

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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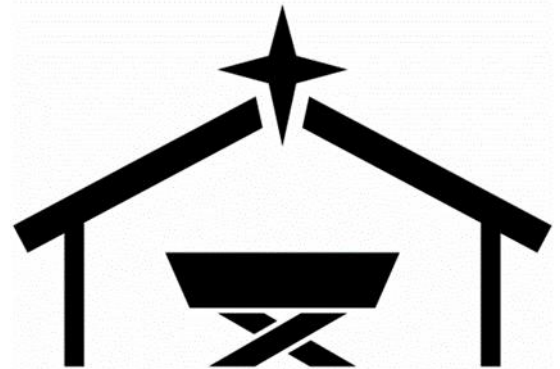
December 2021

On our best days, Christians believe God's most significant act of love put God right in the middle of our messy, dangerous world – as a tiny embryo implanted in the uterus of a teenage girl, as a hungry newborn rooting for his mother's breast, as a man who drank at weddings and cried at funerals, as a human being whose heart broke and soared and skipped beats and, one day, stopped. Because true love can never be coerced or controlled, God does all this without the guarantee of reciprocation.

Rachel Held Evans, *Wholehearted Faith*

Dear Edwards Church Community,

I have loved Christmas longer than I can remember and still marvel at its glittery presentation: the tree that twinkles, the star that shines, and even the red nose on a reindeer. I love the smells of familiar foods that fill the air, lifting spirits as they waft through homes. But most of all I am comforted every year by the message we find so many ways to share.



God loves us so much that God became one of us, subject to all the joys and sorrows that come along with being human: the joy of having families and friends, and the sorrow of having to live with lost loved ones or broken relationships; the joy of sharing meals and sharing lives, and the sorrow of illness and death. Jesus knew all our human experiences fully and directly, so God knew and knows them fully and directly too.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that the God we know through the Bible is not the “unmoved mover” posited by philosophers. Rather, the Biblical God is the “most moved mover,” one who takes a deep interest in all of God’s creation and each of its creatures. Christians, as Rachel Held Evans wrote, “believe God’s most significant act of love put God right in the middle of our messy, dangerous world”.

That is not the end of the story, but only its beginning, as we sang on the first Sunday of Advent:

*O how shall I receive you, how meet you on your way;
blessed hope of every people, my soul's delight and stay;
O Jesus, Jesus, give me now by your own pure light,
to know what e'er is pleasing and welcome in your sight.*



Of course, much of the rest of the church year is dedicated to reminding ourselves what is pleasing to Jesus, as we are challenged and encouraged, called and led by the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus.

For now, it is enough to simply celebrate God coming to us, as fully formed as any newborn, and offer ourselves in service to his growth and maturation in our midst. For the incarnation, begun and completed in the person Jesus, is still to be realized in every generation of the body of Christ, the living local community of our church.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

Advent and Christmas Services

Sunday, 12- 5, Special Time, 11 AM, for our regular Sunday service. The special time is chosen to coordinate with the Hot Chocolate Run for Safe Passage. We are informed that the great majority of runners will have finished before 11, and the Expandable Brass Band, which customarily sets up on the traffic island across Main Street from our front window, will stop playing at 10:55. You may still experience some difficulty driving to the church, especially if driving from the south, but the police have in the past allowed access to the church for drivers coming from the north via State Street.



Sunday, 12-19, 10 AM, Christmas Pageant, live in the sanctuary! Whether you are one of the households to come to see it live or participate via the internet, the return of young people in sufficient numbers to complete the cast of our Christmas Pageant is a cause to celebrate!



Tuesday, 12-21, 7 PM, Service for the Longest Night, or Blue Christmas. One of the strongest themes heard in the listening sessions recently completed by the Thriving Congregations team was the different experiences of loss during the pandemic and how we recognize loss and respond to it. Although we have often offered this service in recent years, this time it will be a bit different to address the accumulated losses of the last 20 months.

Christmas Eve, 12-24, 7 PM, Festival of Lessons and Carols, ending with a candlelit singing of Silent Night. This year we combine what has traditionally been a Sunday service and our celebration of Christmas Eve.

Sunday, 12-26, 10 AM, Rev. Sarah Buteux, pastor of First Churches will lead a service at First Churches for members of Edwards, St. John's Episcopal and First Churches.

