

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear Friends in Christ,

It is Advent, the season of expectant waiting, when we prepare ourselves to once more receive the Good News that God loves us so much, God freely chose to take on our human form and share our common lot. I look forward, along with many others, to the occasion for gift giving, cookie baking, tree trimming and all our other customs that celebrate the season. And I still never lose sight of the fact that, at bottom, Christmas is about the incarnation, about the transcendent God deciding to become a human being, to have experiences of hunger, happiness, rejection, and friendship, just like one of us.

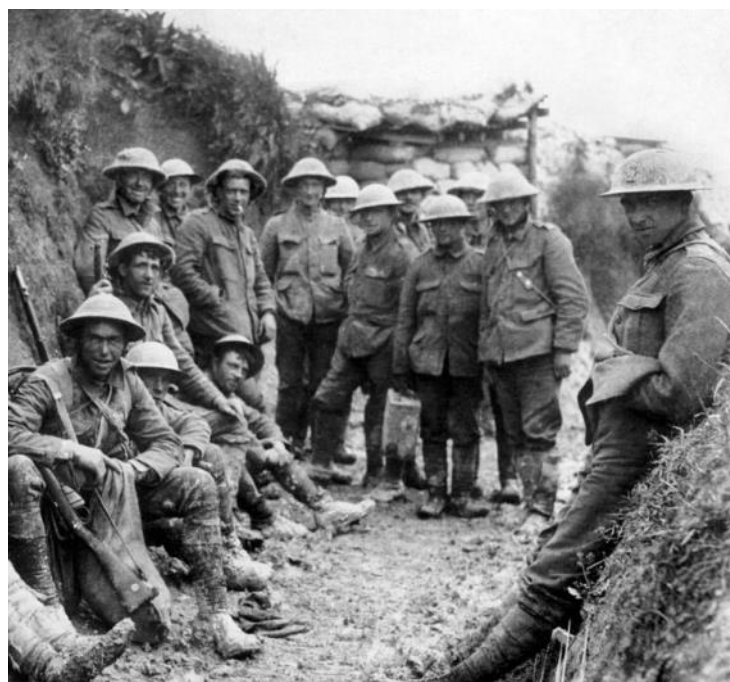
The First Coming, by Madeleine L'Engle

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine. He did not wait

In the history of Christ followers, a lot of
ink and even blood has been spilt over
details of theological debate, including
whether we need to take seriously this
question of what it means for God to take

on human form. But if Christmas has any meaning, I think it is to celebrate that very thing – that the creative force in the universe, the divine spark, recognized a need within the life it had created. It recognized a question for meaning and purpose, for a sense of hope in the face of all that challenges hope, and a sense of connection to the source of life itself, when life as we know it so often makes us feel cut off from the source.





Fuhara, 30, with her fifth child, Alexis, flees violence in the DRC, Nov. 2022

He did not wait
till hearts were pure. In joy he came
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.
He came to a world which did not mesh
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

Madeleine L'Engle was not only a novelist, poet and actress. She also read physics (Einstein and his contemporaries) in her quest to understand and hew meaning from life as she encountered it, a life of some advantages but none that spared her personal challenges, even tragedy. What she made from what she was given reflects her commitment to respond to God's initiative in coming into our lives by returning the favor, which requires allowing ourselves to be stirred into action that demonstrates God is alive among us and can be active through us.

This Christmas, I invite you to move closer to the manger. Let the light shining over it and through it become the glint in your own eyes. Let the warmth of a baby held close by its mother melt your own heart, until you feel the embrace of the One who loves us all. And knowing that you, along with others, have been personally invited to greet this newborn once again, go out into the world renewed to serve.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!
May all your Christmases be bright,
Michael



Photo Sources

<https://cropper.watch.aetnd.com/cdn.watch.aetnd.com/sites/2/2017/06/battle-of-the-somme-1.jpg?w=1200>

<https://www.msf.org/north-kivu-tens-thousands-people-fleeing-violence-urgently-need-aid>

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Welcome to Advent – the season of waiting and expectation; of rituals and traditions; of concert and dance performances; of gift giving and receiving; of journeying to Bethlehem.

In her meditation the Present of Presence¹, Joyce Rupp, a Sister of Saint Mary, poet, international retreat leader and Christian spiritualist, states that Advent is a good season to be more deliberate in sharing the present of our presence every day. That presence is the loving presence of Jesus, sent as a gift by God into the world over 2000 years ago, that lives within each person. It is often referred to as the essence of God or the spark of the Divine within all. Jesus, throughout his life offered his presence in acts of healing, prayer, justice, compassion, forgiveness, dignity, love and more.

