

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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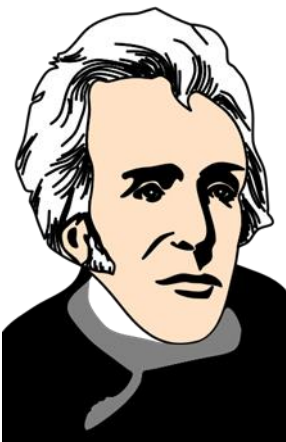
If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. - Mark 8:34-35

Dear Edwards Church Community,

This Lent we are called to consider in what ways we will, individually and collectively, renew our commitment to being disciples of Jesus, the Anointed One who came to teach us how to live. We all know that despite all the distractions – the worthy and unworthy things we give energy to that are not related to knowing and showing the love of God – the pandemic has taken life and imposed death.

Death is not only the 1 million human lives lost in the United States and 6 million worldwide, losses that are still growing. Death is also every decision made to allow evil and injustice to continue when we see it and have the means to address it. Death is the knowing acceptance of continued evil or injustice when we turn away from it, disgusted or afraid (or simply refusing to see), because turning toward it to address it will involve risking our comfort, not our lives, just our comfort, physical or psychological.

When the pandemic started, I mused that sustained pressure tends to expose weaknesses in any system or structure. It's a simple matter. Pressure over time causes things to crack. George Floyd's murder shocked the national conscience, and not only for its calm brutality. It shocked the national conscience because we finally had to acknowledge that things like that have been happening for many years, just off camera.



When the fact of Thomas Jefferson's long sexual relationship with Sally Hemmings first came to light, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which owns and operates historic Monticello, adamantly denied that any such thing could be true. Once they had time to come to terms with that unflattering reality, so inconsistent with a founding father's ideals, they not only admitted the truth, they now have a tour that includes aspects of life at Monticello specifically related to Sally Hemmings and to Jefferson's enslavement of African Americans until he died and beyond, through his will.

Lent is a time for coming to terms with ourselves and those self-serving habits, including habits of thought and feeling, that serve to perpetuate sin (an “old fashioned” word for evil and injustice). I do not expect to address racism and reparations in a sustained way during Lent, but I do commit to you that we will be discussing them in worship and in gatherings outside worship this year, and maybe longer.

As described in the church history paper written by Rev. Marisa Brown-Ludwig and distributed in the weekly email on February 16th, the topics of legal slavery and the abolitionist movement were front and center in civic life almost two centuries ago, when our church was formed by members of First Churches, who obtained permission to leave and establish a new church.

It is hard to say conclusively whether the folks who remained in First Churches or the folks who formed Edwards were more pro-slavery or abolitionist, because there were slave owners and abolitionists in both congregations. It is suggestive but not conclusive that our congregation took the name of Jonathan Edwards, who was not only a powerful preacher but also an enslaver. Just as it is suggestive but not conclusive that a deacon at Edwards, who was a former slave trader, paid half of the pastor’s salary for the first two years of operations. The larger point is not to find conclusive evidence about which congregation was more morally upright when Edwards Church was formed. The point is to fearlessly investigate, with a view to living into our identity and commitments as disciples of Christ.

In his 2014 article “The Case for Reparations,” Ta-Nehisi Coates lays out the argument in favor of fearlessly turning to face the history not only of slavery but the systematic oppression of people of color, especially Black Americans, once slavery became illegal and replacement systems of oppression and control like Jim Crow developed. He acknowledges his own lack of confidence that white Americans will be willing to face that history, but still argues for making the effort, if only for the intangible benefits to the soul of the nation.

“I believe that wrestling publicly with these question matters as much – if not more than – the specific answers that might be produced. An America that asks what it owes its most vulnerable citizens is improved and humane. An America that looks away is ignoring not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the certain sins of the future. More important than any single check cut to any African-American, the payment of reparations would represent America’s maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders.”

