

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 32 No. 7 September 2022

August 26, 2022

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Since the ECM, Personnel Committee, and I announced on May 9th that David Kidwell was no longer employed by Edwards Church, you have been asked to trust without the ability to verify. I often wish I could give you all the verification you want. Then I remember why I cannot.

There is an important, often overlooked difference between what is secret and what is confidential. Secret implies information withheld because people do not want it known. They either could be embarrassed, lose an advantage, or otherwise suffer from disclosure. Confidential information may be shared, but only in limited ways based on a legitimate need to know, in order to fulfill one's role and responsibility to an individual or organization.

Employers also attach special value to confidential information related to employees, and for good reason. This remains true regardless of what David Kidwell or his advocates might say about having "nothing to hide," implying inappropriate secrecy on the part of others (ECM, Personnel, and me). It is much easier for a disgruntled, former employee or his advocates to make a naked claim than it is for an employer to explain why it might disclose one item of information and not others. If David really wants to let the church leaders reveal as much as possible, he could sign a waiver to that effect.

Because David has shared so many details with others (which is demonstrated by specific, factual statements only he could know), he has opened the door to us sharing more than we have before. So much has been written that contorts the truth as we know it, that we must disclose some information we have tried to maintain as confidential in order to protect the community as a whole and provide a response to what has, until now, been a largely one-sided narrative.

David's employment was, in fact, terminated on May 9th. During that process, we offered him the option to resign and asked him to let us know his preference. We thought letting him decide whether to tell others he chose to leave or was terminated gave him a measure of personal agency and would have allowed more ease with which to seek future employment. Keeping options open for him required a vague announcement and silence on our part. When Judy Cardell spoke during the announcements at worship on May 15th, we had our answer from David. It also foreshadowed a pattern to follow: spin an accusatory narrative that assumes the worst about those you disagree with.

Much is made of the unfortunate fact that Chuck McCullagh and Mark Dion entered the sanctuary when David, Deb and I were having our weekly meeting for worship planning and David was taking his turn reading part of the scripture for the week. It was a sad moment, but it was just as likely they would walk in when I was reading, or when we were discussing hymns, or any other part of our regular meetings. Do I wish we had stage-managed that particular moment better? Sure, but there was no moment-by-moment rehearsal of the event to control every detail.

David, on the one hand, and the church's elected leaders, on the other, have different understandings of the nature of his employment. The church's elected leaders fervently deny that they violated any contract or David's rights in any way. There is plenty of background and context that is relevant to that discussion, but because this is the subject of threatened litigation, we do not comment further.

In an effort to acknowledge David's musical gifts and long service to Edwards Church and to resolve this conflict, we have previously offered him severance equal to one full year's salary, which he has rejected. That amount is, compared to severance in similar situations, quite large. We have offered it in recognition of his talent and service and because several church members urged us to be generous. To receive the payment, we have required that he enter into a customary severance agreement. If he were as willing to compromise as the ECM, we could all be in a very different place.

The availability of unemployment insurance for church employees is a matter of state law. Although churches may choose to pay into the system, they are not required to do so. Edwards has historically followed the overwhelming majority of Massachusetts houses of worship by opting not to participate. No decision regarding unemployment insurance was made with David Kidwell or any other person in mind. To assert otherwise is recklessly disregarding any concern for the truth. In fact, it is exceedingly rare for us to terminate an employee. We count on severance to be mutually agreed upon when it happens.

Much has also been made of the manner in which David was told he was losing his job. No doubt it was hard to hear. For better or worse, people with experience in delivering that very bad news have learned the hard way that one can never be sure how any individual will respond in the moment. That is why employers insist on collecting keys, cancelling passwords, and the like. No matter how well you think you know someone, they can (and sometimes do) surprise you in a negative way.

