

THE SPIRE

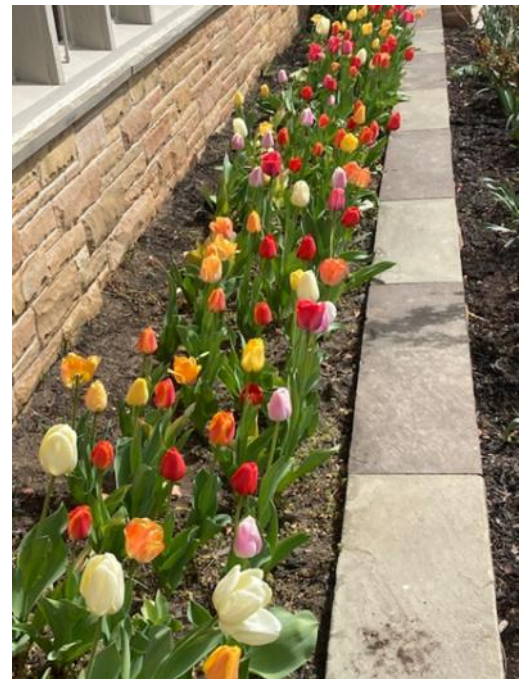
EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Edwards Church Community,

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” With this question, the people standing in the empty tomb, those messengers of God, redirected the attention of the faithful. Other messengers continue to do that. Are we open to recognizing signs of the resurrection that call us to redirect our attention?

I think we are hungry for such signs, but do not practice noticing how much we live in a post-resurrection world. If we really believe in The Resurrection, then as followers of Jesus, we are called to notice and respond to the signs of it everywhere. Yes, poverty and injustice, disease and armed conflict are real. But so are the beauty of creation, in nature and in human response to God in nature, and so are the acts of fellow humans to bind up the broken hearted and love their neighbors.



In his poem “God’s Grandeur,” written in 1877, Gerard Manley Hopkins declares, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” He then surveyed how we had already abused creation and almost despaired over how alienated we had become from nature, itself a stunning instance of divine self-disclosure all around us. But we can still be saved by responding to that divine self-disclosure.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.



It may sound quaint to the modern ear, but Hopkins was a close observer of nature. Though not a scientist, he fully appreciated the creative force in nature. The mere existence of the daily cycle of sunset and sunrise gave him hope, because he trusted the abiding Presence in which we live and move and have our being. He believed that if we are open to its movement and let it move us, then we have hope.

On Earth Day, the *Washington Post* carried a story with the headline “Seeds of hope: How nature inspires scientists to confront climate change.” Reporters collected the observations of scientists and conservationists who are actively working on climate change and resilience strategies to learn how and where they find hope. Their reasons for hope include the capacity of the Amazonian rainforest to regrow, the way plant and animal species migrate and adapt, literally moving with the temperature zones (some on their own, others with human collaboration), the regrowth of coral from grafts grown by biologists, and other interventions.

Of course, we will also need large systemic changes, such as changes in how energy is produced and distributed, but the article shows that there are still reasons to hope. There can still be a climate resurrection if we are willing to midwife its emerging seed sprouts into flourishing full-grown plants in the emerging world. Generating enough collective will may be the biggest challenge we face.

Rev. Carl Scovel, pastor of King’s Chapel in Boston for many years, said of the resurrection, “Christ died on the cross and rose as the church.” People of faith, gathered to embody all that faith gives them and requires of them, are the best evidence of the ongoing reality of the resurrection. Could we, in our community of faith, find more ways to give up those things that are toxic for the earth and human flourishing on it? Could we take on more practices that cultivate new life, living into the challenge given by Jesus to find the things we need to let go of, to “take up our cross” and follow him?

In an Earth Day post on social media, the Quaker writer Parker Palmer shared his poem “The Earth Once Green Again,” in which he unfurls the image of his own expressive process being like a tree that is acted on in nature and naturally responds as part of nature’s larger process. (<https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-world-once-green-again/>)

Our words, like leaves, in season spring
and then in season fall,
but at their rise they prove a power
that gentle conquers all.

Palmer has been writing for over 50 years. As a person engaged in living intentionally, faithfully, and responsibly, Palmer knows that not all his words or other acts “land” as he hopes or intends, not all of his expressions succeed. But as a person living the way he does, he trusts the larger process in which he is engaged.



