

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 33 No. 10

December 2023

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God,



Advent – the journey to Bethlehem begins anew and so does the liturgical calendar of the church year. Advent is a season of expectant waiting, confident hope, anticipatory joy and a reminder of the promises of peace and love ushered in with the birth of the Christ Child over 2000 years ago. It is a season rich with rituals, traditions, special music, liturgical and seasonal decorations, visits with family and friends, gifting those we know and love as well as some we may never meet, colder temperatures and perhaps even some snow. Here at Edwards there will be several special services and offerings and I hope you will consider inviting a friend or neighbor to experience some or all of them with you.

As I began discerning the next chapter of my life and the threshold I would be crossing there were many “what if” questions as I sat with quite a bit of not knowing. Ed Catmull (Pixar) writes that “there is a sweet spot between the known and the unknown where originality happens; the key is to be able to linger there without panicking.”

Many of you - children, youth, young adults, and adults alike- have heard me begin a thought process while in conversation in church school, youth group, on a Zoom, in an email or the Spire letter with “I wonder...” To wonder is a spiritual practice that invites us into an open space and conversation with the Divine and one another to participate in following the way of Jesus, of living out the promises made at Baptism, of meaning making without judgement, along our life long journeys of faith as individuals and a congregation. To wonder invites our beginners mind to entertain many possibilities and to do so lingering without panicking. As you as a congregation moves through this liminal time, I pray that you will be faithfully open to wonder, experimentation, evaluation, reinvention, and more evaluation even as the Church universal continues to evolve.

I am reminded and offer for your wondering, theologian Marjorie Suchoki's metaphor of a kaleidoscope in describing how God moves through all that life presents us with. She suggests that the creative work of the Divine and of Creation is reflective in the multiple pieces and possibilities held in the image seen in this toy. With just a slight turn, a new image can be observed. With just a small decision the whole world can shift. Our steadfast and loving God is present and moving with us in all the shifts, the nuances, the unknowing's, the affirmations, life and church transitions just as God always has and always will be. Many times in recent months I have picked up the kaleidoscope in my office and in the turning, smiled.

Dear Beloved of God, in this my last Spire letter after twelve years and four months I offer this blessing from Jan Richardson. As I have been so deeply blessed to have served you and God, please know that is with a grateful heart that I will carry with me the love and joy we have shared, the grace we have granted one another, the persistent hope we have for living into and helping to make God's dream for all people and creation possible.

In her blessing titled *In The Leaving*, Jan Richardson writes:

In the leaving,
in the letting go,
let there be this
to hold onto
at the last:

the enduring of love,
the persisting of hope,
the remembering of joy,

the offering of gratitude,
the receiving of grace,
the blessing of peace.

Blessings on your journey to Bethlehem and all that you will give birth to,
Deb

From the Senior Minister

Dear Edwards Church Community,

The fundamental fact of Christmas, the event we wait and prepare for, is Emmanuel, God with us. God cares for and about us so much, God has joined us in being human. Before the birth of Jesus, God already *observed* what humans experienced in life, but had not yet *experienced* it the same way we do – in the flesh. God was so moved by what God saw us going through that God decided to enter fully into human life as a distinct human being, with a unique identity and purpose. Only in this embodied way could God demonstrate the depth and breadth of God's love for us.

Just imagine: the creative force that moved across the formless void and gave rise to all we see today. Imagine that creative force being fully present in one person with awareness of all the actions, motives, thoughts, and feelings of other creatures, human or non-human. Imagine that perception and knowledge not limited by time or space, and the capacity to feel in one body the full potential of the human race to create and give for the sake of all that is good.



Just imagine that unique person also experiencing the full range of human frailty, of learning the lure and the cost of giving in to temptation. Jesus the man, 30 years after his birth, 30 years into experiencing the variety of blessings and curses of being human, of growing up in a religious tradition and learning at each stage of his life how to listen and respond to the leading of the Spirit, the *ruah* or breath that moved across the waters at the moment of creation and tame the chaos. Imagine experiencing the full range of possibilities and then being led him into the wilderness to face evil incarnate.



Imagine being born so that you might grow into your maturity as one so gifted, just so that you could give yourself completely to a cause as uncertain as human beings responding fully to a divine invitation, a calling to live into all the good you had in you, a calling to make a way for all the good in others too. Imagine doing all that while knowing in your bones that it would cost you unavoidable suffering, which would make way for an abundant new life.

