

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 33 No. 4 April 2023

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Trees

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

- Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918)



In the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Overstory*, Richard Power weaves an engrossing epic story of characters from a variety of backgrounds. Each has a distinct connection to the overarching story, unfolding against a background that illustrates how trees feed and are fed by their environment, how plant life and animal life are ultimately different expressions of life itself, and how sad it is that the supposedly self-aware human is the one life form capable of both speeding up or avoiding catastrophe for the planet, but is still ruining the planet for all the life forms, including itself.

One of *The Overstory* characters, Patricia Westerford, a botanist, is based on the real life scientist Diana Beresford-Kroeger, a celebrated botanist and medical biochemist. Beresford-Kroeger was trained at an early age in an ancient Irish system of rules for resolving disputes and managing natural resources in a farming society.

In an interview last year, Beresford-Kroege spoke of how that ancient system anticipated the threat of climate change and how she believes (and calculates) that by protecting the remaining old growth forests and planting even more of the right kinds of trees, we can still turn the tide enough to spare future generations much of the damage the planet and all life on it will otherwise face.

The ancient Celtic laws recognized trees as a sacred life form deserving protection from short term exploitation. Forests were seen as more than raw material for products like lumber and paper goods. Forests were, and are, the foundation of other forms of life in the world, to be held and managed in stewardship for generations to come and not just current consumption. People recognized a spiritual need for and connection to a whole, healthy planetary ecosystem, which was seen in the Celtic context as the forest.

In *The Overstory*, the fictional character Patricia Westerford writes of the shift required in human perspective: “This is not our world with trees in it. It’s a world of trees, where humans have just arrived.”

e.e. cummings did not need to have Joyce Kilmer’s poem or Richard Power’s novel to know the spiritual life in nature. He sensed it himself.

I thank You God for most this amazing day
For the leaping greenly spirits of trees
And a blue true dream of sky
And for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes
I who have died am alive again today
And this is the sun's birthday
This is the birth day of life and of love and wings
And of the gay great happening illimitably earth
How should tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, breathing any
Lifted from the no of all nothing
Human merely being doubt unimaginable You?
Now the ears of my ears awake
And now the eyes of my eyes are opened

Diana Beresford-Kroege – she who has one leg planted in an ancient Celtic perspective and the other in modern science – sees a chance for humans to avoid the worst of the climate crisis our industrial activity has set in motion. But it will require a spiritual conversion, a reorientation of values that inspires wholesale change. She told an audience last year: “May you walk with the divine, and may you have life like yeast rising in bread. And may you rise with your life and enjoy it.”

Two weeks after Easter is Earth Day. May God give us the wisdom to recognize where we are and the courage to act accordingly.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,

Each Lent, as we get closer to Holy Week, I inevitably turn to two of Mary Oliver's poems and spend some time reflecting on them in one way or another. I would like to invite you to do the same individually, with someone else, as a family, etc. You might journal or draw some aspect of one or each of the poems. You might also form a French Pantoum (directions for stanzas below) by circling or highlighting six words or phrases that resonate with you. The prompts in italics following the poems are just to get you wondering. If you are interested in a time of sharing thoughts, drawings or the pantoum, please let me know.

The Poet Thinks About the Donkey¹

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

*How horses, turned out into the meadow,
leap with delight!*

*How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight!*

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

*In the Gospels, we read that as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people spread cloaks,
branches, leafy branches on the path he rode. What would we spread or wave? What
would being a part of the crowd mean/look like?*

(Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-38; John 12:12-15)

1) *Thirst: Poems by Mary Oliver*. Boston, Beacon Press. 2006. Pg 44

2) Ibid, Pg 45

Gethsemane²

The grass never sleeps.

Or the roses.

Nor does the lily have a secret eye that shuts until morning.

Jesus said, wait with me. But the disciples slept.

The cricket has such splendid fringe on its feet,
and it sings, have you noticed, with its whole body,
and heaven knows if it ever sleeps.