Sunday, 1-2-22, 10 AM, Rev. Michael McSherry will co-lead a combined service for Edwards and First Churches at First Churches

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

For some time now, I have begun my Spire letter to you with “Dear Beloved of God.” Increasingly each month, my thoughts regarding this salutation have led me to wonder and reflect on what does being a beloved child of God mean to each of us? That leads me to further wonder how we live out our belovedness as children of God? How do we affirm the belovedness of those we may not agree with or relate to?

In conversation with every Search committee and Faith Formation Team (committee) when asked what forms my hope and basis for faith formation for children, youth, and adults, my response has always been: if nothing else, that each will know that they are a beloved child of God. That encompasses nothing short of life long spiritual/faith formation in the world we find ourselves in.

Henri J.M.Nouwen in his book *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*, which he wrote in response to a challenge from journalist Fred Bratman, states: “becoming the Beloved is the great spiritual journey we are called to make once we claim that truth that we are Beloved.”¹ Nouwen suggests a four-fold path to listening to the movement of the Spirit in our lives and devotes a chapter to each: taken (chosen), blessed, broken, and given.² This comes from his call as a Christian to become bread for the world: bread that is taken, blessed, broken, and given.

In the opening paragraph of the chapter titled *Blessed*, Nouwen states “that as Beloved children of God we are blessed.”³ Based on personal experience, he offers two suggestions for claiming and living our blessedness: prayer and presence. On advice from the Hindu spiritual writer Eknath Easwaran, Henri was encouraged to learn and repeat a sacred text over and over while in prayer. He spent many of his half hours of prayer slowly repeating the Prayer of St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

Perhaps there a scripture such as Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God”, or a prayer such as The Lord’s Prayer, or the Metta Prayer (Loving Kindness Meditation) or a spiritual practice such as walking the labyrinth that you spend time with as you listen for God.

The cultivation of presence in claiming and living our blessedness involves being attentive to the blessings that come to us day after day and year after year. It involves putting aside our busy, hectic schedules, the injustices of this world (Nouwen does acknowledge what he refers to as the curses in the world)- all that prevents us from being silent to listen for our still speaking God who claims all as Beloved and desires all to live out that claim in our lives and the world.

In this life long journey and as we head into the liturgical season of Advent, how might we (I) claim and live out our (my) belovedness in the themes of this season? How might we share our belovedness as blessings of *hope, peace, joy, and love* to others in this time? Might we be attentive to receiving and acknowledging the blessings we experience and receive them as such.

Dear Beloved of God, wishing you the blessings of hope, peace, joy, and love in this Advent season and beyond.

Deb

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1. Nouwen, Henri. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. The Crossroad Publishing Company, NY. 1992. pg 43.
 2. Ibid. pg 49
 3. Ibid. pg 67



Holyoke Civic Symphony Holiday Concert

The Holyoke Civic Symphony will present its annual holiday concert on Sunday, December 12 at 3pm at the United Church of Christ in Holyoke (300 Appleton Street). David Kidwell will conduct the orchestra in Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* and *Egmont Overture*, as well as Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* and other holiday favorites. Holyoke tenor Charlie Berrios will be the soloist for "Gesu Bambino" and "O Holy Night." Mask, proof of vaccination, and distanced seating will be required for the in-person audience, and the concert will be live streamed via Zoom. The concert is free, but donations are appreciated.

Update from Building and Grounds Team

Now that we are increasing the number of people who can attend services in person, the B&G team would like you to know the steps taken to ensure the air quality throughout the building. All the duct work was cleaned and sanitized during summer 2021, and air balancing was completed soon after. Five HealthMate air purifiers were purchased for use in staff offices, Heritage and Edwards Rooms, and Addis Hall. These areas also have windows that can be opened for fresh air.

In November 2021, a new exterior vent was installed allowing for fresh air in the sanctuary. This was important as we are unable to open any sanctuary windows. Also, three NuWave ionizers were added to duct work that supplies air to the three zones: the sanctuary, Addis Hall, and the main offices and meeting rooms.

We encourage you to feel safe when you return to attending in-person services and meetings.

