



Dear Edwards Church Community,

Rainn Wilson is a successful working actor, famous for playing the character Dwight in the long running hit TV show *The Office*. With his new book, *Soul Boom: Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution*, the comedic artist best known for portraying a doofus shares surprising insight on what it means to be spiritual and religious in our society.

He has no hesitation in sharing his conviction that God is real: “The first step in knowing that there is a creative force in the universe is I know that there is love. I also know that there is beauty. I also know that there is art and there is music. And all of these things that are ineffable and transcendent are footprints. They're handholds on the path to finding the great mystery.” <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/25/1171786870/rainn-wilson-urges-a-spiritual-revolution-in-his-new-book-soul-boom>

I was impressed by an interview that aired on April 25, in which Rainn Wilson talks about wandering away from the Baha’i tradition in which he grew up and returning to it later, especially by how thoroughly Mr. Wilson integrates both his spiritual questions and convictions into daily life. He found, as a young man, that he did not believe in the God his childhood education provided or that popular culture provides. But still as a young, struggling actor in New York, he would ask people he had just met at parties, “Do you believe in God?” As he says, he was always considered a nerdy guy, and not just by casting directors, but he was OK with that.

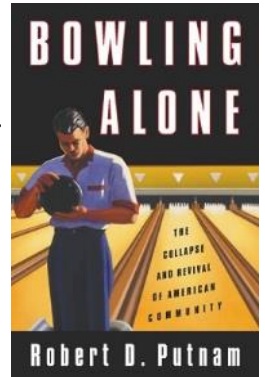


His ranging curiosity and persistent effort to make sense of spiritual matters across all areas of life moved him to speak out now. “There has been a profound loss of the sacred in contemporary Western civilization. Nothing is sacred anymore. And I think sacredness and holiness is part of the conversation that we need to have collectively.”

Rainn Wilson uses his fame and his talent as a communicator to share his spiritual life and raise awareness of related issues. Nothing could be more natural for a person raised in the Baha'i tradition, which teaches the worthiness of all religions and the oneness of humanity. Of course, he had to make it his own, but that is all part of the spiritual and religious life. (For more on that, see Deb Moore's letter in this *Spire*.)

The timing of Rainn Wilson's book is also a happy coincidence with the Christian season of Eastertide, the 50 days from Easter to Pentecost when we are invited to consider how the reality of Easter is manifest in our lives and in the world around us. In our modern world, it can be increasingly hard to do that, and I believe one of the biggest causes *and* effects of that difficulty is our increasing isolation.

In 2000, the sociologist Robert Putnam raised awareness of our increasing isolation with his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. He chronicles the decline in the average number of low stakes social contacts (aka casual friends) that Americans had in each decade since the middle of the 20th century. Many factors (such as commuting to work and watching television) have fed this trend, and a multifaceted response will be required to rebuild and strengthen our social fabric. The consistent theme is that we need more interpersonal connection.



Since 2000, the trend has only become more noticeable. People have less time and fewer venues in which to cultivate casual friendships, which can mature into close friendships. However, we are not powerless. Christianity, by its very nature, is discovered and shared in community. People of many different ages and walks of life come to know God and grow in their experience of God by being part of a caring community in which they can explore and deepen their spiritual lives and form friendships that can be as casual or as close as the mutual friends are comfortable.

Think of the stories in which followers of Jesus encounter the risen Christ. Mary Magdalene cannot recognize him until he speaks her name. Travelers on the road to Emmaus cannot recognize him until they share hospitality and the bread and cup. Thomas thought he needed to have “hard evidence” to experience the hope of the resurrection, but what he really needed was to know that his relationship to God, as experienced in Jesus, was real. (see Deb's letter, especially about the difference between the “achieving” and the “awakened” brain)

The resurrection is real. The presence of the Holy in yourself, your loved ones, and that person two pews over is real. That feeling you get when music allows the spark of the Divine to brighten to a warm glow inside you is not just a passing sensation. The growth of your willingness to take a personal risk to deepen a friendship or family relationship is not crazy; it is the Spirit coaxing you into a creative risk. Go ahead. Live a little, and then a little more.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Minister of Faith Formation

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.