Jesus said, wait with me. And maybe the stars did, maybe
the wind wound itself into a silver tree, and didn't move,
maybe

the lake far away, where once he walked as on a
blue pavement,
lay still and waited, wild awake.

Oh the dear bodies, slumped and eye-shut, that could not
keep that vigil, how they must have wept,
so utterly human, knowing this too
must be a part of the story.

*The synoptic Gospels quote Jesus as telling the disciples to stay awake and pray that they may not come into the time of trial. What does staying awake/waiting and praying with Jesus look like in this day and age? What does that time of trial look like for each of us/for the world?
(Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40)*

Directions for a French Pantoum – do not try to put them in the “right order”

Stanza 1

Line 1 (new line) _____
Line 2 (new line) _____
Line 3 (new line) _____
Line 4 (new line) _____

Stanza 2

Line 5 (repeat line 2 in stanza 1) _____
Line 6 (new line) _____
Line 7 (repeat line 4 in stanza 1) _____
Line 8 (new line) _____

Stanza 3

Line 9 (repeat line 6 in stanza 2) _____
Line 10 (repeat line 3 in stanza 1) _____
Line 11 (repeat line 8 in stanza 2) _____
Line 12 (repeat line 1 in stanza 1) _____

*Blessings as we continue the journey through Lent to Easter,
Deb*

Update on Staff Compensation

At the annual meeting on January 29, the congregation decided to provide compensation adjustments to account for inflation. Following discussion of the fact that no adjustments were included in the budget as proposed, and that there was approximately \$12,000 remaining under the formula used to determine New Way Funds, the congregation decided to use those \$12,000 to fund the salary adjustments. Translating that decision into specific adjustments was delegated to the Finance Team and ECM.

At recent meetings, the Finance Team, in consultation with the Senior Minister as head of staff, recommended the following adjustments in compensation to the ECM, which approved them:

Treasurer, Administrative Assistant, Sexton, and Child Care, a 7.5% increase

Senior Minister and Minister of Faith Formation, a 3.5% increase

Transitional Director of Music, no change because hired recently and serving in a transitional capacity

A/V Technicians, no change because hired recently at a high hourly rate

Assistant Treasurer, this is an unpaid position filled by a very dedicated and much appreciated volunteer

Thank you for your thoughtful and faithful engagement around this issue and others during the annual meeting. Congregational decision making on this and other matters shapes our shared life as a community of faith.

Good Friday Service of Tenebrae



At 7:00 PM on Good Friday, April 7, we will hold a service of Tenebrae or shadows. During this service, we hear eight passages of scripture telling the story of the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and as they are read the candles in the sanctuary are gradually snuffed, until we end in darkness. We will sing a Taize chant and a traditional hymn and hear instrumental and vocal solos, all to help us more fully imagine the events of that day.

