

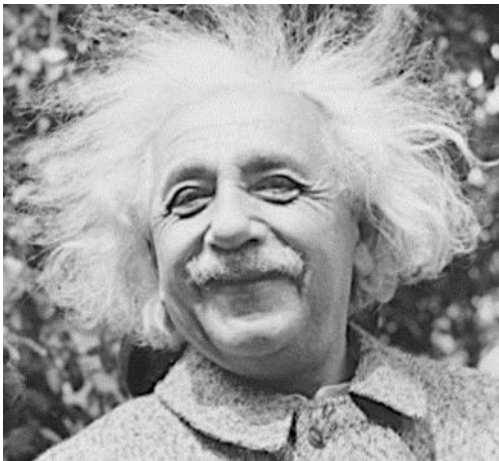
# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 32 No. 4 April 2022

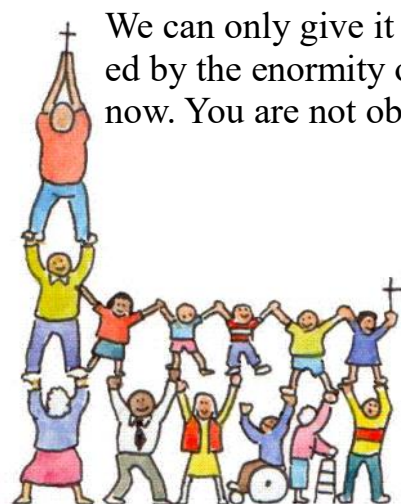
Dear Edwards Church Community,

Everything dies, and everything has a new life. We may struggle to see how new life emerges from the life that has ended, but it does. Even in nature – as gentle and as brutal as nature can be – nothing is wasted; it just changes form.



I did not learn that in church or in seminary; I learned it in physics class. My physics teacher was not Einstein, but a Jesuit priest, so he had a Christian outlook. He was also a scientist, a talented musician, and a gifted teacher. He demonstrated wave motion by sending us to the hallways and stairways with Slinky toys. To demonstrate the difference between voltage and amperage, he put himself directly in an electrical circuit at medium voltage with low amperage, until his usually tidy hair stood straight up. To model Jesus, he taught us with a view to who we might become, as another human being who took an interest in our development.

When Jesus put himself on the line for the ones he called, he held nothing back. He surrendered control to the One who sent him and gave his disciples, then and now, a clear sense of direction and the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his ministry. Ordinary human beings that we are, we take up that mantle knowing that although we may advance the cause, we cannot fulfill it in our lifetime.



We can only give it our all. As the wisdom of the Talmud reminds us, “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

The body of Christ, the church, takes on new forms and modes of expressing the good news in the natural order of things. Generations are born, grow to maturity, and give life to the next generation, each making the gospel and the church its own.

If we are lucky, the pandemic will keep getting more manageable, but not without forcing on all of us additional changes we did not choose or welcome. Church as we knew it – the ways we gather, communicate, celebrate and mourn – will never again be “church as we knew it.” We will recognize it. There will be enough continuity for that. And we will notice differences too. Some have already emerged. More will be required, and we will discern them together.

"People talk about caterpillars becoming butterflies as though they just go into a cocoon, slap on wings, and are good to go. Caterpillars have to dissolve into a disgusting pile of goo to become butterflies. So if you're a mess wrapped up in blankets right now, keep going." – Jennifer Wright

On the very first Easter, the people closest to Jesus did not even recognize his resurrection body. We cannot know what our church, resurrected from the pandemic, will look like either. There will be enough continuity to say it is “the same,” but enough change to notice how it has changed.

Come, let us live into that future together!

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



BUTTERFLY EMERGING  
FROM ITS CHRYSALIS.

## Special Services in April

**PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 10** - the Rev. James Ross, Minister for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, will be our guest preacher.

**GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE, APRIL 15, 7 PM** – Tenebrae commemorates and honors the last hours in which Jesus lived out his purpose and died on the cross. We will hear the familiar story, be moved by music, and see the story unfold in stunning images from classic paintings.