And when speech fails, the dark trunk stands
'til most surprising spring
wells up the voice that ever speaks
the world once green again.

It would be easy to surrender to cynicism, even to despair, in the face of some of the conditions in our world. Parker Palmer has described in his writing his own struggle with chronic depression. But, as Hopkins wrote long ago, there “lives the dearest freshness deep down things,” and as Palmer himself observes today, there is “a power that gentle conquers all.” Our lives are often a mixture of new life emerging alongside, and only because, some earlier life has fallen away and given itself up to the larger process.

May all our lives unfold in the awareness of, and in service to, that which renews and restores the best within us and the world around us. Christ is risen indeed!

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

Blessing and Sending

On Sunday May 8 we will say a fond farewell to Fumiko and James Brown and to Ann Parker and Gene Baker. Fumiko and James are moving to Japan, and Ann and Gene are moving to Missouri – all to be closer to family. We will miss their involvement in the life of this church. Please join us on May 8 to celebrate what has been and bless them on their ways.

*“May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.
until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of God’s hand.”*

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Welcome to Eastertide – a liturgical season of seven weeks leading to Pentecost. And a season in the secular world as we watch with anticipation and thanksgiving for signs of resurrection around us.

At our most recent gathering and as part of checking in with each other before proceeding with the agenda, members of the Thriving Congregation Team were invited to offer 6 words from our Covenant (printed below) that spoke to them as we gathered. In no particular order words offered were: Holy, brave, equal, wonder, grace, accountability, safe, seek, diversity, humble, truth, spirit with us, wonder, grace, lightness, Holy Spirit, bless, wonder, grace, celebrate. Each of these words continue to speak to me of the candor, trust and respect the members of this team have for one another and the holy work we are about.

It will probably come as no surprise to many of you that I smiled inwardly - and still do - with the repetition of the verb “wonder.” In part, wondering has informed and formed my years engaged in faith formation and spiritual direction with participants across the lifespan. Active wondering can be an invitation into conversation and discovery. “Active wondering invites us to participate without judgement, to participate without seeking perfection and to try without the fear of being corrected or being presented with the correct answer.”¹ It is a spiritual practice that opens space for Holy Listening and participating in the Divine Dance of making meaning with each other along our journeys of faith.

Holy Listening is about creating safe and brave spaces where respect, active wondering and active listening go hand-in-hand. A plethora of publications, symposiums, conferences, curricula, etc. which I have read or attended promote these three components in ministry with children and youth. I suggest they are just as apropos for adults and that adults would benefit from practicing them in our daily and faith life. Children and youth are just much more open, receptive and willing participants. I wonder, if that might be one reason why Jesus invited the little children to join him.

Adults - without judgment and understandably - are predicated upon moving agendas, end results, meeting expectations, whatever the governing curricula of our vocation may be. I get it and I wonder if that be might be one reason the disciples wanted to keep the children from Jesus.

One of my mentors for active listening remains the late Rev. Fred Rogers. He understood and authentically modeled listening to children. He helped me – and others – see how in listening to the stories of others we can grow to understand and love our neighbors.

One of the mentors of the author quoted above, in learning from her research stated: “if we are not paying attention to children (and I would say adults as well), it isn’t that we are missing an opportunity to teach them – but we run the risk of missing God at work in our communities and the world.”²

In my personal call to delve deeper into active wondering, holy listening, and creating safe spaces for that to occur, I will be participating in five 2-hour online sessions through the Center for Courage and Renewal founded by Parker Palmer beginning Saturday, April 30. Of particular interest to me is the Center’s Circle of Trust Touchstones and the use of the touchstones in small groups, ministry and personal settings.

I offer, for your wondering, theologian Marjorie Suchoki’s metaphor of a kaleidoscope in describing how God moves through all that life presents us with. She suggests that the creative work of the Divine and of Creation is reflected in the multiple pieces and possibilities held in the image seen in the toy. With just a slight turn, a new image can be observed. With just a small decision, the whole world can shift. God is present and moving with us in all those shifts just as God has always been. Who might you share this metaphor with?

As we move through this season of Eastertide, look and listen expectantly for signs of new life, wonder about which of the disciples in the resurrection appearances of the Risen Christ you are. Wonder how we might engage in the Divine Dance of making meaning intergenerationally.

*Blessings,
Deb*

Thriving Congregations Team Covenant

Holy Spirit, come and be with us, and hear our prayer:

May this team inhabit a safe space and a brave space.