Several people have written things about me that are hard to take. But I know what is true about myself, and my conscience is clear. I am more troubled when I read things suggesting that I have somehow misled or manipulated the ECM and Personnel Committee. Those lay leaders serve as volunteers. In our church's congregational tradition, which I treasure, they are an indispensable resource for guidance in all I do. I share my thinking with them, and I seek and follow their suggestions. They are more than able to challenge or correct me when they see the need, and to support me when they agree with a recommendation. To allege that I could somehow mislead or manipulate them insults their intelligence and independence as critically thinking adults.

Finally, I ask you to consider this: I worked with David for almost 9 of his 21.5 years. During those years we sometimes struggled to see eye to eye, but we most often found ways to provide the church with worship that kept you spiritually fed. I have been fully aware from my first days here of how close he had become to many members of our community and how treasured he is. I personally valued his wonderful music for the way it could open and uplift us in worship.

Some of the writers of emails seem certain they can intuit my motivations. I promise all of you, before God and each other, that my guiding purpose at all times is the long-term health and welfare of this congregation, the people and Spirit within it, and the people and God it serves. At times that may require actions not supported by all current members. But knowing what I know, as your pastor for almost a decade so far, I can assure you that the pain we are going through now will end and a stronger church, with a new and wonderful music program, will emerge.

In faith, with hope, for love,

Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

*“Faith can take root anywhere, but imagine how far it can grow when nurtured.”*¹

David M. Csinos is associate professor of practical theology at Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and founder and president of Faith Forward, an ecumenical organization for innovative ministry with children, youth and families. In his latest book, *a gospel for ALL AGES: teaching and preaching with the whole church*, several strategies for proclaiming the gospel among intergenerational faith communities, including meaningful conversation, vibrant worship, and experiential education are explored. In part two of the book, he shares experiences of colleagues with intergenerational faith formation.

Now to be sure, as most of you are aware, this is not the first text pertaining to intergenerational faith formation I have read (must be at least ten in my office) and certainly not the first time you may have heard me write or talk about it. I thought I would share two of the experiences in one of the chapters with you.

The first involved a church where members share a meal midweek and after dinner a scripture is shared with those of all ages who would like to help with worship prep. One such gathered group included families with children, children who came without parents, teens, young adults, a couple of people in their sixties and a couple more in their eighties who explored the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). All stayed and engaged in LEGO building scenes of the story which were scrolled through during the worship service as the scripture was read. The dialogue recounted in the book between the generations was engaging.

The second involved a CafeStyle Church and the Parable of the Sower found in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 4:1-9). A group discernment planning team (not always the same) met a week ahead of the scheduled service to explore the passage and questions it raises. The theme chosen was “Faith can take root anywhere – but imagine how far it can grow when nurtured.” Those attending the service were split into groups to reflect on discussion prompts.

It will probably come as no surprise to many of you that the theme of nurturing spoke to me as I have shared with many of you with the well-known fact that children and youth in our congregations need at least four adults - other than their parents - interested and participating in their faith journey.

As we begin a new program year, envisioning a multiage church school setting in Addis Hall, I wonder dear adults in our congregation, how might you help nurture the faith of our younger members in an intergenerational setting, say once a month? Perhaps you could share a favorite Bible story or scripture passage, perhaps you have a hobby or a vocation in which you feel or have felt called to that you might lead us in a telling of it or an activity about it. For example: gardening, poetry, an art form, a spiritual practice, health care, science, teaching, where you feel God’s spirit in your life, care for creation, activism, photography, etc. We might even title them “God Stories Sundays.”

The seed planting of intergenerational faith formation and worship began about twenty years ago. I wonder how we might nurture the roots and the growth of those plantings across the lifespan? I wonder who we might invite the youngest among us to nurture our faith journey.

With ECM and Michael’s approval, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Melissa Mattison, and I are working on a draft Vision for Faith Formation...we will keep you posted.

In the meantime, as I head off for vacation and Sabbath rest, I share with you a picture of one of God’s little creatures I met along an early morning walk on the Cape Cod Canal.



