who wrote *Just Mercy*, which chronicles his work as a death row lawyer, and founded the Equal Justice Institute (eji.org) in Montgomery, AL, reminds us that none of us is as bad as the worst thing we have done. His life's work with those on death row has also taught him how each person's fate is linked to others'. So he counsels forgiveness while practicing an unflinching pursuit of equal justice for all.

Deb reminds us, in her letter, that we are now in the season after Pentecost, that period of the liturgical year and, indeed, that period of human history when we have been given the Spirit to guide and support us. While we work toward a new way of being together, a way sufficiently like what we were used to so that it gives us comfort, and a way sufficiently new so that we can be assured we are not rushing to “get over” and get past the more painful lessons of the pandemic, let us be guided and encouraged by all the gifts the Spirit offers.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Praying¹ by Mary Oliver

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds to a vacant lot, or a few
small stones, just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

According to scripture, the Pentecost event was anything but silent. Rushing, violent, wind, tongues like fire and many voices speaking as the Spirit moved in, around, and through those gathered at this event celebrated as the birth of the church. Moving into the Season after Pentecost – the longest season of the liturgical year – we move into a season noted as a time of growth. Spiritual growth as individual disciples of Jesus, and as a pan-generational faith community of Jesus' disciples *walking together* living into baptismal promises made and affirmed.

This year, the Season after Pentecost will coincide with the season after COVID-19 protocols. It will be important to reflect as individuals, as families, as a faith community where the blue irises, the vacant lots, the losses, the thanksgivings we experienced were as we continue to grow into whatever *new way God may be opening us* to.

The first line of three stanzas one of my favorite reflections around listening begins: “When someone deeply listens to you..” Your Thriving Congregation Team (Sarah Briggs, Sheri Cheung, Melissa Mattison, Karen Pohlman, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Michael McSherry and Deb Moore) has been engaged in empathic listening with cohorts of this Lilly Grant Initiative and with each other. Empathic listening engages listening deeply to others, not to respond and not to pass judgment. It is listening to understand, *to listen for the holy in ourselves and others, and God's still speaking voice* in all of it.

Over the summer, as part of the Thriving Congregations Initiative, your team will begin some listening sessions in person or via Zoom, engagement through social media and interviews within the community. Here is what is scheduled for congregational input during July either in person/or via Zoom: July 6 @ noon; July 13 @ 7:00 p.m; July 15 @ 7:00p.m.; July 18 @ 11:30 (Zoom). In August, we will engage social media input and in September community engagement. Focus questions during this time of empathic listening will center around longings/ losses, hopes/dreams/what is providing meaning/feeding your spirit during this time. Please email Deb Moore: ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org for more information and to sign up for a July listening session.

These conversations are doorways into *the crossroads of ancient faith and contemporary culture* as well as *where God would have us serve as instruments of love and justice* in the midst of *the world's joys and suffering* towards becoming a thriving congregation as we travel through the Season after Pentecost – a season of growth – in the coming months and beyond with the guidance of the Holy Spirit moving in, through, and around us.

*Blessings,
Deb*

Oliver, Mary. *Thirst*
Fox, John. When Someone Deeply Listens to You.

Congratulations to our Graduates!

High School

Stone Cornelius from Northampton High School
Stone will attend New England Conservatory of Music in Boston

Christian Kroll from Smith Academy
Christian will attend Greenfield College next year and then
head to an Arts and Design College

Alice Sturman from Northampton High School
Alice will attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
her field of study is Early Education

Emi Sturman from Northampton High School
Emi will attend Hawaii Pacific University in Honolulu
where she is enrolled in a 5- year BA program in Math & Engineering

Nina Young from Northampton High School
Nina will attend Oberlin College of Arts and Science
in Oberlin, Ohio

College

Natalie Grace Aquadro
Magna Cum Laude from Providence College
Major in Marketing with a minor in Spanish

Claire Cheung from Wheaton College
Major in Women & Gender Studies
with a Minor in Public Health

Emily Smith from Dean College
BA in Dance with a concentration in
Performance & Choreography

Elected Core Ministry

Good News!! We are so pleased to announce that the Elected Core Ministry (ECM) has openings for TWO more people on the Team!

Do you like seeing the interconnectedness of all the different aspects of our church? Are you a little bit interested in everything we do? Does it make you happy to hear about our successes and intrigued to figure ways around barriers to making a difference in the world? Yes?! Then the ECM may be the Team for you!!!

