



# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 31 No. 8      October 2021

Dear Edwards Church Community,

I daydream about standing in the sanctuary and singing out loud with all of you:

*My life flows on in endless song; above earth's lamentation,  
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn, that hails a new creation;  
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing;  
It finds an echo in my soul – How can I keep from singing? <sup>1</sup>*

If we are lucky, we have enough hope and imagination to see that glimmer on the horizon, the “far-off hymn that hails a new creation.” One and a half years into the first pandemic in a century, I read in the news on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup> that the CEO of Moderna says the virus could be contained a year from now, because vaccines can be produced fast enough to give that many shots. And on Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> the news reported that vaccines for 6-11 year olds could be approved by Halloween. We only need to hang in there, weather the storm, and arrive intact.

A rainbow doesn't have to be dazzling to brighten your day. A simple spectrum of colors streaking across the sky in an arc that hugs the horizon can be enough. As a child, when my father said thunder was the sound of angels bowling, I tried to imagine what angels looked like bending at the knee in a bowling alley – and that last one was a strike! In high school, when our teacher explained the physics of rainbows, I was no less appreciative of the beauty, but saw it with a more nuanced appreciation.



Many of us are discouraged, even despressed at this point in the pandemic. The last year and a half have tested our patience, sometimes with each other as well as the wider context. (Read this UCC Daily Devotional by local pastor Rev. Chris Mereschuk for a humbling take: <https://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional/accidental-cannibals/>) Some of us are frustrated by those who choose not to follow public health recommendations, while others are tired of being told what they need to do to be part of the solution. No one chose for this to happen. Now we find ourselves navigating our way as a community passing through troubled waters.

*What tho' my joys and comforts die? The Lord my Saviour liveth;  
What tho' the darkness gather round? Songs in the night he giveth.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that refuge clinging;  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?*

The pandemic is not over, but we are so done with it, so tired of speaking through masks, of having to wonder in public who poses a risk and who does not. Resorting to lyrics of a 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn may seem like an unlikely comfort, but for me they speak directly to the current challenge, as does the famous painting, below *Gulf Stream*, by Winslow Homer.



In our deepest challenges, our scariest times, we all choose where to focus, what to rely on to help us make it through. Underneath the beauty of art, scripture, or other inspirations, there must be an ultimate truth on which we can rely. All the art created to capture that reassures me, and I hope it helps you, because it evokes how others have made that crossing, keeping an eye on the horizon and tuning their hearts to the “far-off hymn that hails a new creation.”

There is a reason it took a life-threatening storm to get John Newton to write *Amazing Grace*. He had to be that scared, that shaken to acknowledge his need and be cracked open. The first time my oldest sister was diagnosed with breast cancer, the minister of faith formation in the church she was attending – a minister who knew her very well from years of shared spiritual practices – asked “What new thing is the Spirit offering you to learn?” That minister was not being insensitive; she was reframing the experience in a supportive, faith deepening way.

*I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin; I see the blue above it;  
And day by day this pathway smooths, Since first I learned to love it,  
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, A fountain ever springing;  
All things are mine since I am his – How can I keep from singing?*

From now through the end of the pandemic and for the rest of our lives, we can choose to greet serious life-threatening challenges as something merely to survive or treat them also as opportunities to grow in depth of practice and appreciation for our faith. The choice is ours. So Edwards Church community, what new thing is the Spirit inviting us to learn together from this pandemic?

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

1) 19<sup>th</sup> century American Baptist minister Robert Lowry composed the tune for this hymn. The lyrics first appeared in the New York Observer on August 27, 1868, as written by one “Pauline T.” and are in the public domain.

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## In Person Pastoral Care

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We have enjoyed meeting in person with many folks in the community over the spring and summer, and we hope to see each of you as soon as we can. As is always true, if there is a special reason to meet, we want to do that but need you to let us know.

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

## *From the Minister of Faith Formation*

The Lesson of Falling Leaves

By Lucille Clifton

the leaves believe  
such letting go is love  
such love is faith  
such faith is grace  
such grace is god  
I agree with the leaves



Dear Beloved of God,

Oh, Autumn, welcome! Autumn is one of my favorite seasons of the year. I so appreciate Mother Nature and marvel at:

- The many shades of green giving way to shades of yellow, orange, red, and brown forming placemats on the earth they will be covering and enriching.
- Acorns dropping from branches providing nutrition through the winter for their four-legged friends.
- Disrobing tree branches offering windows to landscape previously obscured in the preceding months.
- The relinquishing of present existence to that which will percolate and bear new life in upcoming seasons.
- Migrating birds and butterflies.
- Summer flowers and vegetables welcoming their fall siblings.