Every Advent and Christmas we return to the beginning, to the manger and the moment when God comes into our lives as a newborn, completely vulnerable and willingly dependent on other ordinary humans to see what God is doing as Jesus. In a time when the world is so frightening, we can be tempted to despair. It can feel like too much to keep putting our time and energy into hope, much less joy, peace, or love. Given the state of the world, it can feel like too much to believe God really cares.

And then a Christmas pageant, a candlelight service, or an old, familiar hymn will rekindle hope, joy, peace, and love and the willingness to rejoin the struggle to share them with every living being. In 1849, the Massachusetts pastor Edmund H. Sears wrote in “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”:

*And you, beneath life’s crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way, with painful steps and slow,
Look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.*

The angels, the messengers of God, come on Christmas Eve and throughout the season – throughout the year really, though sometimes in disguise as fellow humans – not just to join us in singing praise, but as reminders that even though Jesus may no longer be available in the flesh, the same Spirit that inspired him is now available to us, sustaining and prompting us along the way he came to show and call us to follow.



In “Joy to the World” we sing, “*Let every heart prepare him room ... and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing!*” This Christmas, may that Spirit, the spirit of Christmas, the *ruah* that moved across the water, that descended on Jesus at his baptism, led him into the wilderness, and moved him through life and death, and then back into new life with him, bring you comfort and joy.

And may your Advent preparations unfold in new life too.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael



Advent Prayers for in the Manger

All are invited to write a word(s) of hope or longing on a ribbon found on the table in the back of sanctuary and place it as straw in the manger located in the chancel area.



Nativity Sunday and the Annual Christmas Pageant

Nativity Sunday is December 17 and will feature our annual intergenerational Christmas Pageant co-directed this year by Jim Stokes-Buckles and Ella Stocker. Sign-ups are underway!

If you or your child/ren would like to be part of the pageant – an angel, a shepherd, an animal around the manger, the innkeeper, narrator, please contact Deb Moore at ffminis-ter@edwardschurchnorthampton.org. A rehearsal will take place Saturday, December 16 from 9:30 – 10:30 in the sanctuary. Costume fittings will take place after worship December 10 and also before and after the rehearsal on December 16.

Advent is coming and so is one of our favorite Edwards Church traditions!



Mark Saturday, December 2nd on your calendar now! At 4 pm we'll have our weekly worship service, immediately followed by trimming the tree at the back of the sanctuary, carol singing at the front of the sanctuary, and a light supper served buffet-style down the hall in the Edwards Room. ***This event has been a beloved Edwards Church tradition to celebrate the beginning of Advent for many years. You won't want to miss it!***

Why on Saturday? Because on Sunday, Dec. 3, downtown Northampton will be the site of the Hot Chocolate Run, a fundraiser for Safe Passages. With some roads closed and parking at a premium for this event, we hold our worship service on Saturday, which also allows folks in our congregation to participate in the Hot Chocolate Run themselves!

What should I bring? Your friends, family, sense of fun, fellowship, festivity and cookies! This is a great opportunity to share the fellowship you enjoy at Edwards with friends and family. Please invite them to come with you! And, we'd love it if some folks could bring a plate of cookies or another dessert to share, preferably something that doesn't require utensils. We'll be offering light, informal supper fare including assorted finger sandwiches, chips and dips, cheese and crackers and beverages provided by the church – things that are easy to eat while standing or transitioning back & forth between caroling, tree trimming and enjoying refreshments. All we need to complete the meal are desserts – either homemade or store-bought, your choice!

If you're interested in helping by serving as a greeter, or with the food set-up or clean-up, please call or email Debbie Davis: debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413-626-5117. See you on Saturday, December 2nd at 4 pm!

Thank you Fellowship Hosting Team!



A big thank you to our volunteers who serve on the Fellowship Hosting Team! These folks make our time visiting with each other after Sunday worship even better by setting up light refreshments so we can mingle, chat and enjoy each other's company with a cup of coffee and a tasty snack.

Some of our Fellowship volunteers listed below take turns hosting each week by setting out the snacks that we keep stocked in our Fellowship Hour cupboard. Others help by preparing the hot beverages. *Next time you see one of these volunteers, please thank them for the time and talent they devote to making our fellowship time together so pleasant!*

And, if you'd like to get involved in the life of the church as a member of this team, please contact Debbie Davis at debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413-626-5117, who will be happy to show you the ropes and, if you like, team you up with another volunteer so you can co-host together.

Our wonderful Fellowship Hosting Team volunteers are ...