**EASTER, APRIL 17, AT LOOK PARK** – Celebrate the Resurrection at the lake side Sanctuary in Look Park at **10 AM** on Easter. We will have a live choir and special music and a catered reception with sandwiches, pizza and other treats after worship.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 24** – the Rev. Dr. Audrey Price, Executive Minister for Strategic Operations in the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, will be our guest preacher.

## *From the Minister of Faith Formation*

Dear Beloved of God,

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.  
Isaiah 43: 19-21 (NRSV)

The Holy Season of Lent was for the early Christians – and is so for us as followers of Jesus - a wilderness time. A liminal space. A time where we seem to be on either side of a *threshold* with one foot in a space that isn't quite over and the other foot in an anticipatory space not quite ready to begin.

Admittedly, I am not relaying anything you don't already know when offering that for people around the world COVID, with all its variants, vaccines, and modifications to protocols partially define the wilderness time we are living in. Other world events do as well: the invasion of Ukraine, the continued humanitarian crisis in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, parts of Africa, Haiti, the plight of refugees at our southern border, climate crisis, racism, phobias of all types, etc.

From a spiritual perspective, Joyce Rupp writes: “the threshold provides a way to cross into a fuller life of spiritual depth and freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

As human beings, we are presented with threshold experiences throughout our life time. Sometimes these experiences are typical life transitions: when we have mastered the ability to talk and walk and are less dependent upon others, when we start school, get our driver's license, leave home, enter the workforce, marry, raise a family, retire. Sometimes the experience is occasioned by loss: declining health, the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, the death of a loved one, a broken relationship, loss of employment, divorce. The latter examples are what Joan Chittister, a Benedictine sister, calls “unwilled change.” She states that “unwilled changed, which is accompanied by loss, has the ability to catapult us into becoming the rest of who we are.”

During this pandemic time, we have made necessary adjustments – unwilled changes, if you will - in our personal, professional, and church lives. We have had to adapt and, in many instances, re-invent much of what we were used to. There are among us those who long for a return to life and what used to be pre-COVID. There are among us those who anticipate and look forward to a new way of being. Church goes across denominations (including the UCC) wonder if their members will return to in person worship or prefer to worship via the hybrid format.

Around 2005, Phyliss Tickle, Brian McLaren, Marcus Borg, Diana Butler Bass and others spoke and wrote about “The Great Emergence,” happening in Christianity. Talk of Reformation entered the conversation with the observation that every 500 years the Church reviews the social and cultural changes and paradigm shifts happening and the impact they have on Christianity. The church universal has been looking at that for decades, particularly as Sunday morning attendance began to noticeably decline in the 70's and 80's. In many instances, denominations and churches made and continue to make faithful and prayerful adaptations.

Following up on the article in last month's Spire and additional suggestions from our coach, your Thriving Congregations Team (Sarah Briggs, Sheri Cheung, Karen Pohlman, Melissa Mattison, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Michael McSherry, and Deb Moore) recently sponsored a discussion group based on the book *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* edited by Dorothy Bass. The twelve Christian spiritual practices presented in the book offer congregations practices they might choose to engage as they navigate, adapt, and re-invent during this wilderness time of the changing landscape of being church.

As part of the Thriving Congregation Grant Initiative, through Vibrant Faith, congregations will be invited to experiment and re-invent (with funding available) one or more of the following areas:

- Worship.
- Learning ministries across the lifespan.
- Service and justice ministries and the people who participate with preparation and follow-up...how did they grow as Christians?
- Caring community relationships – how do we connect with people; what are the ways we manage relationships; how do we have hard conversations; how do we faithfully resolve conflict?
- Devotional/prayer life of individuals and groups.

The Thriving Congregations Initiative recognizes that the church is in a threshold time. How/what might the church, with Jesus as its head and we as disciples of Jesus, re-invent to thrive? Stay tuned for more from your Thriving Congregation Team.