Music at the Crossroads: An Evening of A Cappella

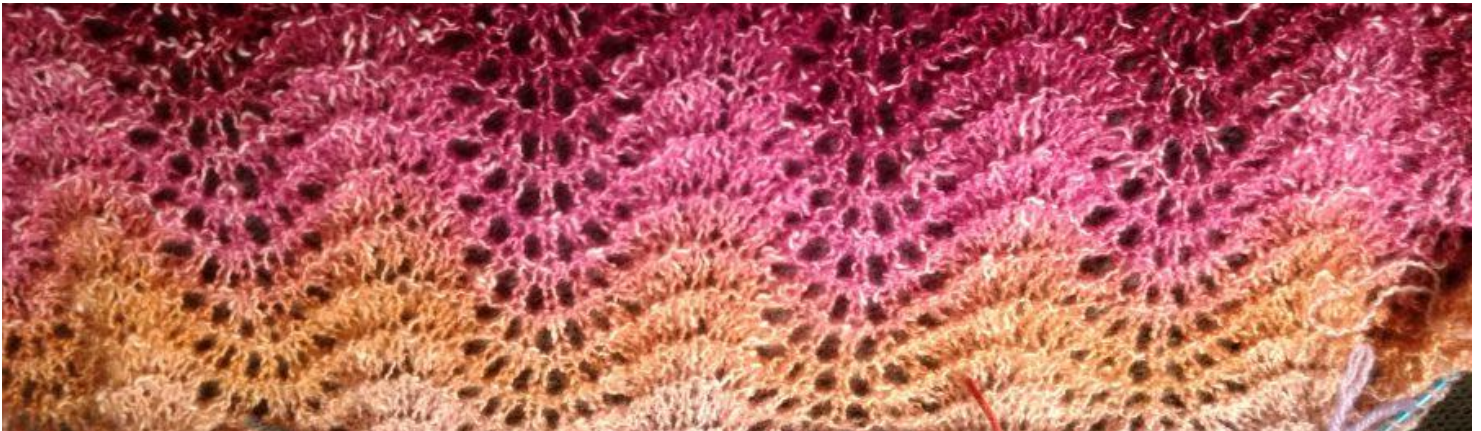
We will host an evening of A Cappella music on Friday April 28 at 7:00. Performers will include the Pride Choir from the Northampton Community Music Center, the Wise Guys, On That Note and the fabled Northamptones of Northampton High School. Admission is free, donations will be solicited for Survivor Arts Collective of Easthampton.

Prayer Shawl Ministry turns 25 in 2023!

“In 1998, Janet Severi Bristow and Victoria Galo, two graduates of the 1997 Women's Leadership Institute at The Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut gave birth to a ministry as a result of their experience in this program of applied Feminist Spirituality under the direction of Professor Miriam Therese Winter, MMS. Compassion and the love of knitting/crocheting have been combined into a prayerful ministry and spiritual practice which reaches out to those in need of comfort and solace, as well as in celebration and joy. Many blessings are prayed into every stitch.

Whether they are called Prayer Shawls, Comfort Shawls, Peace Shawls, or Mantles, etc., the shawl maker begins with prayers and blessings for the recipient. The intentions are continued throughout the creation of the shawl. Upon completion, a final blessing is offered before the shawl is sent on its way. Some recipients have continued the kindness by making a shawl and passing it onto someone in need. Thus, the blessing ripples from person-to-person, with both the giver and receiver feeling the unconditional embrace of a sheltering, mothering God!”

The Edwards Church Prayer Shawl Ministry began in the Fall of 2011 and the first prayer shawl was delivered in January of 2012. To date over 300 - 317 to be exact- shawls have been gifted locally, within and beyond the United States. To learn more about the history of this ministry begun in Connecticut and occasions for gifting people with shawls visit: <https://www.shawlministry.com>. Members of the Edwards Church Prayer Shawl Ministry Team are: Mabel Cheung, Pam Lamlein, Diane Roeder, Janet Tucker, and Deb Moore.



Summer Camps

Faith based summer camps are a wonderful way to experience and connect with the Divine, nature, and other campers. Many wonderful and lasting relationships develop during these experiences. For more information visit any of the following sites:

<http://www.sneucc.org/disciples>

<https://www.starisland.org>

<https://www.silverlakect.org>

<https://hortoncenter.org>

For more information or to inquire about camperships, please contact Deb Moore.

ECM Meeting Notes

March 7, 2023

Facilitator: Leon

Minutes: Sheri

Opening Devotional: Jack—discussed the Selma initiative and how it launched so much, and today is international women's day (Jack's granddaughter reminded him!)

Search Team update: Laura Frogameni

Focus groups in December

Survey: helped mold what we want to post for the job posting. Director/coordinator/pianist top priorities. Volunteer choir important, variety important. Collaboration with senior minister important.

Job posting: discussion of starting salary needed. Job description will be coming up, and personnel should be consulted for that.