Sue Anderson

Emmy Clausing

Laura Frogameni

Ruth Griggs

Kathy & Ron Korza

Susan & Brian Swift

Sandra Rossi

Ella Stocker

Kelly Tice

Grace Del Vecchio & Debbie Davis

ECM Meeting Minutes

November 13, 2023

7:15 pm – 8:30 pm

- Facilitator: Mark
- Minutes: Heather
- Opening Devotional: Sheri
- Attending: Leon, Mark, Heather, Sheri, Michael, Deb
- Approval of previous minutes: approved
- A/V Upgrade update: Mark
 - Have training needs on the new system and a few other questions regarding electrical, etc. Mark will let ECM know when the contractor returns the email/call that was made to them in late October.
- Music Team update: Mark
 - \$350 raised at last concert
 - Working on getting better attendance by changing marketing and day of week for future concerts.
 - Can we track money that has come in due to a concert? Mark and Michael are working on this.
 - Next concert is Danny Shanahan and Adam, music director, on December 8th.
- Finance Team update: Leon
 - Have a surplus versus expenses. Music has been under-spent, but will likely catch up. Outreach is also showing a surplus, but again, they spend down at the end of the year. Faith formation is under spent relative to budget.
 - Faith formation: would like to see the project with Amihan for Social Justice education rejuvenated next year.
 - Pledges are still down by about \$9,000. Will need to adjust the anticipated 2024 number that is used in the budget.
 - Annex has a new management company because the former company has merged with another. We will be getting a new property manager, and we are hoping for an improvement in that relationship. There is one space available for rent in the Annex.
- 2024 Budget: Leon
 - Finance sent a new budget to ECM. There is a plug for the 5% rolling average number (\$400,479) that the church draws from the investment account. \$379,640 will be needed to cover the budget before any salary increases. There will be about \$20,839 for New Way before any wage adjustments.
 - General maintenance is higher (elevator), snow removal is higher, landscaping was lower, pledge expectations are down dramatically, salaries are up (treasurer, AV operators, admin assistant) over the last few years.

- If Faith Formation position is not filled immediately, that budgeted money can be shifted to other areas if needed, including more programming for Faith Formation
- Proposed salary increases of 4% for Treasurer, Admin, Music Dir and Sexton (not AV Tech) is about \$4600 total for all positions
- Staff Compensation: Propose an increase in wages prior to the annual meeting
 - 4%. See above
 - There has been a deliberate decision made to not give COLA increases to Senior Minister and Minister of Music due to the Minister of Music leaving and that the Senior Minister will give any increase back to the church as stewardship
- Investment Committee Report: Leon
 - Working on social positive investment for the church. The investment committee is recommending working with Wayfinders on their real estate projects via their real estate investment fund. Proposing taking \$500K to make a 4% return over 4 - 6 years on housing development in Hampden and Hampshire counties.
 - The ECM approved the Investment Committee investing with Wayfinders
- ECM Nominations: All. We are each going to reach out to a few potential nominees.
- Thriving Congregation Update: Sheri/Deb
 - No updates as of right now. More official updates will come in writing from Deb.
- Outreach update: Michael/Jack
 - Met over the past month. Additional gifts have been designated and a few more are under consideration.
- Rewriting By-Laws update
 - Table until next meeting
- Christmas Schedule for Services
 - Angel Tree should be ready for Sunday after Thanksgiving
 - 11 – 26 Thanksgiving / Stewardship Sunday – bring your pledges, please
 - 12-2 (Sat 4 PM) Advent-1, decorate the tree, light dinner and cookies, carols around the piano. Special Musical Guest, vocalist Kimaya Diggs
 - 12-3 Hot Chocolate Run
 - 12-10 Advent 2 – Maybe Lessons & Carols-ish. Choir not yet in a place to do 3 or 4 special pieces, so may just as well be a service with lots of music and readings. Deb and I begin to imagine prayer stations, congregational singing and choral singing. Presentation of scholarships.
 - 12-17 Advent 3 – Nativity Sunday. Jim S-B and Ella co-direct the pageant. We will also make a little bit of a fuss over Deb.
 - 12-24 Christmas Eve at 7 PM. Candlelight Silent Night.
 - 12-30 (Sat at 4 PM) First Churches to come here. Adam is probably away.
 - 12-31 First Night (hosting)
- Other Business?
 - ECM will provide feedback on the stewardship letter to be sent out by Saturday
- Next Meeting date and time
 - Dec 13 at 7:15 pm
 - Facilitator: Leon

- Agenda: Heather
- Opening Devotional: Michael
- Minutes: Sheri
- Closing Prayer: Deb
- Closing Prayer: Michael

Holiday Schedule

December 2nd (Saturday, 4:00 PM) - *Advent begins*

For worship we have Special Musical Guests, vocalist Kimaya Diggs and guitarist Robbie Roiter. After worship, our annual Advent gathering for tree trimming, carol singing around the piano and a light meal and cookies.

