



# THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**Vol. 33 No. 3      March 2023**

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Grace happens! The bumper sticker declares it. I believe it. I also receive it, and I am glad. More than glad, I am relieved beyond measure that once again, that wondrous love has come back around to “save a wretch like me.”

OK, wretch is a little strong, but John Newton, who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace,” knew himself to be a wretch. The child of a seagoing father and an attentive mother who schooled him in the Christian faith, as a younger man Newton sailed and engaged in the slave trade, taking captured Africans onto ships and transporting them for sale. He was also a foul mouthed, hard living man who talked other sailors out of their faith, so that he became known as “The Great Blasphemer.”

Until March 21, 1748, when the ship he was serving on was almost torn apart by a storm at sea. Tied to the ship’s wheel for 11 hours, as he steered through heaving seas he reconsidered his faith and prayed that he and the ship might be spared, and that he might change his ways. They were spared, and he did change, albeit gradually. In the second half of his life, Newton became a committed Christian, then a pastor, composer of hymns, and persistent preacher and advocate on behalf of the abolitionist cause.



*The Storm on the Sea of Galilee, Rembrandt*



In more ordinary lives, like mine or maybe yours, grace comes, we know not how, and changes the course of things by changing how we perceive, feel, and make sense of life as we live it. We can cultivate the conditions that are conducive to grace acting, but we cannot force it. The Spirit goes where it will. Simply taking the time to engage in daily devotional reading, or meditation, or any other practice that feeds you spiritually can awaken underused instincts and open new possibilities.

In his Lenten book *A Season for the Spirit*, Anglican priest Martin L. Smith writes of rediscovering in the English countryside a well spring that was the focal point of pilgrims in the Middle Ages. They travelled great distances to seek healing from it. The location had been lost for centuries, but Smith was able to find it by turning away from the spots favored by seekers in recent centuries, who preferred the tidier high ground. Noticing the wet earth where the cows gathered in a low spot, after digging through stinky mud and dung, Smith unearthed an ancient well head to reveal a source of clean, live giving water.



Lent, for Martin Smith, is a time for locating and uncovering the spiritual well spring buried within ourselves, because when we do we become so reconnected with God we cannot help but care more about our fellow humans and the world.

Ross Douthat, the NY Times columnist, is a conservative Catholic and cultural commentator. A consistent defender of traditional norms and social structures, Douthat nonetheless values the unpredictable and ultimately uncontrollable vitality of the Spirit in keeping faith alive. In a recent column, Douthat notes that “religious history is shaped as much by sudden irruptions as long trajectories, as much by the mystical and personal as by the institutional and sociological.” He sees the future of the wider Christian church as depending as much on our being open to the Spirit, as available to grace, as we are concerned for engineering the future of our institutions.

Given the toll the pandemic has taken on Sunday service attendance and other forms of engagement at almost all houses of worship, many wonder how we might court the spark of the Spirit and invite grace to help us regrow. The answer is both simple and challenging. We must practice our faith faithfully, pursuing those activities together that will bring us closer as followers of the Beloved, who calls us all to know ourselves as beloved, and keep turning outwards to the wider community as agents of God’s love and justice, as we come to know it.

And when we do, may God bless our efforts.

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

## **From the Minister of Faith Formation**

*Dear Beloved of God,*

As Jesus arose from the waters of the River Jordan following his baptism, the Spirit descended as a dove and a voice from heaven said: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” In the Transfiguration story, Peter, James, and John heard a voice from the cloud say: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

For years I have begun my Spire letter with the above salutation. In the churches I have served, members of Faith Formation Committees, ministers, parents, teachers, youth, and children have heard me say: “If there is one hope/longing I have, it isn’t how many Bible verses or stories our children and youth learn or remember, it is that each and every one of them will know that they are a beloved child of God.” That remains my hope...for the children of God of all ages. It is not to say that Bible verses and stories are not important or shouldn’t be remembered. The sacred verses and stories in both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments elicit a variety of reflective thoughts, emotions and wonderings theologically, spiritually, and personally. Two hymns, Tell Me the Stories of Jesus and I Love to Tell the Story, are among those that echo my sentiments about Bible stories.

Having entered the forty-day Season of Lent, a season typically characterized as a time of prayer, fasting or taking something on, and almsgiving, my spiritual journey has circled around, yet again (the spiritual path is not linear), to reflect on what being a beloved child of God means for me. What does God long for me as one of God’s beloved?

I have many “to do” lists; perhaps some of you can relate. Some pertain to my vocation, my personal life, my spiritual life etc. I have also drafted many “to do” lists about what living out Micah 6:8 “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? What might it look like for me to live a life personally transformed by the love, compassion and justice that Jesus modeled...love that God has embedded in all of us? Love realized by Jesus, his disciples, the woman at the well, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, and so many more.

This Lent, seeking a deeper intimacy with God, I intend to focus on, uncover, and own my identity as a beloved child of God. Time spent will not be about creating another “to do” list, rather it will be about “*being*” with love, in all those places and in those persons I experience the Divine and in unexpected new ones. It will be sitting in silence and stillness listening for God and resting in the love God has for me, to be awed by it, to trust it, and risk to allow that love to embrace and transform me.