Psalm 139: 13-14 (NRSV)

Dear Beloved of God,

In 2015, Lisa Miller, PhD., authored a ground-breaking book titled *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*. Her latest book, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life*, builds on her research about the effect of spirituality on mental health. I have not read her latest book; however, a colleague, Debbie Gline-Allen, Minister of Faith Formation for the Faith Formation Ministry Team of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC has shared her findings in a couple of recent blogs. You can read Debbie's most recent blog at: <https://www.sneucc.org/blogdetail/17390136>.

Miller defines spirituality as “an inner sense of relationship to a higher power that is loving and guiding. The word we give to this higher power may be nature, God, spirit, the universe, the creator or others which represent a divine presence.” We are foundationally, inherently and genetically spiritual beings; from day one we are born with a capacity for transcendence. Many of us are aware that the youngest among us are indeed spiritual beings. How faith communities nurture the spiritual life of the youngest among us is important especially in the first 10 years of their life. How faith communities assist families in offering opportunities for meaning and memory making is important to their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual health. It is imperative that none of these areas are neglected.

Miller also offers six spiritual strengths: 1. a child's spiritual compass is trustworthy and good for life, 2. children are hardwired to hold family sacred and sustaining, 3. spiritual community gives your child an expanded family of kindred spirits, 4. spiritual multilingualism (seeing the sacred in others and diverse traditions) is your child's passport, 5. spiritual agency empowers children to create a culture of love, 6. transcendent knowing: dreams, mystical experiences, and other special knowing.

There is an engaging YouTube video conversation with Lisa Miller and Professor Stephen Kelleher titled *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and our Quest for an Inspired Life*. In the video the two spend time discussing the achieving (transactional/ utilitarian) brain and the awakened (transformational) brain. The achieving brain has to do with having more and the awakened brain has to do with being more. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IOJeBAIVB4>.

On April 18th and 19th, I attended the 2023 Children's Spirituality Summit regarding Generation Alpha (those born between 2010-2024). Primarily children of Millennials, Alpha's are the first generation entirely born into and shaped by the 21st century. They are "digital natives" having no prior experience of life before cell phones, iPads, computers, etc. Mark McCrindle (<https://mccrindle.com.au>) coined the term Alpha as having reached the end of the alphabet we are most familiar with, he transitioned to the Greek alphabet.

In response to the types of stress (Sprenger 2008) that children and youth face The Harvard Center for the Developing Child (<https://developingchild.harvard.edu>) states that children need:

The availability of at least one stable, caring, and supportive relationship between a child and the important adults in his or her life. These relationships begin in family and can include neighbors, teachers, social workers, coaches and I would add members of their faith community.

Helping children build a sense of mastery over their life circumstances to adapt positively to adversity.

Children who develop strong executive functions and self-regulations skills are able to manage their behavior and emotions and adapt strategies to cope effectively with difficult circumstances.

The supportive context of affirming faith or cultural traditions. Children who are solidly grounded within such traditions are more likely to respond effectively when challenged by a major stressor or a severely disruptive experience.

Some other, still forming characteristics of Generation Alpha: they are activists with a deep responsibility to reverse the damage of past generations; which includes systemic injustices prevalent in our world; they are influenced by activists not too much older than themselves – like Greta Thunberg; they are super informed and constantly connected; they will likely stay in education longer; start their earning years later and so stay at home with their parents later than even their predecessors, Gen Z and Gen Y; they may be particularly impatient as they are used to technology fulfilling their desires from an early age; they are inclined to break free from existing structures and institutions (including church); they will face questions that haven't been named yet, so that adults who have gone before them will need to be present and receive their questions without judgement or fear.

I pray that Generation Alpha (and all our children and youth) will know this chant based on Psalm 139: 13-14, taught to us by Jeff Olmsted, and which has become part of the opening ritual in church school:

I am wonderfully made, named, and claimed by God.

You are wonderfully made, named, and claimed by God.

We are wonderfully made, named, and claimed by God.

And I pray that we as a faith community will actively, lovingly, and faithfully minister to our church school families in meaning making and memory making ways that support their faith and spiritual well-being.