This Lent, let us prepare fearlessly not just for this Easter, but for the rest of our lives as faithful disciples. This Lent, let us find and face whatever prevents us from becoming our best selves. Let us stop kidding ourselves about the things we focus on rather than turning our attention to that which scares us, precisely because there is more at stake. I have no idea where it might lead us, other than closer to Jesus, and through him closer to God.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael



From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

I have found myself reflecting upon a power point presentation our Thriving Congregation Team (Sarah Briggs, Sheri Cheung, Melissa Mattison, Karen Pohlman, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Michael McSherry, Deb Moore) was presented with by our Cohort Coach, Jim Merhaut early on as we embarked on this journey with multiple other churches.

The power point, a template for characteristics of a Thriving Congregation based on The Books of Acts (and the authorship of Duke University theologians Kevin Rowe and Greg Jones in their book *Thriving Communities*) listed the following steps:

- Churches loved Jesus – they focused on discipleship and following Jesus
- Churches focused on Relationships by:
 - caring for the weak
 - deeply networking with other Christians
 - sharing their lives
 - addressing conflict – respectfully and with trust amidst diversity
- Churches focused on Practicing the faith – lived expressions of it
- Because of those faith practices they were Visible in their communities
- Churches helped God’s world to Thrive – responding to God’s call beyond the walls of the church

At a November gathering with two other churches in our cohort, teams were introduced to the concept and steps of Service Learning by asking what we need to know and learn to get us to the next level. The questions are:

- Who else is doing this well?
- Who are community partners?
- What needs in the community are not being met
- Who are the experts?
- Who can be engaged (i.e. families)?
- What training is needed?
- Are there safety issues?

At that same November gathering we were also introduced to the exercise of *inhaling* (expanding or building capacity) and *exhaling* (letting go).

The Thriving Congregation Team, responding to input gathered from listening session participants, offered an expanded Longest Night Service in December for those coping with loss of any kind, are offering a book discussion on Christian faith practices, and hope to set up a meditation area for those who would like to come into the sanctuary during the week for prayer and reflection.

During our last meeting, team members reflected on the various ways Edwards has been and is engaged in the steps to becoming a Thriving Congregation and no doubt many of you will share our thoughts. Our Vision Statemen, written on the walls of our sanctuary expresses our desire to be a thriving congregation. How do we live more deeply into it *inhaling* and *exhaling* as we strive to?

The following is a partial listing of practices, Spiritual and Christian, which can assist to guide us.

Which one(s) do you presently identify with and/ or are interested in exploring, personally and perhaps as a congregation?

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Caring for Creation | Discernment | Doing Justice | Forgiveness |
| Honoring the Body | Hospitality | Lament | Praying |
| Reading the Bible | Testimony | Worship | Healing |
| Finding God in Everyday Life | Household Economics | | Dying Well |
| Saying Yes and Saying No | | Peace and Reconciliation | |
| Serving the Poor and Vulnerable | | Stewardship and Generosity | |
| Keeping Sabbath | Shaping and Forming Communities | | |
| Honoring the Body | | Singing our Lives | |

I would love to hear and listen to your thoughts around the steps to becoming a Thriving Congregation, the Service Learning questions, the Practices listed above to share them with the members of your Thriving Congregation Team.

*Blessings as we enter the reflective season of Lent,
Deb*

Greetings from Northampton Parents Center!

Beginning on February 28, we will be back indoors in our space twice a week, as well as outdoors twice a week, and occasionally online with our programs for families with young children. Here is a link to our winter program preregistration form, updated weekly, with details and health and safety measures:

<https://forms.gle/hwaEzVhDT9G9E7hd6>

All of our programs are offered free for families. If you would like to donate to help sustain NPC's free programs here is the link:

<http://www.northamptonparentscenter.org/donate/>

Thank you to the Edwards Church Community for your continuing support!

Warmly,

-Northampton Parents Center

Looking for a Faith Based Camp or Retreat Center?

Check these out and know that scholarships are available.