Oh, Autumn, welcome! We humans have our own fall rituals. Perhaps, like me, some of you:

- Put away spring and summer clothing and bring out the fall and winter clothing
- I remember my mother changing out summer curtains for fall and winter ones and replacing lightweight bedspreads for heavier ones (especially in the bedrooms upstairs which were not heated).
- Begin a fall cleaning in our living spaces and a fall clean-up in our yards (remember jumping in huge piles of just raked leaves?).
- Decorate our spaces with seasonal icons and items.

Macrina Wiederkehr writes, “Autumn is a wondrous metaphor for the transformation that takes place in the human heart each season. When we notice a subtle change of light outside our windows, we know the dark season is near. Everything is being prepared for winter. Autumn calls us from summer’s playground and asks significant questions about our own harvest: What do we need to gather into our spiritual barns? What in our lives needs to fall away like autumn leaves so another life waiting in the wings can have its turn to live?”<sup>1</sup>

Contemplation on what I might need or desire to gather into my spiritual barn and deepen my spiritual practices, has led me to enroll in a six-week online offering from the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation titled *Opening to the Spirit*.

If you would like to have conversation about your desires for your spiritual barn, please feel free to give me a call.

*Wishing each of you the blessings this harvest season has to offer,*  
*Deb*



1. Rupp, Joyce & Wiederkehr, Macrina. *The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey Through the Seasons*. Sorin Books, IN. 2005. page168.

## **Re-imagining Church School**

Many thanks to parents for responding with thoughts and hopes for church school and the continuing faith formation of our children and youth. Respecting where families are regarding COVID 19, the Delta variant, and no vaccine availability for youth under the age of 12, following CDC and the Northampton Board of Health guidelines continues to be a top priority as we re-imagine church school in Addis Hall and/or outdoors, weather permitting. I am presently planning to visit with families, share faith stories, and leave you with a blessing balm.

## **Edwards Church Library**

Have you visited the Church Library lately? Do you know about the Church Library? For those who may not, it is located in the Heritage Room and has a wonderful selection of books pertaining to theology, spirituality, social justice, anti-racism, climate justice, the history of Christianity, and Congregationalism. If you couldn't make a book discussion group, there are copies of the books discussed. There are different translations and versions of the Bible, Biblical Commentaries and Bible Dictionaries. Many of the books listed in the bulletins pertaining to Open and Affirming and LGBTQ+ issues as well as books listed in recent Spires pertaining to Justice Education are there. And, of course, some good children's literature pertaining to some of the categories listed above. Stop by, browse through them, and check them out.

## **Scholarships**

The Edwards Church Scholarships are available for those in high school, vocational school, college or university. They are also available to those attending an educational workshop, religious conference, workcamp or internship. The due date for submitting an application is October 31. If you would like to receive an application, please email Deb at: [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org).





# GROUP

All youth in Grades 6-12 are welcome to be part of the Edwards Church Youth Group and to invite a friend.

Our October schedule times to be announced:

October 10 - Creation themed hike at Acadia in Easthampton at 1:00 pm, led by Carla Wirzburger. More information on what to bring to follow.

October 24 - Gleaning for Rachel's table along with youth and adults from St. John's Episcopal Church and First Churches.



## Prayer Shawl Ministry

All knitters, crocheters, and weavers are welcome to join this ministry team which meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month via Zoom from 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. 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, please contact the church office at [info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) to arrange a time for pick-up or delivery of a shawl.



## Guided Meditation Offering

This popular offering will start back up on October 7, meeting via Zoom from 9:55 – 10:30 a.m. Please email Linda Vincent

([lcvincent56@gmail.com](mailto:lcvincent56@gmail.com)) and Deb Moore

([ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)) 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

**Re-imagining ministry with our College Students – and those who have graduated** – we will meet via Zoom on October 3 at 1:00p.m. This group is open to Edwards Church and Smith College students.

## October Birthdays

Sidney Letendre

Thomas Bernardin

Charles McCullagh

Henry C. Atwood

Elise Olson

Delores Thayer

Floyd Cheung

Robert Saalfrank

Judith Almeida

Susan Swift

Fumiko Brown

Sid Montague

Janice Batura

Nancy Flickinger

Daisy Letendre

Janet Smith



**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!



### Why We Call Ourselves Manna 'Community' Kitchen

In February of 2020, Manna made a change from doing business as Manna Soup Kitchen to Manna Community Kitchen. While 'Manna Soup Kitchen' is technically still our incorporated name, you may have seen us on social media platforms, marketing campaigns, or in the local news as 'Manna Community Kitchen'. Many people have asked us about the new name and if we are a soup or community kitchen, so I thought I'd use this, Edwards Monthly Newsletter, to give some insight and reasoning behind our 'doing business as' name change.