*Blessings,
Deb*

ECM Meeting Notes

April 11, 2023

- Facilitator: Heather
- Minutes: Sheri
- Opening Devotional: Jack
 - interfaith devotion: Hindu prayer
- Approval of previous meetings minutes: Everyone
 - approved with no corrections
- A/V Upgrade : Mark
 - met with vendor last week, contract signed, down payment sent.
 - likely 4-6 weeks estimated timeline
- Finance Team update (did not meet in March): Leon
 - no update
- Eliminating Zoom for Sunday Services – U-Tube only: All
 - zoom quality of music is poor and we aren't using the breakout rooms anymore.
 - very few people are using zoom and we can tell how many people are watching on U-Tube which would be nice to track
 - planning to transfer to OBS (Open Broadcasting System) soon, easier to use graphics, etc. plan to transition within the next 3 weeks or so
 - Michael will write something for the Spire
- Music Committee: Mark
 - crossroads on 4/28: a cappella groups. Jeff is putting up a poster in the sandwich board
 - Alan in June
 - August 18th Eavesdrop (folk band); they will bring some of their own equipment to help with sound
 - Dave Haughey in Sept or Oct
 - maybe Danny for the holidays
 - consider increasing budget as mixing the sound for streaming is challenging
 - discussion about optimizing sound quality in the sanctuary for music; may need to consult a sound expert at some point
- Search Team Update: Mark
 - just met tonight: first round of questions all set and posting will go out to a large audience to get a wide pool of potential applicants
 - plan to give applicants 10 minutes to ask questions, and policy is proposed to have no comments on former employees. Proposal approved unanimously

--We can recommend employees use former evaluations in lieu of a letter of recommendation, and we feel the personnel committee would be the appropriate body to discuss this. Michael will reach out to them.

- Search Team Budget: Mark
 - one is needed! For advertising and interviewing funds. 3000 dollars recommended by Michael, and it was voted in favor unanimously. The funds will come out of the ECM new way money.
- ONA Welcome Statement – Special Meeting: All
 - written notice and announcement on Sunday for ONA statement proposal to be voted on by congregation
 - And Michael is recommending adding a vote from the congregation to take some funds out of the investment account to replenish the B&G budget.
 - date: April 30th; Michael will draft the announcement
- Website access: Mark
 - do we block former members from the password-protected areas of our website? We'd have to change password and recommendation is to change password annually in June or July. Michael will ask Kyla to change now and then we'll do annually in June or July.
 - notice in bulletin to say we're changing password
 - we should have a discussion about what we want the content of the password-protected areas of the website to be at some point
- Extra Pews B& G email: All
 - 6 pews to be removed, so the question is can we give them away?
 - perhaps move the pews around so the free-standing pew is in the front, which is what B&G recommends. But that would separate the chairs in front a bit. Also under discussion: block off the back pews except for on Sundays when they're needed. Leon recommends meeting in person sometime in June in order to check out the space. We will hence table this discussion. We will invite B&G to join us for the first part of the meeting so we can all be together, look at the space, and come to a consensus
- Thriving Congregation: Sheri/Deb
 - no update
- Signing Contracts: Leon
 - do we have a policy on signing contracts for people that we hire? Should we ask finance committee to draft something? We all agree that seems like a good idea. Leon will bring it up tomorrow at their meeting!
 - the old by-laws didn't really have a statement about this either, so may be good to come up with something more structured.

- Rewriting By Laws Update: All
 - Heather emailed Ella but hasn't heard back. She will email again and include Laura and Jeff as they had also volunteered to take this on last year, just to see if they're still interested.
- Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group: Deb
 - Islamophobia will be the focus, likely to be in late May
- Safe Church/Safe Conduct Policy: Deb
 - Deb thinks we should update this again as it's been awhile, especially given our new ONA statement.
 - we vote yes, let's put a team together. Jack volunteers to be on the team. Deb will put the team together and notify us via email
- Review of the Minister: All
 - we have some materials from earlier reviews that were emailed to us all. Thanks Mark and Leon!
 - we think we should save this for next month as it's pretty late. Next month at minimum we will come up with hard dates for scheduling the steps. Heather will workup a proposed schedule for us to look at. Also, maybe we need just a separate meeting to talk about this and we will do this before our next full ECM meeting.
- Other Business?: All
 - 2nd Tuesdays are tough for Jack, so is there a better night? Maybe standardize? Proposal would be second Monday of the month at 7 pm, and so we'll give that a try.
- Next Meeting(s)
 - meeting for minister review: Wednesday 4/26 at 7 pm. Michael will ask Kyla to set up the Zoom
 - next ECM meeting will be 5/15/2023 (even tho that's the 3rd Monday, we recognize this) at 7 pm on Zoom, then 6/12 in person so we can look at pews, then 7/10 on zoom again
- Assignments: for 5/15
 1. Agenda: Mark
 2. Facilitator: Leon
 3. Opening Devotional: Sheri
 4. Minutes: Heather
 5. Closing Prayer: Jack
- Closing Prayer: Deb
 - pictures of cute baby first! Yay!
 - Steven Mitchell's Psalm 16 adaptation