The Elected Core Ministry (ECM) is the Team that tends to the institution of our church to ensure that all ministries in the organizational structure are supported and connected. It is the administrative and operational coordinating body to which the three core ministries - Congregational Life, Worship & Spirituality, Justice & Outreach - report and to which they can turn for support. We strive to foster a culture that encourages and supports the formation of new activities and programs, too.

The ECM is the prudential body with responsibility for the care and management of the institution as a whole, including its property, policies and navigating through the Pandemic. The ECM appoints and oversees the work of several administrative operations ministry teams including: Finance, Investments, Safe Conduct/Safe Churches, Pastoral Congregational Relations, and Personnel.

We don't do any of the above alone! We work closely with our Pastor, the Ministers of Faith Formation and Music, and church staff. We listen, we advise and do some "in between meetings" work. Not too much, just enough, and in return we are nurtured in our faith and by bringing our community together.

If you are even a little interested in talking more about this special opportunity, please contact us by sending an email to:

ecm@edwardschurchnorthampton.org and we'll give you a call!

Sincerely,
The Elected Core Ministry

Mark Dion
Margaret Allen

Laura Frogameni
Sheri Cheung

Leon Drzewianowski
Ella Reily Stocker



Garden Team

Growing Flowers

Several members of the church family planted Cosmos, Zinnias and Marigolds in the top planter and on the some of the sidewalk areas on Saturday (May 15.) Trudy Bertram and Kathy Korza selected the flats of annuals at the nursery, kept them fresh until planting day and then transported them carefully to the church. Marc Waller, Debbie Davis and Cynthia Stanton joined the planting crew. Rev. McSherry prepared the way for this work because, of course, before the planting, the ground must be prepared.

Cynthia and Debbie also helped with the prep work. First, dig up spent tulips, pull the weeds (even though they were pretty) and rake the bed smooth. Amend the soil to replenish nutrients for the new plants to thrive. Dig furrows and the planting begins. Water. Plant. Water again. Mulch. Water.

And on all the days we worked, the passersby would thank us, would tell us how much they looked for the tulips each spring. One fellow said that Christmas didn't begin until he saw the tree in Edwards' window. I am sure we can draw biblical parallels with this gardening work. We did, and do, make a difference in the lives of our bigger community.

Growing Justice

Easy to enjoy the flowers without seeing the work that make the blossoms possible. Members of the Finance Committee want to draw attention to the care and effort made to keep the bills paid for our many social justice initiatives. Much of this work is behind the scenes. Seems a good time to celebrate the work of Khalil Power and Sabra Aquadro. Our time and talent is always needed, and it is well used because they keep us all more organized, planned, directed, disbursed and accounted for, which helps us fulfill our missions. For example, we may not see a transgender refugee using their cellphone. But this is not possible without paying the bill. We may not see the countless messages and tasks that flow through the office. When you think of the all the work needed to support our many initiatives, it is impressive. It takes everyone. Thank you for all you do to keep our many ministries humming!



ONA Suggestions for June

Pride Month, celebrated in June, honors the 1969 Stonewall riots and struggles for equal justice and opportunity for LGBTQ Americans. Learn the history that moved us from the closets to the streets.

Two books available at local libraries:

The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle, Lillian Faderman (2015) Chronicles the struggle for LGBTQ rights in the United States from the 1950s to the early 21st century.

A Queer History of the United States for Young People, Michael Bronski (2019) Explores how LGBTQ people have always been a part of our national identity, contributing to the country and culture for over 400 years. This history is not easy for LGBT youth to find as it's rarely taught or commemorated in schools. Named one of the Best Nonfiction Books of 2019 by *School Library Journal*

Before Stonewall, 1984 (1 hr. 27 min.) and *After Stonewall*, 1999 (1 hr. 26 min.) Two films that tell the history of LGBTQ people from the 1920s through the 90s and how they emerged from being a hidden and hated subculture into a vibrant and integral part of American life.

Available for streaming from Kanopy with your local library card or university ID.

<https://www.kanopy.com/>

Other LGBTQ resources available at Edwards Church:

- *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens*
- *Welcoming and Affirming: A Guide to Supporting and Working with LGBTQ+ Christian Youth*
- *Transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians*
- *Call Me Malcom* (DVD).