Jon Dietrich, Rick Aquadro, Ron Korza, Janet Tucker, Marc Waller

In Person Pastoral Care

We have enjoyed meeting in person with many folks in the community since getting vaccinated last spring and our booster shots in November, and we hope to see each of you soon. 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 walk outdoors. 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

“How the Word is Passed” through our Study Group

Reading and sharing comments about Clint Smith’s wonderful book, *How the Word is Passed*, has deepened my interest in the role slavery has played in the economic growth of our nation and how it continues to corrupt our national life. Smith’s book takes us to memorial sites around the U.S. to see how the history of slavery is passed on to our generation. My interest was not so much about those slavers of the South, but about how slavery informs my life and my geographic area. Early in the book, Smith challenged me with this quote: “History is about what you need to know . . . nostalgia is about what you want to hear.” With this in mind, I set off for Deerfield. What about slavery in Massachusetts? How is the story passed on in our area? What I found was surprising. Thanks to the work of Robert Romer in 2009, a great deal is known about households that had enslaved people and how they were incorporated in the life of the Deerfield community.

But first some background. Massachusetts was the very first slave holding colony and did not ban slavery until 1783. Boston had a slave market in the early 17th century and by 1752 10% of Boston’s population was African American, enslaved and free. During this time slavery was banned in Georgia and one resident at Deerfield chose to settle there because he could not bring his slaves to Georgia which did not make slavery legal until 1750. We know how our mills in the north relied on cotton from the south, but now we need to face the fact that slavery was our reality as well.

At Deerfield, a number of households are identified that had enslaved people including Rev. Jonathan Ashley, the Congregational Minister who had three slaves (sometimes called “servants for life”: Jenny and her son Cato, who was sold by Rev. Ashley in 1760, and a man named Titus. There do not seem to be separate houses for these people, and my guide thought that they did not have rooms in the house and just found a place to sleep, perhaps in the kitchen or the barn. 38% of Deerfield residents owned enslaved people who worshiped with others in the community, served in the militias, were hired out to work off debts, were seen by the local doctor, and made small purchases at the local store. Massachusetts law mandated a curfew for all slaves, forbade the consumption of alcohol and demanded obedience based on the Gospel “When your master or mistress bids you do that or that, Christ bids you do it, because Christ bids you obey them.”

There is much we need to learn about the impact of slavery upon our lives historically and the way the past continues to cast its shadow on our lives today. I urge you to read *How the Word is Passed* and to visit our own historical sites with new eyes. And, yes, to join Deb Moore’s next book group. Chris Hjelt

Building & Grounds: Surplus Items Update

The Building and Grounds team would like to thank everyone who gave new homes to the surplus furniture and books. It was good to see the items get out of boxes and closets and put to good use.

ECM Update: Maximum In-Person Church Attendance

Dear Edwards Church Congregation,

Beginning Sunday November 21, 2021, we will change our maximum attendance at church sponsored events in the sanctuary from 30 to 70 people. This will include Worship, Music at The Crossroads, etc. This change from 30 to 70 represents a modest increase in our in-person attendance, following improvements to our air handling system and the installation of air cleaning equipment. Per Mass.gov and the Northampton Board of Health houses of worship are allowed to have attendance up to 50% of their maximum occupancy on file with the city of Northampton. Our maximum occupancy for the sanctuary is 320. This would allow us to have up to 160 people, but we are not yet comfortable having church sponsored events with that many people. This careful and safe adjustment is due to the combined effort of the Ad Hoc Team and the Buildings and Grounds Team.

Private entities such as **First Night** that have a stricter protocol than we do i.e., *requires proof of full vaccination status or recent negative Covid test, plus personal ID.* May be allowed to have a maximum attendance up to the current state and city protocols. This would be reviewed by the ECM and approved on a case-by-case basis.

For all events at the church, face masks and social distancing will remain required. Vocalists, speakers, and wind instrument musicians will be allowed to unmask as long as they remain 10 feet away from people they are facing.

Looking forward to seeing more of you.

Sincerely,

The Elected Core Ministry

Mark Dion

Sheri Cheung

Margaret Allen

Ella Stocker

Leon Drzewianowski

Christmas Music at Edwards

The Edwards Church Festival of Lessons and Carols will be on Christmas Eve at 7 pm. The choir will have recorded anthems, but we will still have the familiar hymns and readings. On December 19th, Trumpeter Sheldon Ross will be joining us for a special solo and to play along with the congregational hymns. Don't miss these beautiful services, whether in-person or on Zoom.