Director of Music Search Committee Update

Charged by the ECM in the fall of 2022, the members of the Director of Music Search Team have been hard at work since December researching Edwards members and friends, creating a job posting and job description for interested candidates, and developing questions and rating rubrics for our interviews with qualified candidates. Kyla Power and Michael McSherry have been very helpful in managing the actual posting of the job on appropriate music school, UCC, recruitment and choral director sites. Kyla will redact the names and addresses of qualified applicants before submitting packets to the search team to ensure an unbiased review of candidates.

Timetable of events both past and present:

December, '22 - Focus Groups with 22 Edwards members and friends

February - Survey of Edwards Church members and friends (56 responded)

March & April – Assess survey results; craft job posting and job description; post on 10+ websites; pre-screen candidates

May 1 – close of application submissions (date will be extended if pool is small)

Early May – Kyla sends redacted candidate packets (resume, cover letter & music samples) to search team; team reviews packets and agrees on whom to interview

Mid-late May – First Zoom interviews; review & assessment; second interviews

June – Search Team narrows pool to 2-3 finalists; visits/interviews in-person with candidates; crafts and extends offer upon ECM approval

July 1 – Target Director of Music start date

SUMMARY OF “THE FUTURE OF MUSIC AT EDWARDS” QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Methodology: The quantitative survey was sent via email on February 6 and 13 to 197 friends and members of Edwards Church. The survey was made available as an online Google forms survey as well as a paper survey. We received 56 responses which represents a 28.4% response rate. 75% of the respondents were 60 years+ of age.

Executive Summary: Similar to what we heard in the December focus groups, the overall “theme” of the responses is that folks want variety and quality in the future of music at Edwards Church. Respondents expressed an openness to different types of instruments, types of singing (spiritual and gospel were very popular), less regular organ playing, and even less adult choir presence. Some of their likes reflected a traditional approach: singing hymns, not more secular music; listening to an organ performance during service; not singing too much during service; not much interest in clapping to bring out the spirit. There is real interest in investing in the music program and in building up the adult choir through volunteers.

Types/Genres of Music: Respondents are open to a wide variety of musical genres. Spirituals were ranked highest, with classical right behind followed by gospel. Folk and meditative come in as the next most popular, followed by jazz and then contemporary.

Instruments: The respondents are clearly interested in a variety of musical instruments. Piano was the most important to respondents, followed by organ and then strings. Brass was popular for three quarters of respondents and guitar and winds garnered near the same interest. Drums and handbells had the weakest interest.

Singing: Hymns are clearly the favorite type of singing – from any type of hymnal. While they may like to sing, they don't express a need to sing much more than three times during the service, perhaps four. There is definitely interest in having a choir, but the respondents don't express an adult choir as being the be-all/end-all. Nor were they decisive in how a choir should be built back up. Starting with a small choir of volunteers was the most popular approach with the respondents, although a paid professional choir was also considered a viable idea. Respondents seemed willing to have the church spend money on professional musicians - a full three-quarters of respondents said that investing in a professional music program was either a great idea or they were somewhat comfortable with it.

Reactions to Specific Ideas and Suggestions: Having different musical themes on various Sundays was the most popular idea, and is consistent with the expression of liking variety that we have seen. They were also very open to merging youth from other churches in music. Having the Director of Music as more of a producer garnered enthusiastic response as did sharing an organist and reallocating funds toward musicians and singers rather than a single choir model. This all reflects the interest in and openness to variety that we have seen throughout the research. The vast majority expressed an interest in hearing the organ played during service. Clapping during music to feel the spirit garnered a lukewarm response, while applauding after music was pretty evenly split between a firm "no" and "sometimes." Being given context of the music we are singing also had lukewarm interest.

Having the organ played two times per month was the most popular option, and the adult choir and piano being heard each week was the preferred approach for over half of respondents. Noteworthy that a little under half of respondents were fine with the adult choir every two weeks or even monthly.

Your Music Search Team,

Sarah Briggs, Mark Dion, Laura Frogameni, Ruth Griggs, Dave Haughey, Chris Hjelt, and Alan Schneider

Pride is Back

You're Invited to a Parade!