*Blessings,
Deb*

1. Csinos, David. a gospel for ALL AGES: teaching and preaching with the whole church. Fortress Press, MN, 2022. Pg108.

Standing TOGETHER Against Racism and Antisemitism



Tuesday, September 13, 2022
7:00-8:30 pm free on Zoom

Please join us for an inspiring presentation by Yavilah McCoy, an anti-racism activist and third generation Jewish woman of color. Yavilah is a renowned national speaker, educator and spiritual practitioner. She will explore racism and antisemitism as they impact both Black and Jewish communities and the relationships between us.

Our goal is to build on Yavilah's energy and knowledge and create bridges to stand TOGETHER against racism and anti-semitism. If you are eager to do the work of standing TOGETHER against the politics of hate, you won't want to miss this event!

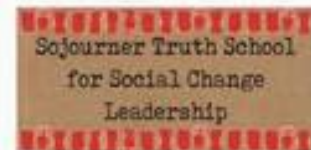
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Nothing about us Without us!



Bridge4Unity



self-evident education

The Tikkun Olam Social Justice Committee of



קהילת בני ישראל
Congregation B'nai Israel
A PROGRESSIVE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN NORTHAMPTON, MA

Register in advance for this free meeting:

<https://www.cbinorthampton.org/form/standingtogether.html>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting

For more information, contact standtog@gmail.com

We are grateful to our co-sponsors, [click here](#) to see the list.

Standing TOGETHER Against Racism and Antisemitism

Co-Sponsors

Abundance Farm	Smith College Religious and Spiritual Life
ACLU of Massachusetts	Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee
Amherst Area Gospel Choir	Temple Israel Greenfield
Beit Ahavah Reform Synagogue of Greater Northampton	The Islamic Society of Western Mass.
Edwards Church	The Lander-Grinspoon Academy
Greater Springfield Campaign for Non-violence	The Real Cost of Prisons Project
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice	Tikkun Olam Committee of the Jewish Community of Amherst
Lotus Peace Arts/VWMA	Traprock Center for Peace and Justice
Northampton Friends Meeting	U.U. Society of Northampton and Florence
Racial Justice Rising	Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group
Reparations Committee of Northampton	Western Mass Standing Up for Racial Justice

Justice Education Summit

Sponsored by the SNEUCC Conference, this in person and virtual summit will take place September 24 from 9:00am – 4:30pm. The summit features opening worship, morning and afternoon workshops, two plenary sessions, and closing worship with communion. For more information and to register visit: <https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/16394185?month=9&year=2022&day=1&display=m>

Note: there will not be a fall Super Saturday event, so be sure and check this out. Please let Deb Moore or Michael McSherry know if you would like to attend.

Rainbow Contra of Western Mass

Rainbow Contra of Western Mass begins again on September 10th from 7-10 pm at First Churches of Northampton (enter on Center St.). Caller with live band. \$10-15; Students \$5-10; cash or VENMO. Proof of vax and booster and mask required (N95, KN95, KF94).

The gender-free dance is led by the caller who teaches the sequences before the music begins. No partner is needed. Clean bottom shoes or sneakers help to protect the wooden floor. Dress is casual--whatever your style. Everyone helps newbies through the dance. Come to dance. Come to watch, listen to the music, and learn about contra! We look forward to seeing you there.

Rainbow Contra of Western Mass is a member of Lavender Country and Folk Dancers (LCFD) <https://www.lcfd.org/>, founded in 1988, which sponsors, supports, and promotes a nation-wide network of gender-free community dances and dance camps and is committed to providing safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community and their allies through participatory community dance and gender-role free calling.

Building and Grounds project update

as of August 23, 2022

The HV/AC project has been stalled by shipment delays and supply chain issues. Six large pieces of the HV/AC equipment were ordered in April and only 5 of the 6 have been delivered to our contractor. Air handling units are being delivered on 8/24 and installation will proceed. Two of the 3 cooling units that go on the roof need to be installed by crane and this will be arranged. The remaining unit will be shipped by the end of the week (8/27) from Texas.