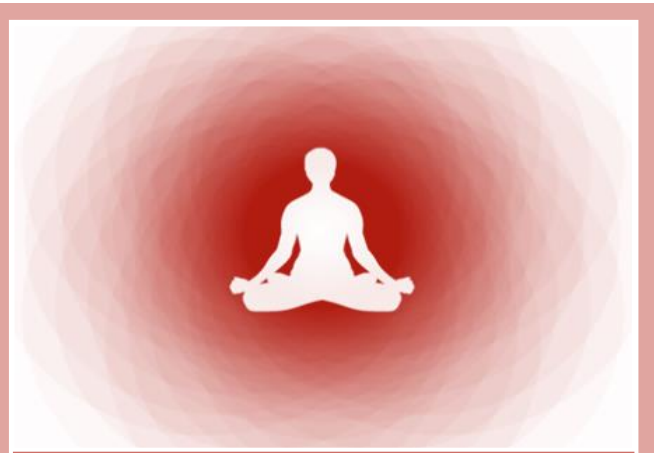
YOUTH GROUP

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

Our December schedule:

December 12 - we will meet via Zoom at 11:30

Save the date: January 21, 2022 we will supply the meal for guests at the Interfaith Shelter in Northampton. Details forthcoming.



Guided Meditation Offering

This popular offering meets on the first Thursday of the month via Zoom from 9:55 – 10:30 a.m. Please email Linda Vincent (lcvincent56@gmail.com) and Deb Moore (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 via Zoom promptly at 9:55 to avoid disrupting the meditation.



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. If you or someone you know would like a prayer shawl, please contact the church office at info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org to arrange a time for pick-up or delivery of a shawl.



Young Adults (Previously titled “College Students”)

Ministry with our 20 somethings– we will meet via Zoom on December 5th at 1:00 pm. On December 19th we will meet in person at noon. Location to be determined on December 5th.

December Birthdays

Pamela Lamlein
Shannon Small
Jane Rausch
Jensen Kroll
Sheri Cheung
Alex Koester
Sarah Pease
Betty Ann Krywicki



Katherine B. Cook Scott
Hazel Waller
Diane Roeder
Susan Voss
Wendy Zadworny
Greg Boucher
Jared Koester

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!


Re-imagining Church School

Hope springs eternal is the saying and yes, it does. Wonderful is the news that vaccines are now available to those between the ages of 5 and 11! Following CDC, the Northampton Board of Health and the Northampton School Board guidelines for COVID protocols, we are moving forward reimagining Church School in Addis Hall. All are wondering about Church School on Sunday morning – what will it look like? Just like Sunday morning worship it is bound to be different.

Several families have expressed interest in an intergenerational gathering on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon consisted a main theme with stations similar to the theme, followed by a meal. The space in Addis Hall, with windows that can be opened provides multiple opportunities limited only by our imagination.

Parents, I continue to desire your feedback and am happy to visit with you in person, following protocols, talk on the phone or schedule – yes – a Zoom.

December 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 11 Bible Study 6:30 Thriving Congregations 7 Building & Grounds	2 9:55 Guided Meditation 7 Choir Rehearsal	3	4
5 <i>Communion Sunday</i> 11 Worship 12 Cathedral in the Night 1 Young Adults 3 Outreach Grants	6 5:30 ONA	7	8 12 Bible Study 7 ECM	9 7 Choir Rehearsal 7 Finance	10	11
12 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	13	14 3 Prayer Shawl	15 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds SPIRE Deadline	16 4:30 Care & Visitation 7 Choir Rehearsal	17 7:30 Music at the Crossroads	18 9:30 Pageant Rehearsal
19 10 Worship & Christmas Pageant 12 Young Adults 3:30 Labyrinth	20	21 7 Longest Night Service	22 12 Bible Study	23 7 Choir Rehearsal	24 7 Christmas Eve Service	25  Christmas
26 10 Worship (at <i>First Churches</i>)	27	28 3 Prayer Shawl 6:30 FF COP	29 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds	30 7 Choir Rehearsal	31	