The Pride Parade is back in Northampton! Join Edwards Church congregation members as we march in the parade with our sister UCC churches!

Date

Saturday, May 6

When and Where

9:30 am: Meet at back door of Edwards Church

9:45 am: Shuttle to Sheldon Field, the parade starting point (near the fairgrounds at the corner of Bridge St., & Old Ferry Rd.)

10:00 am: Meet other Hampshire Association UCC churches for the parade line up & fellowship

11-12 noon: Parade steps off & marches up Bridge St. to Main St. ending downtown at the corner of Main & Old South St.

12-5 pm: Optional to attend is the Hampshire Pride Festival in the parking lot behind Thornes featuring booths sponsored by local organizations & businesses (including a shared First Churches/ Edwards Church booth!) entertainment & special speakers.

RSVP PLEASE and direct questions to

Debbie Davis at debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413-626-5117

What else?

First Churches is sharing their festival booth with us where we'll be handing out information and free bottles of water to festival attendees. We're looking for Edwards folks to work in teams of 2 for one to two hour shifts from 12-5. Reply to Debbie Davis if interested in helping in this fun way to get to know folks from Edwards and First Churches!

Thanks for seriously considering this invitation to join your Open and Affirming Ministry Team for a day of fun & fellowship, and an opportunity to live out our church's commitment to support & celebrate LGBTQ+ folks.

From your Open and Affirming MInistry Team

Debbie Davis, Grace Del Vecchio, Chris Hjelt, Carls Wirzberger, Jude Almeida, Samson Melendez, Deb Moore & Michael McSherry

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.silverlakeect.org>

<https://hortoncenter.org>

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

From Smith Academy

On May 4 Smith Academy in Hatfield is hosting a fun and informative festival of events. **Hatfield's Getting Cooler**, with fun for all ages, information, games, activities, music and art. We hope you'll join us starting at 4:30 PM at Smith Academy, 34 School St., Hatfield, MA 01038.

Please see the poster, designed by a Smith Academy 9th grade student, for details.

Hope to see you at **Hatfield's Getting Cooler!**



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:

May 28 - Gathering for youth and parents

Church School

Here is what we will be exploring in April:

May 7 - Communion Sunday Intergenerational worship walk the Labyrinth in Addis Hall before or after worship.