May this be a space of equality, of support, of hearing and seeing one another.

Help us ask what the team needs; make us larger than our roles.

Remind us that we are equals who celebrate our diversity and difference, and make us as candid with one another as we are loving.

Let us not judge, but rather seek to wonder and to understand.

Bless us with a balance of accountability and grace.

Fill our hearts with truth, our minds with clarity.

Humble us with the gravity our work, and lift us up with the lightness of laughter.

Make ours a thriving team,
within a thriving congregation.

Amen.

1. Campen, Tayna Marie Eustace. *Holy Work With Children: Making Meaning Together*. OR, Pickwick Publications. 2021. Pg. 44.

2. Ibid. pg. 50

Quilt Ministry Team Update

Since the Quilt Team organized in early 2018 we have designed and donated over a dozen quilts. In the fall of 2019 we had our first donation “fail.” We loved the fabrics we used for our design – perhaps a bit too much? The blocks reminded us of stained glass and we imagined how it would look in our sanctuary. So instead of making them into a donation quilt, we divided the blocks creating two wall hangings and planned to finish them after the holidays. And then COVID came and shut us down.

The pieces hanging below the cross on May 1st and May 8th were finished in April of this year. They are there in memory of and in honor of Joan Loveless, a vital member of our team who passed away suddenly last Christmas. They were the last project that we all worked on together.

We were finally able to safely get together again this spring. As a way to honor Joan, we reached out to Friends of Children, a local agency that she supported. Joan worked with children in area schools for 40 years as an early childhood speech and language pathologist. In June we will ask the congregation to bless several quilts which will be given in Joan’s memory to Friends of Children young adults (ages 18-24+) who have aged out of the foster care system and are moving out on their own.



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.

ONA Announcements

Save the date for three Pride Events in Western Massachusetts:

Springfield will have its first official Pride Parade on Saturday, June 4th from 10:00-3:00. The march will begin at Springfield Technical Community College and proceed to Court Square.

Also on June 4th, from 11:00-4:00, there will be the Berkshire Pride Festival. The festival will take place at The Common in Pittsfield.

On Saturday, June 11th, Greenfield will have its Pride Rally from 12:00-3:00 starting in Downtown Greenfield and walking to Energy Park.

Please consider attending these events to show support for our LGBTQ+ community.

Save the Date! Sunday, May 1st at 10:00 am!

Please plan to join us on May 1st for a special worship service planned by the Edwards Church Open and Affirming Ministry Team. Called ONA for short, this team works on how we as a congregation express our welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized folk in our community.

We're looking forward to introducing you to the proposed new Edwards Church welcome statement and sharing how we hear God speaking to us about the importance of our covenant to be welcoming and inclusive both within our church and the broader community.



Reading Together With Deb

Recently, I have been part of a group discussion around the book *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. The book looks at 13 different spiritual practices that feed our personal lives and our lives together as a congregation. The contributing authors include a variety of Christian perspectives from professors of theology to ministers in the Presbyterian, United Methodist and Disciples of Christ Churches and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. We read insights from Quakers and Catholics and heard voices from African American theologians. There was much that fed me, but one particular area captured by attention: Testimony.

Now, I must confess that the word *Testimony* conjures an image in my mind of someone standing with a raised hand to proclaim that “I am saved by the blood of the Lamb!” This chapter helped me to redefine this term. *Testimony* can be found in preaching, praying, singing, shouting, storytelling and just being.

When I share a joy or a concern, it is *testimony*. I am testifying to God’s goodness when a healthy grand child is born or I have had a restorative walk in the forest near my house. I am testifying to my need for God’s support and for yours when I share my fears after a difficult diagnosis or the loss of a loved one and ask for your prayers. I am testifying when I share a song that speaks to my condition, or a poem that has unexplainably slipped into my thoughts at just the right time. Testifying is often the strongest when our lives speak of our compassion and care—sharing a meal at Cathedral, stopping to talk with a pan handler, giving a smile to a stranger, a hug to friend who is feeling low.

So I have reclaimed this word and would like to testify to the power of this small group of friends reading this book together and sharing our insights. It was a gift of connection and grace. Thanks be to God. *Chris Hjelt*

Holyoke Civic Symphony Concert

The Holyoke Civic Symphony will present its final concert of its season on Sunday, May 1 at Holyoke Community College and on Zoom. The concert will celebrate David Kidwell's 25 years as conductor of the orchestra. A special reception will follow the concert.