John O'Donahue writes that "to acknowledge and cross a new threshold is always a challenge. It demands courage and also a sense of trust in whatever is emerging. This becomes essential when a threshold opens suddenly in front of us, one for which we had no preparation."<sup>2</sup>

*Continued blessings as we journey through Lent to Easter,*  
*Deb*

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1. Rupp, Joyce. *Open the Door: A Journey to the True Self*. IN, Sorin Books. 2008, pg 94.  
2. O'Donahue, John. *To Bless the Space Between Us*. Doubleday, NY. 2008. pg 49.

## Reviews from Super Saturday

*Chis Hjelt and Grace Del Vecchio*

Chis Hjelt and Grace Del Vecchio attended a virtual workshop at Super Saturday called "Opening Doors". The presenters were from a church in Upton, MA and they told the story of how they decided to open a coffee shop in their church.

It began with a thoughtful process that led them to the understanding that food was very important in their church; they loved church suppers, participating in town festivals by making desserts and they knew they had some talented cooks and bakers. They also had space in their church that they realized could be put to some new use. Then they considered what their community needed and found that a gathering place/coffee shop would be a welcome addition, so they decided to open the doors to their church and invite the community in through opening a coffee shop. Reaching their goal has required many steps, but it has enabled them to help local businesses, strengthen ties with the community, provide people in the community a warm and friendly place to gather, and opened the church to many who would not ever have entered otherwise.

This church in Upton is a creative, thoughtful community, open to the Spirit, who have found a new way to be Church. Perhaps their experience will help Edwards move forward in living out our vision: "Gathering at the crossroads of ancient faith and contemporary culture, we are a Christian church asking God to open us to a new way."

If you would like to know more, Chris and Grace would be happy to chat.

*Deb Moore*

**Faith in Nature** was the title of the morning workshop I attended. The presenter, based on research which indicated "pediatricians, child and adolescent psychiatrists, and children's hospitals have declared a national state of emergency for child and adolescent mental health" ([www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)), researched the mental health and physical safety benefits for children being outdoors. The following are two links shared:

**1000 Hours Outside** (Ginny Yurich) – [www.1000hoursoutside.com](http://www.1000hoursoutside.com)

"The entire purpose of 1000 Hours Outside is to attempt to match nature time with screen time. If kids can consume media through screens 1200 hours a year on average, then the time is there and at least some of it can and should be shifted towards a more productive and healthy outcome!"

**Taking Sunday School Outside** (Jared Goodykoontz) – <https://greenteacher.com/product/little-adventures-big-connections-pre-sale/> "This engaging curriculum takes Sunday School outside and is based on excitement, engagement, local and accessible nature, and reflection. It guides educators through their teaching with 'adventure cards' and their accessories, plus templates for weekly lessons."

*Deb Moore (continued)*

**The Power of Clemency**, the afternoon workshop that I attended, was extremely informative and focused mainly around the Women’s Prison in Framingham, MA where approximately 173 women are incarcerated. The group Families for Justice and Healing is involved in (1) Re-imagining Communities focusing on housing, healing, treatment, and education, as well as (2) Policy and Litigation, and (3) the Free Her Campaign. Participants learned that as of August 2020, there were 31 women ages 50-59, 10 women ages 60-69, and 5 women ages 70-79 serving sentences on conviction of felony charges of “being present” when a crime was committed. Danielle Metz, director of the Clemency Initiative, incarcerated for 23 years, was the last Black woman granted clemency by former President Barack Obama. Her story was compelling as was the presentation, enough so that I will do some follow up on materials presented.

*Debbie Davis*

I attended two workshops at the Super Saturday virtual conference on April 19. In the “Simplifying Church Structure” workshop, the presenter recommended simplifying outdated governance structures that were created decades ago when the size and demographics of congregations were quite different than today. These old structures are difficult to staff with volunteers and often feature multiple decision-making bodies, which makes it difficult to respond nimbly to new ideas and opportunities. Instead, the presenter advocated having one governing body that makes decisions and serves as a resource to the teams and individuals who carry out the various missions of the church – which is the structure we’ve been piloting at Edwards since early 2020 – yeah! Asking the whole congregation to weigh in on major decisions by way of a congregational vote was also recommended. This practice allows the whole congregation to be briefed on and gain an understanding of the topic at hand on their way to making a decision. Since the whole congregation is invited to participate, a bonus of this practice is that it results in built-in buy-in for implementing whatever decision is made.