Discussion around timeline for posting job description and anticipated hire date

We can discuss salary at a special meeting or even by email, and figure out how many hours we want the job to be as well. The search committee will send us data from the survey to contribute to our discussion. Plan to meet the week of 3/20, need to figure out a specific date

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Everyone: approved!

Annual Meeting Minutes
up.

Leon: they're still being firmed

A/V Upgrade (Attachment sent)

Mark

New proposal is higher by about 4,000 dollars; around 32,000 dollars total. This is for downstairs only. We can always expand to upstairs if needed in the future.

Discussion: are we still in a position to utilize this proposed equipment, doing zoom/you-tube meetings on a regular basis. Deb points out it is a ministry outreach. We have to make sure we use the equipment!

We vote that 28,000 dollars from B&G funds and the other 4,000 dollars from ECM to go forward with this proposal. Passed unanimously.

Music Team update

Mark

Sit and sing: we're going to use sandwich board for advertising. Everyone should come!

8/18: reschedule Eavesdrop hopefully

8/28: Northampton's, Smith's pride choir, wise guys, on that note a cappella groups!

Couple other groups including one of Dave's groups and Alan condensed opera performance will be forthcoming

Finance Team update:

Leon

Solar utility package: waiting on updated contract

Overall things look good; portfolio looking good, 7.6 million approximately

Staff Compensation

Everyone

Leon shares recommendation from Michael and Deb: funds available 12,000.
7.5% increase for all except Deb and Michael will be 3.5% increase; Heather points out this 12,000 is from new way fund which is a one-time fund and not annual. Next year we should discuss where this money for salary increases will be coming from.
Consider coming up with a proposed increase in wages for next year prior to annual meeting.

A/V Music/Streaming (Bugs worked out etc.) Mark

Still not great sound for the streaming online, being worked on; consider going just to you-tube and eliminate zoom. Mark will check with Michael.
Sanctuary: music sometimes too loud for the live congregation

Thriving Congregation:

Sheri/Deb

23 people interested in Breaking Bread! May also do a lunch or cookies after church

Pew Situation (Attachment sent)

All

Concerns about putting pews along the walls; suggestion to remove 8 pews and donate some to other churches that might need them or figure out some other way to give them away!
Mark will contact B&G with the plan

Rewriting By-Laws Update

All

Old team: Laura, Jeff, and Ella but not sure they'll still be interested in this. We will table this til May and then check with them again to see if they're still interested

Review of the Minister

All

Leon will resend documents to discuss timeline and reviewing the process

Other Business?

All

None!

Next Meeting: will have a special meeting the week of 3/20 time TBA; April meeting 4/11 7:15 pm

Assignments:

Agenda: Leon

Facilitator: Heather

Opening Devotional: Jack

Minutes: Sheri

Closing Prayer: Deb

Closing Prayer:

Heather: thankful for our

congregation, this group, the work we do; breathing in and out

Annual Meeting Follow-Up from the Open and Affirming Ministry Team

The Open and Affirming Ministry Team (ONA for short) is grateful for the engaged and insightful discussion about the proposed Welcoming Statement at the Edwards Church Annual Meeting on January 29th. Thank you for prayerfully and thoughtfully considering the statement and listening for God's voice during this process! As you know, the Welcoming Statement is grounded in our efforts to include, affirm, and celebrate LGBTQ+ individuals and others who have been marginalized by race, immigration status, family structure, range of ability, or in other ways into the life of our church.

Below is the statement, which our team updated based on the discussion at the annual meeting. The **bolded and italicized text indicates changes made to the version that was proposed in January**. The Elected Core Ministry Team (ECM) will schedule a congregational meeting soon to vote on this updated statement.

Questions? 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 Welcoming Statement, April 2023

Welcome to Edwards Church. ***United in Christ's love, we are*** committed to creating a just and loving world where all feel valued and free to be themselves.