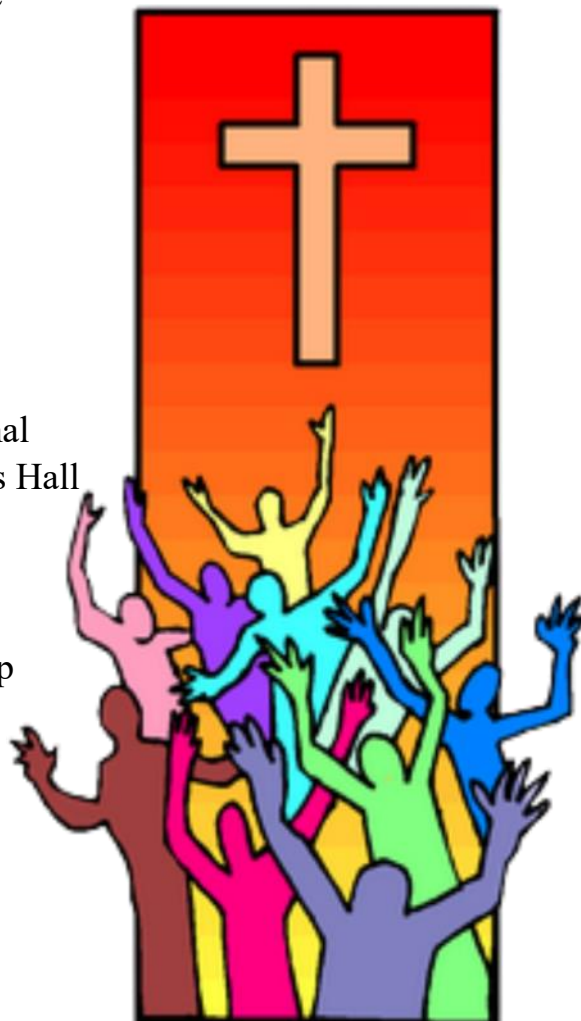
May 14 - Parable of the Mustard Seed

May 21 - Parable of Leaven

May 28 - Pentecost - intergenerational worship

Young Adults

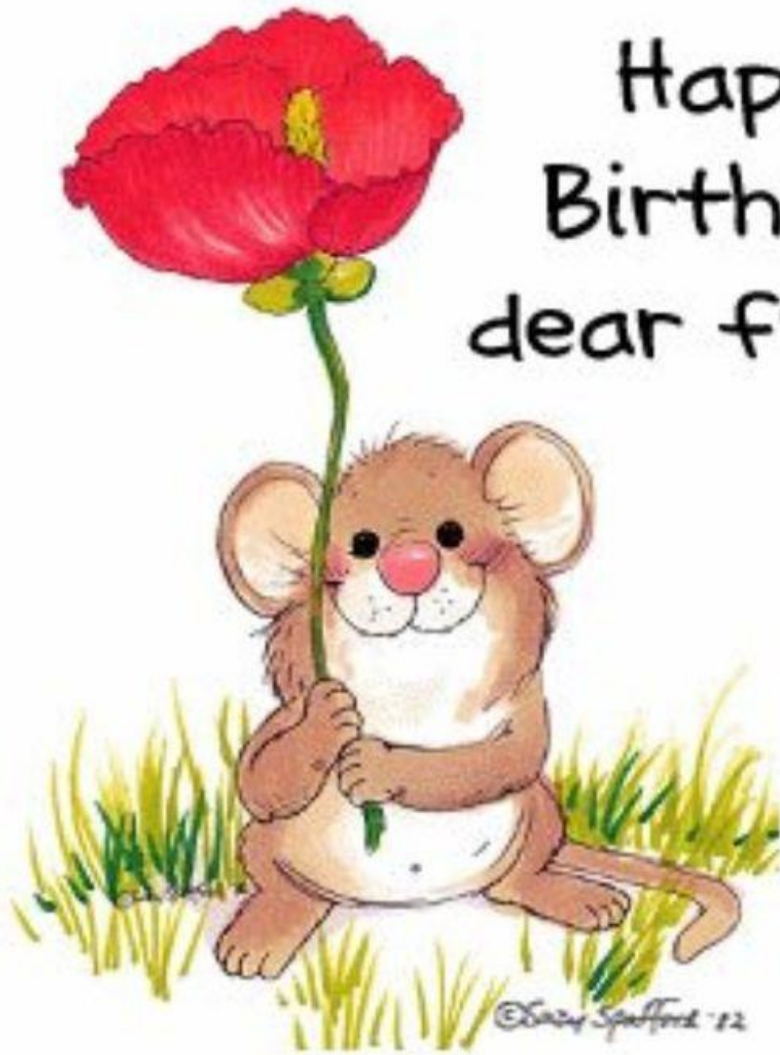
This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on May 7th at 1:00pm.



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.



Happy
Birthday,
dear friend!

Jody Gerbasi

Ann Abel

Sarah Briggs

Janice Longstreeth

Sally Griggs

Debra Davis

Lynda Kamik

Owen Hutchison

Julia Shapleigh

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

NPC = Northampton Parent's Center
 RVS = River Valley Sangha
 VJV = Valley Jazz Voices
 FoH = Friends of the Homeless
 B&G = Building & Grounds
 PVC = Pioneer Valley Cappella
 HA = Hampshire Association

May 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 9:30 NPC 6 RVS 7:30 VJV	2 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 Wise Guys	3 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	4 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	5 11:30 MANNA	6 11:30 MANNA
7 10 Worship 1 Young Adults 4 On That Note 7:30 PVC	8 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV	9 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 Wise Guys	10 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 5:30 FoH	11 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	12 11:30 MANNA	13 11:30 MANNA
14 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 4 On That Note	15 9:30 NPC 7 ECM 7:30 VJV Spire Deadline	16 9:30 NPC 6:30 FF COP 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 Wise Guys 7:45 Outreach	17 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	18 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visitation 7 Sit & Sing	19 11:30 MANNA	20 11:30 MANNA
21 3 HA - annual mtg. 4 On That Notes	22 9:30 NPC 6:30 Finance 7:30 VJV	23 3 Prayer Shawl 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 Wise Guys	24 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	25 9:30 NPC 7 Sit & Sing	26 11:30 MANNA	27 11:30 MANNA
28 10 Worship 4 On That Note	29 9:30 NPC 7:30 VJV	30 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon. 7 Wise Guys	31 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study			