The program includes "Concert Overture No. 1" by Florence Price, "Shenandoah: A Symphonic Portrait" by David Kidwell, and George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" with Maestro Kidwell as both conductor and soloist.

Tickets are \$10 to \$20 for adults and \$5 for children under 12 and may be purchased at the door. Masks, distancing, and proof of vaccination are required.

To watch the concert on Zoom, please visit shorturl.at/aktCN to register.



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:

May 15 - in person in Addis Hall 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 ffmininister@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.



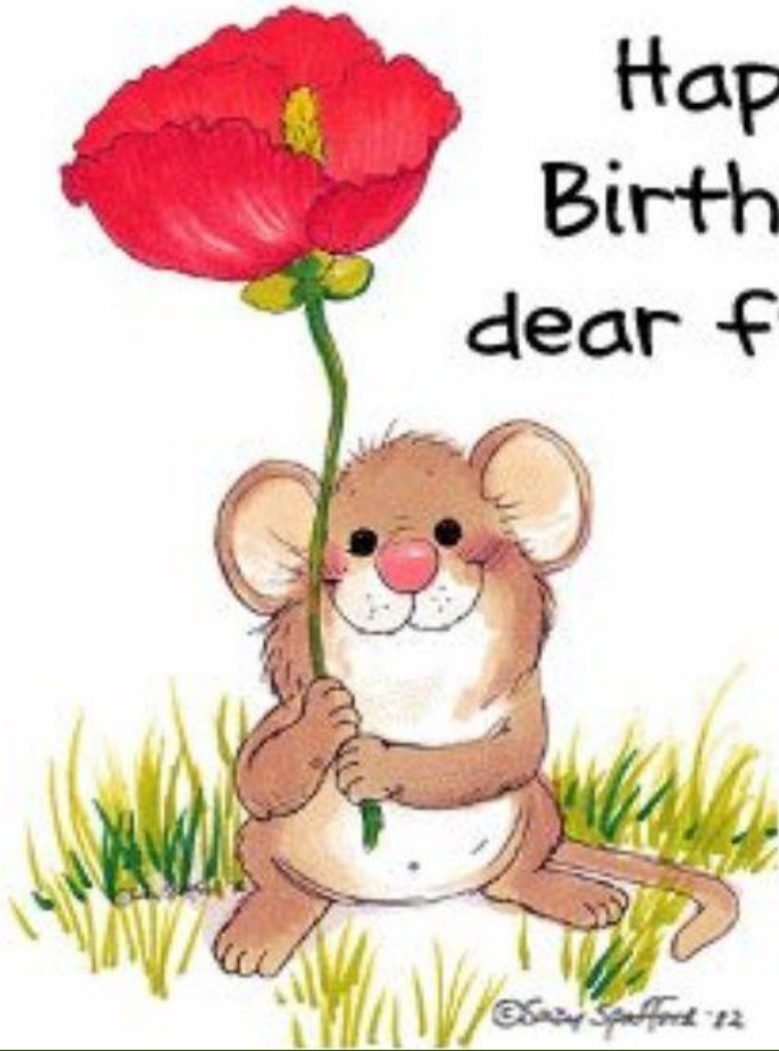
Guided Meditation Offering

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 and 20 somethings– we will meet via Zoom on May 1st at 1:00 pm.



Happy
Birthday,
dear friend!

Jody Gerbasi

Ann Abel

Sarah Briggs

Janice Longstreeth

Sally Griggs

Debra Davis

Lynda Kamik

Janie Thurber

Barbara Kirchner

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 cell: 413-531-9729

Deb ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-275-5507

May 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10 Worship 1 Young Adults	2	3	4 12 Bible Study 5:30 ONA 7 Building & Grounds	5 10 Guided Meditation 7 Choir	6 7	
8 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	9	10 3 Prayer Shawl 7 ECM	11 12 Bible Study	12 7 Choir 7:15 Outreach	13 14	
15 10 Worship Spire Deadline	16	17	18 12 Bible Study 7 Building & Grounds	19 4 Care & Visitation 7 Choir	20 21	
22 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	23	24 3 Prayer Shawl 6:30 FF COP	25 12 Bible Study	26 7 Choir	27 28	
29 10 Worship	30	31				