The second workshop I attended was “You’re Open and Affirming: What’s Next?” It was interesting to hear where other churches are in the Open and Affirming (also known as ONA) process. Some were similar to where we find ourselves – having become an ONA church 10-20 years ago and now thinking about updating their ONA welcome statement and the ways in which they live out the promises made in those statements. On the other hand, it was challenging to hear that some churches still struggle with internal disagreements about whether or not to display a Pride Flag on the exterior of the church to signal a welcome to LGBTQ+ folks. Thanks, Edwards Church friends for seeing the value of being open and affirming for our LGBTQ+ siblings and for making it possible to attend these workshops to learn best practices and make connections for our mission work!

## Families Forming Faith Together

This bimonthly gathering is continuing to meet the second and fourth Sundays of the month. We begin our time together in Addis Hall and, weather permitting, will move outdoors.

The three spiritual practices attributed to Lent – prayer, fasting, and generosity (almsgiving) were the focus of our last gathering. Using beads from Ghana, West Africa, participants made prayer beads (pictured below). The significance of the four beads are: God to whom we pray, and those for whom we pray: others, ourselves, and the world.

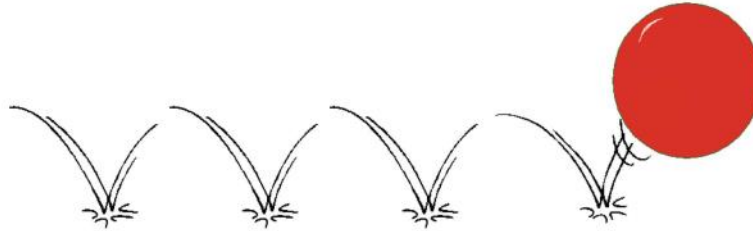


If you are a member or friend of the Edwards Church family and are interested in learning more about or participating in this experimental faith formation gathering, please contact Deb Moore ([ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org)).

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## Calling All Graduates

From high school, college, post-graduate, doctorate! Please email Deb Moore so the wider church can learn of this significant milestone in your life's journey. Please let us know where you are graduating from and where life is taking you next. With your permission, we will also recognize your accomplishment during an upcoming worship service.



# Play All Week with Northampton Parents Center + Northampton Hadley Family Connection !

*All are welcome.  
Come meet other families and children  
in a safe, supportive, and fun environment!*

**MONDAY: 10-11:30 am** INDOORS at NPC, 297 Main Street, lower level

**TUESDAY: 10-11:30 am** OUTDOORS at the YMCA Playground, 286 Prospect

**WEDNESDAY: 10-11:30 am** INDOORS at NPC, 297 Main Street, lower level

**THURSDAY: 10-11:30 am** OUTDOORS plus MUSIC CLASS!  
Look Park's little playground by the Dow Pavilion

**FRIDAY: 9:30-11:30 am** INDOORS with NHFC at the Children's Room,  
Hadley Public Library, 50 Middle Street, Hadley



**DROP-INS  
WELCOME!**

**9:30-11 am** INDOORS with NHFC at Meadowbrook Community Room  
491 Bridge Road, Florence

**Please note:** This schedule is subject to change for weather, health,  
and safety reasons. See changes and register using the sites below.