Joyce admits that sharing presence in a hurried and cultural environment that encourages us to be as busy as possible so that we will be rich, successful, important, and able to purchase more things and this time of year, “the Christmas rush” is difficult. She suggests two possible ways to be with someone: (a) physically or (b) “in spirit” by deliberately sending prayer, compassionate thoughts and kind feelings toward another person or group. Many of the twenty-five generic examples she lists in her meditation comprise the sections of the In Our Prayer list in our weekly bulletin and in our Pastoral Prayer on Sunday morning. Others include: a person who gives us hope, a person who has helped us grow, someone we dislike, a farmer losing their land, a coworker, those imprisoned, our loved ones...I am sure each of you have suggestions you could add. Perhaps the weekly Advent themes of hope, peace, love, and joy might be the focus for a gift of presence for someone exuding from the essence of the love that exists in each of us.

Gunilla Norris, poet, author of children’s books as well as multiple books pertaining to the practice of spiritual awareness in our daily activities, terms this gift of being present as “with-dom,” a practice that could become a holy ritual if we focused on someone for a minute or two each day.

Prayer:

Holy One, this Advent, whether we practice the gift of *presence* or *with-dom*, physically or spiritually, may we be attentive as we journey yet again to Bethlehem, to the sharing and gifting of God’s loving presence within each of us to someone else. Amen.

Blessings of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love this Advent Season to all of you.

Deb



1. Taken from *Out of the Ordinary* 2000 by Joyce Rupp. Used by permission of Ave Maria Press. All rights reserved. Pages 20-21.

Transitional Music Director

Just mentioning “Christmas music” is likely to elicit strong opinions of several types. Some dismay: it starts too soon, it’s boring and annoying to hear everywhere you go, the same ones every year. And why aren’t there any good new ones? And what is the deal with Rudolf anyway? Or delight: I love caroling, my favorite Christmas album is (fill in yours), that Silent Night gets me every time...

Another thing: yearly events create a (very slow) rhythm. Our bodies and souls know this, even though we can’t exactly “hear” it.

What is the PASTOR CONGREGATION RELATIONS TEAM?

Our team consists of five members working with our Senior Minister and the Minister of Faith Formation. Our main function is to provide support and maintain an open and healthy relationship amongst the ministers and members of the congregation. The team also functions as an advisory group for the ministers (share ideas, dreams, hopes, expectations, and concerns) and as support for the minister’s leadership (interprets roles, functions, and needs of the ministers to the congregation). Constructive and caring communication with confidentiality and trust are essential to the work of this team.

We support the professional growth and well-being of the ministers. We support the promotion of a mutual ministry between ministers and congregation. Sustaining an open and healthy relationship between the ministers and congregation through the work of this team enhances the effectiveness of the church’s mission.

Members of the team are responsible for understanding the pastoral and congregational role and helping the congregation have reasonable expectations for ministers and helping the ministers to have a clear picture of the congregation’s priorities. We encourage the congregation if they feel comfortable to reach out directly to the ministers. You can also contact any member of the team.

Respectfully,

Mark Dion, Jim Stokes-Buckles, Sandra Rossi, Jeanne Kocsis and Shauneen Kroll

Rainbow Contra of Western Mass

This month's Rainbow Contra Dance will be December 10th , 7-10 pm at First Churches of Northampton (enter on Center St.). Admission: \$10-15; Students \$5-10; cash or VENMO. Proof of vax, booster, and N95, KN95, or KF94 mask required. Caller: Hannah Johlas. Band: Black River Ironworks: Cory Walters on melodion, flute, mandolin, Jonah Sidman on fiddle, Michael Freedman on keyboard. Rainbow Contra is a participating member of Lavender Country and Folk Dancers (lcfed.org) and is committed to creating an environment that’s fun and inclusive of all members of the LGBTQI community, friends, and allies. No partner or experience is necessary. Dances are taught. Please bring clean bottom shoes to protect the wooden dance floor and refrain from wearing highly scented products. All dances are smoke, drug, and alcohol free.

Important Information from your Open and Affirming Ministry Team

A congregational vote on a proposed update to our church's Welcome Statement will be held at the Edwards Church Annual Meeting in January 2023. Here's some background info to explain what it's all about!

The proposed welcome statement, which is seen by the ONA Team as a necessary first step in defining *how* we as a congregation will live out our Open and Affirming covenant, is printed below. *Thank you* for taking a few minutes to review it in preparation for the congregational vote in January 2023.

We welcome questions, conversations, ideas and inspirations! Please feel free to chat with any of us after worship on Sundays or by emailing Debbie Davis at debradavis1217@gmail.com or Deb Moore at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

Your Open and Affirming Ministry Team:

Carla Wirzburger, Chris Hjelt, Grace Del Vecchio, Jude Almeida, Debbie Davis, Samson Melendez, Deb Moore, Rev. Michael McSherry

Proposed Edwards Church LGBTQ+ Welcome Statement Developed by the Open and Affirming Ministry Team

Welcome to Edwards Church, a Christian community committed to creating a just and loving world where all feel valued and free to be themselves.

We welcome you to be a part of shaping this community as it continues to evolve. We invite you to bring all that you are to this church: your gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, family structure, race, color, ethnicity, culture, age, range of ability, and immigration status.