Edwards House Meeting & Retreat Center, Framingham, MA

<https://www.edwardshouseframingham.org>

Irons Homestead Camp & Retreat, Glocester, RI

<https://www.sneucc.org/ironhomestead>

Pilgrim Day Camp, Framingham, MA

<https://www.pilgrimdaycamp>

Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon, CT

<https://www.silverlakect.org>

The Horton Center, Gorham, NH

<https://www.hortoncenter.org>

Pilgrim Pines, Swanzey, NH

<https://www.pilgrimpines.org>

Star Island, coast of NH & ME

<https://www.starisland.org>

Craigville Retreat Center, Centerville, MA

<https://www.uccr.org>

For information about scholarships, contact a member of the Scholarship Team: Melissa Mattison, Sandi Coyne-Gilbert, Pam Lamlein, Deb Moore.



The Music Team Needs You!

The Music Team consists of a group of talented and enthusiastic people interested in promoting the arts at Edwards Church.

We are looking for volunteers to join our Music Team and assist us in our goals of providing spiritually enriching music for our congregation and community.

If interested please contact the church office or one of the Music Team members.

Peace,

Mark Dion
Judy Cardell
Nancy Flickinger
Alan Schneider
David Kidwell

MARCH BIRTHDAYS



Courtney Aquadro Thomas Bankman Michele Carroll Martha McCullagh
Taylor Cook Lynda Erickson Ruth Griggs Alfred Griggs Elizabeth Henneman
Ken Longstreeth Paula Mattison Rev. Michael McSherry Eugene Sielski
James Stokes-Buckles Gwenn Swift Matthew Buckley Wells

Note: In an effort to protect the digital identities of our community members, we will no longer publish dates of birth in the newsletter. 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!

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



GROUP

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

Our upcoming schedule:

March 13 & 27 - we will meet via Zoom at 11:30.



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.



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.



Young Adults

Ministry with our college students 20 somethings– we will meet via Zoom on March 6th at 1:00 pm.

Justice Education

VERY Short Justice Education Survey. Just in case you had trouble with the first link, or didn't get a chance to participate, the Justice Education Team is looking for your input! We want to understand your thoughts and desires surrounding Edward's justice education. Please [click on this link](#) to participate in our 3 question (and two are multiple choice!) survey. All responses will be anonymous. Thank you for helping us shape the upcoming year!

Our team's mission is: *Acknowledging the many injustices in our community both past and present, we come together to educate ourselves and others, and to inspire reflection based on our Christian values and a commitment to faith-based action.*

Families Forming Faith Together

Our first gathering in this experimental alternative to traditional Church School took place on February 13. Our time began with some Church School Trivia and the theme centered around God is Love and how do we show that Love to others. In addition to being in community and catching up with each other, seven families participated in three activity centers: writing a playbook as to how to show God's Love, Visio Divina – selecting pictures that represented Love, and creating Valentines.

After gathering on February 27 to celebrate Madri Gras and prepare to enter the season of into Lent, we will gather from 3:00 – 4:4:30 in Addis Hall on March 13 and March 27.

Contact Deb Moore, Minister of Faith Formation
(ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)
for more information.



March 2011

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--------------------------------|--|---|---|-----------|-----------|
| | | 1 7 Ad Hoc | 2 Ash Wednesday 12 Bible Study | 3 9:55 Guided Meditation 7 Choir | 4 | 5 |
| 6 Communion Sunday 10 Worship 11:30 Lord's Prayer 1 Young Adults | 7 7 Book Discussion | 8 3 Prayer Shawl 7 ECM | 9 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds | 10 7 Choir | 11 | 12 |
| 13 Worship 10:30 Youth Group 3 Families Forming Faith Together | 14 7 Book Discussion | 15 Spire Deadline | 16 12 Bible Study | 17 4 Care & Visitation 7 Choir | 18 | 19 |
| 20 10 Worship 11:30 Lord's Prayer | 21 | 22 3 Prayer Shawl 6:30 FF COP | 23 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds | 24 7 Choir | 25 | 26 |
| 27 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 3 Families Forming Faith Together | 28 5:30 ONA | 29 | 30 12 Bible Study | 31 7 Choir | | |