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

## **Transitional Director of Music**

Maybe you heard there is a “revival” at a Christian college in Kentucky. A worship service that went on for two weeks, as of this writing, and which has attracted thousands of visitors and a lot of skeptical commentary. What were they doing? Mostly, they were singing.

I wonder about the revivals shepherded in Northampton by Jonathan Edwards in the 1730’s and 40’s. I bet there was singing. Edwards describes singing praise to God on horseback. His wife Sarah was a singer, and probably played the lute.

But corporate singing in congregations was undergoing a transformation, in which Edwards took the modern approach, which is called “regular” singing—that is, singing in parts. The earlier Puritan tradition allowed only “lining out”, in which a leader sings a line from the Psalms (only the Psalms!) and the congregation responds. This would not result in much harmony (or rhythm). Edwards thought that the beauty of musical harmony was a manifestation of God’s beauty. Of heaven, he preached “There shall be no string out of tune to cause any discord”.

At the height of the Northampton Awakening, it was said that night-time singing and moaning could be heard from every house.

## **A Thank You From Stone**

I want to thank you and everyone on the committee for awarding me the generous Edwards Church scholarship to help me pursue a career in jazz drums. This spring semester (in my sophomore year at the Manhattan School of Music) has been quite busy so far, but I've been enjoying every second of it. I've been rehearsing and performing my own compositions with the Phil Markowitz ensemble, watching Brian Blade give a masterclass on campus, and setting up a gig at Chris's jazz cafe in Philadelphia with my band. I also recently had the opportunity to perform the music of Jim McNeely with the MSM big band orchestra. Click [here](#) for a short clip from that concert.

Please extend my gratitude to everyone in the Edwards Church Community!

Thank you again,

Stone

## Search Team Responsibilities

To: Director of Music Search Team

From: Elected Core Ministry (ECM)

Re: Search Team Responsibilities

The search team should engage the friends and members of the church to identify preferences and ideas for the future music program. After collecting that information create a survey that will be sent to all members of the congregation so you can collect information and insights and identify the needs and wishes of the congregation. The information collected in the survey should be used in part as the basis to create a Director of Music job description. Once the job description has been finalized by the ECM in consultation with the Personnel Committee it will be posted to attract potential candidates.

The search team will also develop interview questions, and an interview process, and propose a communication plan with the congregation and ECM. Initial interviews will be conducted by the \*search team. Follow-up interviews will be conducted by the \*search team and will include the Senior Minister as head of staff and may include other ministers and ECM. The \*search team may visit and observe the candidates for consideration.

The search team will report monthly to the ECM and Senior Minister on their progress.

The search team will be reimbursed for travel expenses as it relates to this process.

Sincerely,

The Elected Core Ministry

Leon Drzewianowski

Jack Hjelt

Heather Bell

Mark Dion

Margaret Allen

Sheri Cheung

\*at least three members



# **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:

**March 19** – CPR training with Mark Dion  
in Addis Hall - limited to 8  
participants

## **Church School**

Here is what we will be exploring in March:

March 5 - Communion Sunday. Worship is  
intergenerational so all ages may share in the  
Sacrament together.

March 12 - The Very Thirsty Woman

March 19 - A Brand New King

March 26 - The Road to Jerusalem

## **Young Adults**

This ministry with our college students and other  
young adults will meet via Zoom on March 5th 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](mailto:ffmininister@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.



## MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Courtney Aquadro, Michele Carroll, Martha McCullagh,  
Taylor Cook, Lynda Erickson, Ruth Griggs, Alfred Griggs,  
Elizabeth Henneman, Ken Longstreeth, Paula Mattison,  
Michael McSherry, Eugene Sielski, James Stokes-Buckles,  
Gwenn Swift, Matthew Buckley Wells

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**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!

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## 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

# March 2023

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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 7 Music	2 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing 7 Search	3 11:30 MANNA	4 11:30 MANNA
5 10 Worship 1 Young Adults 4 On That Note	6 9:30 NPC 6 RVS 7:30 VJV	7 9:30 NPC 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon 7:15 ECM	8 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 5:30 FoH	9 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	10 11:30 MANNA	11 11:30 MANNA
12 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 11:30 ONA 4 On That Note	13 9:30 NPC 5 ONA 7:30 VJV	14 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon	15 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 12:30 FEC 7 B&G <b>SPIRE deadline</b>	16 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visita- tion 7 Sit & Sing	17 11:30 MANNA 5:45 ISM	18 11:30 MANNA
19 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 3 Ukraine Fundraiser Rehearsal 4 On That Note	20 9:30 NPC 7:00 Karuna 7:30 VJV	21 9:30 NPC 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon	22 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 6:30 FF COP	23 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	24 11:30 MANNA	25 11:30 MANNA
26 10 Worship 12:15 NCMC 4 Ukraine Fundraiser	27 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV	28 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon	29 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	30 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	31 11:30 MANNA	