As a congregation, we will:

- Create a warm welcome for visitors and those new to Edwards Church
- Offer a variety of opportunities for every stage of life to grow spiritually in relationship with God and each other
- Provide care in times of need and celebration in times of joy
- Recognize and challenge privilege and oppression in our church and local community
- Use inclusive language in our Sunday services, written literature and everyday speech



The six-color striped rainbow flag, long recognized as the symbol of the LGBTQ+ community, was replaced in 2018 by a new flag emphasizing inclusion and progression. Designed by Daniel Quasar, it features a five-color chevron: black and brown stripes representing marginalized LGBTQ+ communities of color and the colors pink, light blue and white which are used on the Transgender Pride Flag. This flag flies on the front of Edwards Church as a sign of welcome to all.

YOUTH 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:

December 11 – cookies for college students

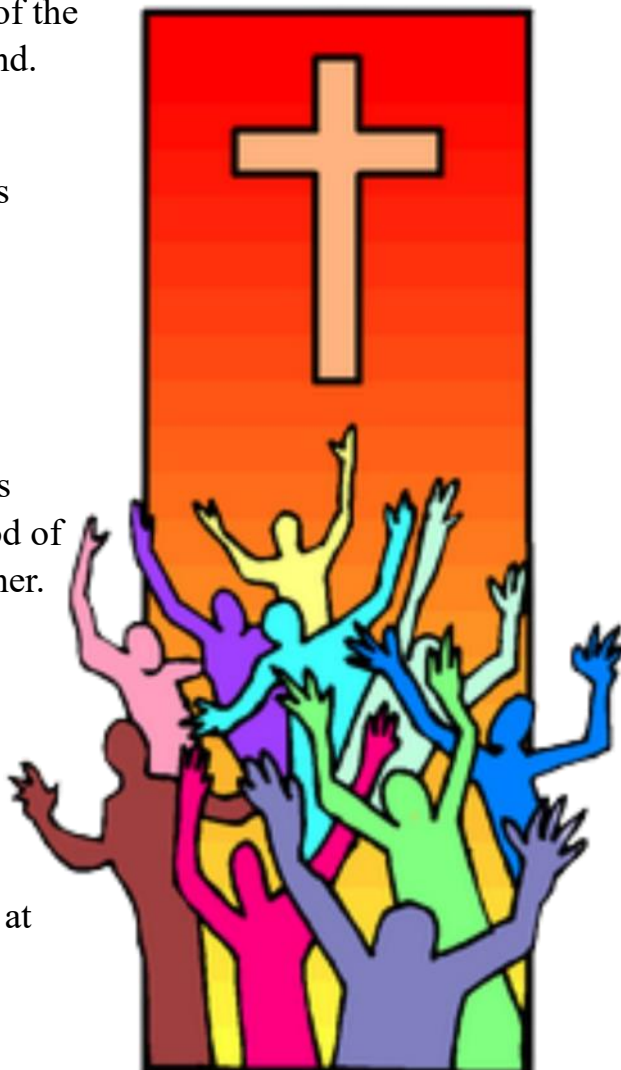
December 25 – enjoy Christmas with your families!

Church School

During the month of December, our worship services will be intergenerational allowing the children of God of all ages to participate in these Advent services together. Child care for children under 5 will be available. Church school will resume on January 8, 2023.

Young Adults

This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on December 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: 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.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Pamela Lamlein | Katherine B. Cook |
| Shannon Small | Scott |
| Jane Rausch | Hazel Waller |
| Jensen Kroll | Diane Roeder |
| Sheri Cheung | Susan Voss |
| Alex Koester | Wendy Zadworny |
| Sarah Pease | Greg Boucher |
| Betty Ann Krywicki | Jared Koester |
| | Caroline 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!

Special Birthday Announcement!

Louise Montague will turn 90 years 'young' on November 15, 2022.

If you wish to send a card, it can be sent to her at 292 North Rd., Westhampton, MA 01027.

- *Kim Montague, Louise's daughter*

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

December 2017

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--|--|---|---|---|-----------------|
| | | | | 1 7 Sit & Sing | 2 | 3 4 Worship |
| 4 1 Young Adults 4 On That Note | 5 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices 5 Scholarship | 6 7 Gamblers Anonymous 7 Wise Guys 7:45 Outreach | 7 12 Bible Study | 8 7 Sit & Sing | 9 7 Music at the Crossroads Rehearsal | 10 |
| 11 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 4 On That Note | 12 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices | 13 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anonymous 7 Wise Guys | 14 12 Bible Study 5:30 Board of Friends 7 Finance | 15 7 Sit & Sing SPIRE DEADLINE | 16 7 Becoming Sanctuary for Each Other | 17 |
| 18 10 Worship 4 On That Note | 19 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices | 20 6:30 FF COP 7 Gamblers Anonymous 7 Wise Guys | 21 12 Bible Study | 22 7 Sit & Sing | 23 | 24 7 Worship |
| 25 4 On That Note | 26 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices | 27 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anonymous 7 Wise Guys | 28 12 Bible Study | 29 7 Sit & Sing | 30 | 31 |