Wherever you are on your journey of faith, 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, ***economic, educational***, immigration status, ***and unique perspective***.

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

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:

April 23 - Earth Day outing (weather permitting)

Church School

Here is what we will be exploring in April:

April 2 - Communion Sunday. Worship is intergenerational so all ages may share in the Sacrament together.

April 9 - Easter - Intergenerational worship

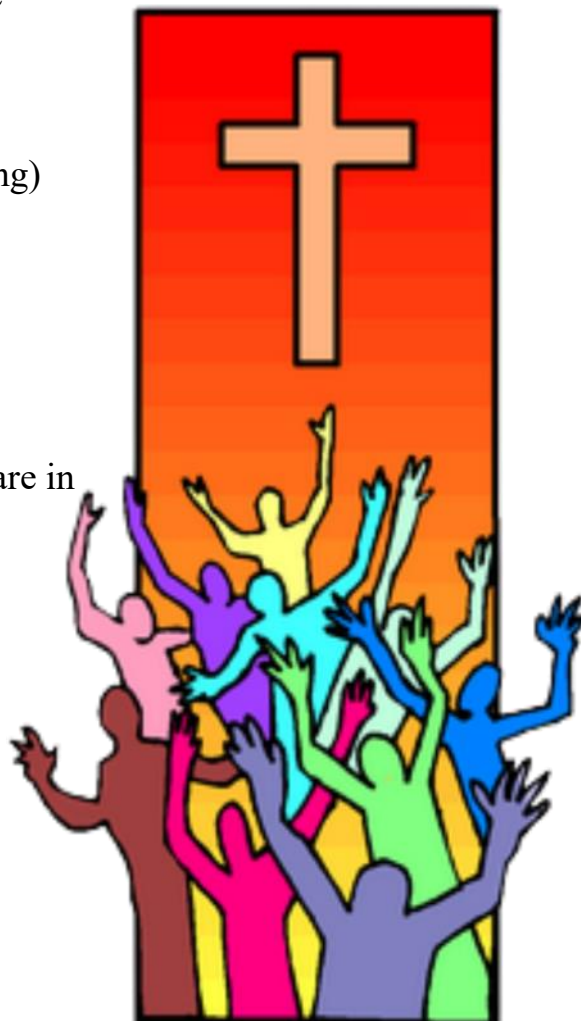
April 16 - What is the Church?

April 23 - The Walk to Emmaus

April 30 - Caring for Creation

Young Adults

This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on April 2nd 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 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.

A background image of yellow tulips in bloom, with some buds and open flowers, set against a soft yellow light.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Richard Aquadro, Carla Bee, Rachel Frogameni, 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!

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

April 2023

NPC = Northampton Parent's Center
 RVS = River Valley Sangha
 VJV = Valley Jazz Voices
 FoH = Friends of the Homeless
 B&G = Building & Grounds
 ISM = Interfaith Shelter Meal

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 11:30 MANNA
2 10 Worship 1 Young Adults 4 OTN	3 9:30 NPC 6 RVS 7:30 VJV	4 9:30 NPC 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon.	5 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	6 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	7 11:30 MANNA 7 Tenebrae Service	8 11:30 MANNA
9 10 Worship 4 OTN	10 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV <i>Office closed</i>	11 9:30 NPC 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 ECM	12 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 5:30 FoH 6 Finance 7 B&G	13 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	14 11:30 MANNA	15 11:30 MANNA
16 10 Worship 4 OTN	17 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV	18 9:30 NPC 6:30 FF COP 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon.	19 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	20 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visitation 7 Sit & Sing	21 11:30 MANNA 5:45 ISM	22 11:30 MANNA
23 10 Worship 11:15 ONA 4 OTN	24 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV	25 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon.	26 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 7 B&G	27 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	28 11:30 MANNA 7 Music at the Crossroads	29 11:30 MANNA
30 10 Worship 4 OTN						