Over the next few weeks contractors will be on site working on the duct work and electrical connections to be ready for when the final pieces can be installed. Rick Aquadro has been invaluable in coordinating (and prodding) our contractor. As per contract, the contractor's deadline for completing the work is September 30th. Even with supply chain issues, we feel this can still happen.

It's been a very hot summer, and B&G appreciates the patience of the staff as they work in a less than cool environment. Offices have AC in them, but the rest of the building does not – so thanks, Kyla, Justin, Sabra, Deb and Michael.

Another project that is more noticeable is the lack of exterior landscaping work. In July, we hired a company to do a clean-up, with mulch and new plants, however, they did not have their usual staff to do the work and they had a scheduling issue. They will not be able to work until early September. At this point, we felt it was best to wait and do a fall cleanup and reevaluate the original quote for replacement of the courtyard tree, weeding and planting, as well as revising the layout in the front of the church. Of course, the weeds are growing by leaps and bounds regardless. If you have any interest in pulling weeds, either in the courtyard or in the front of Edwards, let B&G know, or start without us! Any weeds pulled can be placed in the back of the church near the dumpster and we will take care of having them disposed of properly.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work through this. B&G is ready to be back in the sanctuary, too!

B&G – Jon Dietrich, Ron Korza, Janet Tucker, Marc Waller, Rick Aquadro (DCM)

Baby Quilts!

The Quilt Team was happy to send along three baby quilts to clients of the Friends of Children FOCUS program for their infant baby girls. Thank you to Michael, Jeff Olmsted and Cynthia Stanton for helping to bless the quilts before they were given to the new families.



GROUP

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

Here is our upcoming schedule:

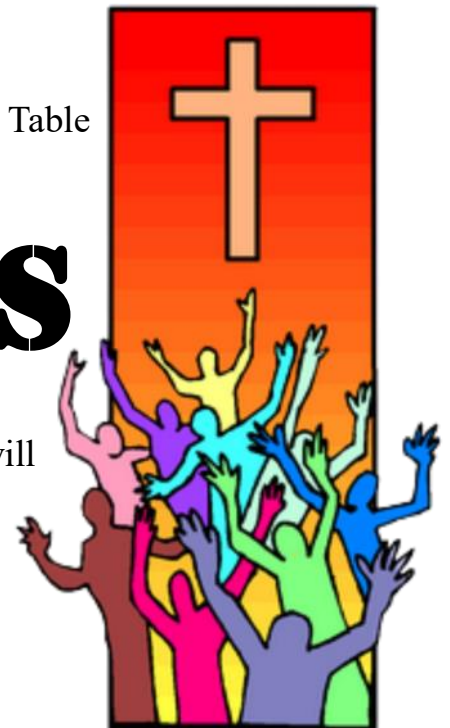
September 25 – in person in Addis Hall at 11:30am

October 9 – in person or off site at 11:30am

October 23 – 11:30am – 3:00pm ~ Gleaning for Rachel's Table

YOUNG ADULTS

This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on September 4th at 1:00pm.



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.

Note: we hope to begin meeting in person on September 27. Watch the Wednesday weekly message and Sunday bulletin for up to date information.

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.



SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Carolyn Gray

Kathleen Korza

Shirley Atwood

Pamela Cook

Eli Hutchison

Elena Frogameni

Debra Moore

James Young

Phillip Cooper

William Hogan, Jr.

Elizabeth Prince

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!

Pastoral Care

There is no substitute for personal contact. We have enjoyed meeting in person with many folks in the community. There need not be a special reason to meet. We appreciate simply staying in touch. We can sit inside or out, take a walk, whatever is comfortable. 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 fminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-275-5507

September 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4 Communion Sunday 10 Worship 1 Young Adults	5	6	7 12 Bible Study	8	9	10
11 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	12	13 3 Prayer Shawl	14 12 Bible Study	15 Spire Submissions 4 Care & Visitation 6:30 Thriving Congregation	16	17
18 10 Worship	19	20	21 12 Bible Study	22	23	24
25 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 1 Young Adults	26 7 ECM	27 3 Prayer Shawl	28 12 Bible Study	29	30	1