In 2017, I was a new resident of Northampton and looking for a place to volunteer locally when I first came across Manna Soup Kitchen during a Google search of the words 'Northampton' and 'volunteer'. While I knew the term 'soup kitchen' as a colloquial name for places that serve food to hungry people, it also brought to my mind the photos I'd seen that were taken during the Great Depression of people lined up, waiting for a meal, some even hiding their faces from the camera. As I signed up for my first shift, a slot reserved for serving the meal, I wondered if Manna would experience a similar atmosphere as what I imagined soup kitchens to be like in the 1920s - grim, downtrodden, and morose.

To my surprise, my first shift at Manna in the Edwards Kitchen had not even a shadow of anything remotely close to my preconceived notion. It was clear to me after a mere four hour shift that Manna was a place of acceptance, a place of joy, a place of dignity, and a place of community. While the name 'soup kitchen' had been carried throughout history as a place to receive a meal, Manna was so much more than the association which may arise from the name.

I quickly became a regular face around Manna and got to know Lee, our kind and imaginative chef. Over our many hours of chopping and cooking together, we had conversations about his hopes for Manna's future. Lee hoped that Manna could grow, become more inclusive, and reach even more people and families in the community experiencing various levels of food insecurity. I divulged to him my initial notions of the name 'soup kitchen' and wondered if some people may feel that they truly needed to be in dire straits to call upon the services of a 'soup kitchen', that some may think that Manna's meal program was reserved for people who were unhoused and/or unemployed.

While this thought was not new to Lee and he had been wondering the same thing, these conversations brought about the idea of possibly changing Manna's name to something that would signify that Manna was here for everyone. When I joined Manna's Board of Directors in early 2020, some of the first conversations amongst our fellow board members were about the idea of changing our 'doing business as' name to Manna Community Kitchen. While the idea was met favorably, none of us could have ever predicted that within a couple of months more people in our greater community would be calling on our services than ever before due to the pandemic.

The reality of food insecurity is that it presents itself in many ways and is not just reserved for those who may not know where their next meal is coming from. Food insecurity is present in the choice between paying rent or going to the grocery store. It's present in the decision to stretch that last bit of rice sitting in the back of your shelf because you don't know if you have enough money in your bank account to buy the meat and vegetables to make it a balanced meal. It's present when parents serve their kids a meal but don't eat themselves, because they worry about their kids having enough so they don't go to bed hungry. The experience of food insecurity is not always evident and clear to the outside world, and it is not just a reality for the unhoused population, it's a reality for many of our friends and neighbors. The rates of local food insecurity have continually risen over the past year, and we at Manna feel fortunate to have been able to step up and serve our community, without question, without hesitation, and no matter the circumstances of each of our guests. We truly strive to make ourselves and our services accessible and welcoming to everyone and anyone who may be in need of a meal, even if it is just so they can have a little extra cash in their pocket that week to put towards another bill, payment, or need.

All of us at Manna want to thank you, Edwards Church, for being a huge part of Manna's success by making it possible for us to increase the number of days we are able to serve meals to our community each week. Which is why we would like to formally reintroduce ourselves to you as **Manna Community Kitchen**.

Sincerely,

Nora Finnerty, Manna's Director of Development

# October 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26 10 Worship 12 Cathedral in the Night 1 College Students	27 7:30 Book Group	28 7:00 ECM	29 12:00 Bible Study 6:30 Thriving Congregations 7:00 Building & Grounds	30 9:55 Guided Meditation 7:00 Choir	1 3 Circle of Care	2 3 Circle of Care
3 10 Worship 12 Cathedral in the Night 1 College Students	4 7:30 Book Group	5 7:00 ECM	6 12:00 Bible Study 6:30 Thriving Congregations 7:00 Building & Grounds	7 9:55 Guided Meditation 7:00 Choir	8	9
10 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	11	12 3 Prayer Shawl	13 12:00 Bible Study 4:00 Thriving Congregations (Cohort) 7:00 Investment Committee	14 7:00 Choir	15 <b>SPIRE</b> <b>Deadline</b>	16
17 10 Worship 11:20 Pastor Congregation Relations	18 7:30 Book Group	19 6:30 CE Community of Practice	20 12:00 Bible Study 7:00 Building & Grounds	21 7:00 Choir	22	23
24 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	25	26 3 Prayer Shawl	27 12:00 Bible Study	28 7:00 Choir	29	30
31 10 Worship	1	2	3	4	5	6