There are also several other resources in Deb Moore's office which are available for loan including picture books used during Chancel Step time and in church school.

Pastoral Care In Person – Finally

Spring has sprung, we are now fully vaccinated, and we hope to start seeing a lot more of you in person. We can sit inside or out, though who doesn't love the outdoors on a nice day?! If you are not vaccinated, we can still visit, but may need to take more precautions for your benefit.

Please email anytime or call us at the church office (413) 584-5500 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!

Justice Education Resources

The Justice Education Team continues to gather resources to share with the Edwards Church community promoting an anti-racist bias as well as an awareness to systemic racist policies. Here are this month's recommended books and DVD's (and short descriptions about them) for adults and youth. Also, highly recommended is a local art exhibit. If you would like to borrow any of these recommended resources or are interested in learning what other books/DVD's we have on these topics, feel free to reach out to Deb Moore.

Eric Carle Museum: Through 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.

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race. By Debby Irving. "Brave...a jolting and continuing journey from white oblivion to white awareness described in an honest way that may inspire others to do such transformational work on themselves." Peggy McIntosh.

Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America. By Michael Eric Dyson. "Elegantly written, Tears We Cannot Stop is powerful in several areas: moving, personal recollections, profound analysis, and guidance for moral redemption, a work to relish." Toni Morrison.

We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy. By Ta-Nehisi Coates. "Features Coates's iconic essays first published in *The Atlantic*, including "Fear of a Black President," "The Case for Reparations," and "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," along with eight essays that visit each year of the Obama administration."

FOR CHILDREN/YOUTH:

Freedom over me: Eleven slaves, their lives and dreams brought to life. By Ashley Bryan. "Using original slave auction and plantation estate documents, the author offers a moving and powerful picture book that contrasts the monetary value of a person with the priceless value of life experiences and dreams that a slave owner could never take away." (Ages 6-10)

DVD's:

Hidden Figures (PG) DVD & Blu-Ray set. Tells the incredible, previously untold, story of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson – brilliant African-American women working at NASA. They served as the brains behind the launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit.

The Color Purple (PG-13) 153 min. A Steven Spielberg film based on Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. "Celie's search for fulfillment in a world closed to her becomes a triumph of cruelty overcome by love, of pain eclipsed by joy."



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 through June. Upcoming dates are:
6/13 & 6/27



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 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 (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

June 6th at 1:00 pm (hopefully outdoors) will be our last gathering until September. We will celebrate those graduating from college and welcome those heading to college!



Summer Birthdays



JUNE

Linda Vincent
 Judith Cardell
 Mark Smith
 Jonathon Tucker
 Matthew Teague
 Maryann Bankman
 Thomas Derr
 Robert Daniels
 Jennifer Korza
 David Kidwell
 Mary Lyons
 Sarah McCullagh

JULY

Beth Firmin
 Melissa Mattison
 Christian Schmidt
 Jon Dietrich
 Phyllis Taylor
 Ellyn McAllister
 Schmidt
 Lyle Phipps
 Carl Erickson
 Ron Korza

AUGUST

Glenn Gulotta
 Florence Howes Semb
 Alexandra Webb
 Mark Dion
 Carolyn Dion
 Jeffrey Prince

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!

Sing Virtually with the Choir!

The Edwards Church choir will be putting together one more virtual anthem. Zoom rehearsal will be Thursday, June 4 at 7pm. The choir will be singing David Kidwell's setting of "The Lord's Prayer," which will be used for worship on Father's Day (June 20). Anyone who enjoys singing and is comfortable with cell phones and laptops is welcome. And since it's virtual, there is no geographic limitation.

We hope to have the choir back singing live at some point in the fall. It's been a long time! If anyone is interested in joining the choir in the fall, please contact David Kidwell at music_minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org.

June 2021

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|
| | | 1 | 2 12 Bible Study | 3 7 Choir Rehearsal | 4 | 5 3 Circle of Care |
| 6 10 Worship (Communion Sunday) 1 College Students | 7 | 8 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Finance | 9 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds | 10 6:30 Thriving Congregations | 11 | 12 |
| 13 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group | 14 | 15 | 16 12 Bible Study 6:30 CE Community of Practice | 17 4:30 Care & Visitation | 18 | 19 |
| 20 10 Worship | 21 | 22 3 Prayer Shawl | 23 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 10 Worship | 28 | 29 | 30 12 Bible Study | | | |