**NPC**  
[Bit.ly/NPCPLAY](http://Bit.ly/NPCPLAY)



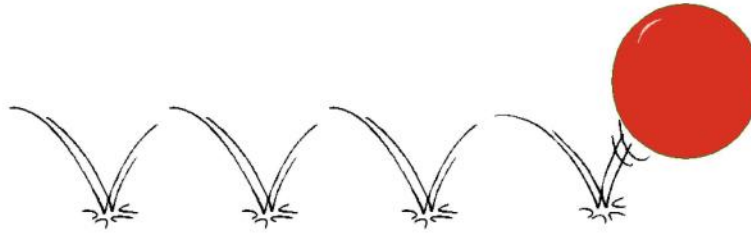
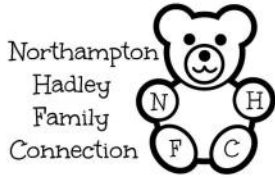
**Meadowbrook Playgroup**  
[asmiller@northampton-k12.us](mailto:asmiller@northampton-k12.us)

← To Register

For Updates →



**NHFC**  
[www.northamptonfamilies.com](http://www.northamptonfamilies.com)



# ¡Juega toda la semana con el Centro de Padres de Northampton + Conexión de la Familia de Northampton Hadley !

*Todos son bienvenidos.  
¡Ven a conocer a otras familias y niños  
en un ambiente seguro, solidario y divertido!*

**LUNES: 10-11:30 am** INTERIOR en NPC, 297 Main Street, nivel inferior

**MARTES: 10-11:30 am** AL AIRE LIBRE en patio de la YMCA, 286 Prospect

**MIÉRCOLES: 10-11:30 am** INTERIOR en NPC, 297 Main Street, nivel inferior

**JUEVES: 10-11:30 am** ¡OUTDOORS más CLASE DE MÚSICA!  
El pequeño parque infantil de Look Park junto al pabellón Dow

**VIERNES: 9:30-11:30 am** INTERIOR con NHFC en la sala de niños,  
Biblioteca Pública de Hadley, 50 Middle Street, Hadley



¡PERSONAS SIN  
CITA PREVIA  
BIENVENIDOS!

**9:30-11 am** INTERIOR con la NHFC en la sala comunitaria de  
Meadowbrook, 491 Bridge Road, Florence

**Nota:** Este horario está sujeto a cambios por razones meteorológicas, sanitarias y de seguridad. Se puede acceder a los cambios a través de los siguientes sitios.



**NPC**  
[Bit.ly/NPCPLAY](https://bit.ly/NPCPLAY)



**Meadowbrook Playgroup**  
[asmiller@northampton-k12.us](mailto:asmiller@northampton-k12.us)



Registrar

Actualizaciones



**NHFC**  
[www.northamptonfamilies.com](http://www.northamptonfamilies.com)



# 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:

**April 10** (Palm Sunday) - in person in Addis Hall at 11:30

**April 24** - (weather permitting) outdoor location to be determined in celebration of Earth Day



## 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 meets on the first Thursday of the month 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 via Zoom promptly at 9:55 to avoid disrupting the meditation.



## Young Adults

**Ministry with our college students and 20 somethings**– we will meet via Zoom on April 3rd at 1:00 pm.



## APRIL BIRTHDAYS

**Richard Aquadro**

**Carla Bee**

**Frank Heston**

**Karen Hogan**

**Michael John Masamitsu**

**Karen Pohlman**

**Janet Tucker**

**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 out, 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](mailto:minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) cell: 413-531-9729

Deb        [ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org](mailto:ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org) cell: 413-275-5507

# April 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b> Communion Sunday 10 Worship 1 Young Adults	<b>4</b> 5:30 ONA	<b>5</b> 7 ECM	<b>6</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>7</b> 10 Guided Meditation 7 Choir Rehearsal 7:15 Outreach Grants	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b> 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	<b>11</b> 7 Building & Grounds	<b>12</b> 3 Prayer Shawl	<b>13</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>14</b> 7 Choir Rehearsal	<b>15</b> Interfaith Emergency Shelter Meal  <b>SPIRE REMINDER</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>17</b> 10 Worship	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds	<b>21</b> 4 Care & Visitation 7 Choir Rehearsal	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>24</b> 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> 3 Prayer Shawl 6:30 FF COP	<b>27</b> 12 Bible Study	<b>28</b> 7 Choir Rehearsal	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>