December 3rd (Sunday, 9:00 AM) - *Hot Chocolate Run*

December 10th (Sunday, 10:00 AM) - *Advent 2*

Deb and Michael are preparing a special service with prayer stations for Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love. Come engage your senses while we pray and sing. We will also present scholarships.

December 17th (Sunday, 10:00 AM) - *Advent 3*

Nativity Sunday. Jim S-B and Ella co-direct the pageant. We will also make a little bit of a fuss over Deb.

December 24th (Sunday, 7:00 PM) - *Christmas Eve.*

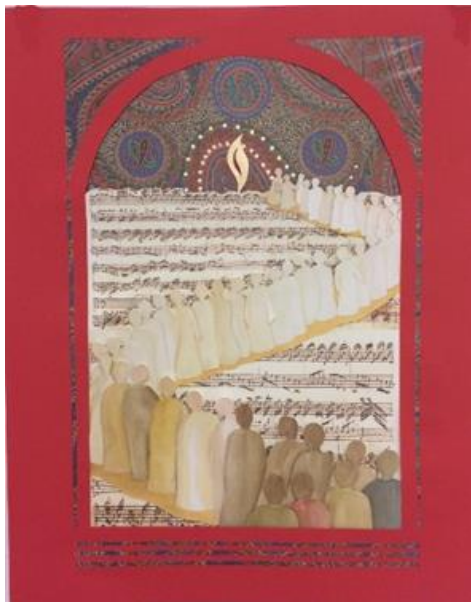
Candle lit Silent Night. Need we say more?

December 30th (Saturday, 4:00 PM) – *Combined worship*

First Churches will join us on Saturday afternoon, as both of our spaces are First Night venues on Sunday. They will host a Sunday service in the late afternoon as well.

December 31st (Sunday, 10:00 AM) - *First Night*





Becoming Sanctuary for Each Other

At Edwards Church Northampton

Friday, December 8, 2023, 7:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Our Advent performance will continue the theme of Becoming Sanctuary for Each Other, a message we feel is needed now more than ever. We look forward to lighting this sacred road of Advent with ancient chants, music, poems, songs, guided meditation, and stories from various traditions: Look, the Wisemen of the East are making their way already! Tell a friend, bring a friend! Come for peace, for rest, for the spirit of Christmas. There is no charge for this event. We are accepting donations to support Cathedral in The Night.

Dan Shanahan Poet, Singer

Carla Bee, Singer

Robert Jonas, Author, Shakuhachi Flute

Sarah Briggs, Violin

Adam Simon, Pianist

Megan Moore, Storyteller

Russell Mariani as Charles Dickens

Jennifer Reis, Guided Meditation

SHOW NORTHAMPTON PARENTS CENTER SOME LOVE THIS GIVING TUESDAY!!

GIVING TUESDAY IS 11/28!
YOU CAN MAKE A DONATION ONLINE
ANYTIME STARTING NOW!

THANKS TO GENEROUS
MATCHING GRANTS YOUR
GIVING TUESDAY DONATIONS
WILL BE DOUBLED!

[GIVINGTUESDAY.MIGHTYCAUSE.COM/STORY/NPC2023](https://givingtuesday.mightycause.com/story/npc2023)

Announcements
from the
Parent's Center

Hope you can
make it!

NORTHAMPTON PARENTS CENTER

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

ALL GROUPS ARE 9:30AM-11:30AM (EXCEPT FOR
THURSDAYS WHEN THE BABY GROUP STARTS AT 8:30!)

MONDAY
INDOORS
@ NPC

TUESDAY
OUTDOORS @
THE YMCA
PLAYGROUND

INDOORS @ NPC
IF THE WEATHER
DOESN'T
COOPERATE!

WEDNESDAY
INDOORS
@ NPC

THURSDAY
INDOORS
@ NPC

WE ARE
WHEELCHAIR
ACCESSIBLE!

LOWER LEVEL OF
EDWARDS CHURCH 297
MAIN STREET
NORTHAMPTON

PLEASE USE PUBLIC PARKING
AND THE REAR ENTRANCE. LET
US KNOW IF YOU NEED
ASSISTANCE!

Church School

Here is what we will be exploring in December:

December 2 - 4:00 PM Intergenerational worship, tree trimming and caroling

December 10 - intergenerational worship

December 17 - Nativity Sunday pageant

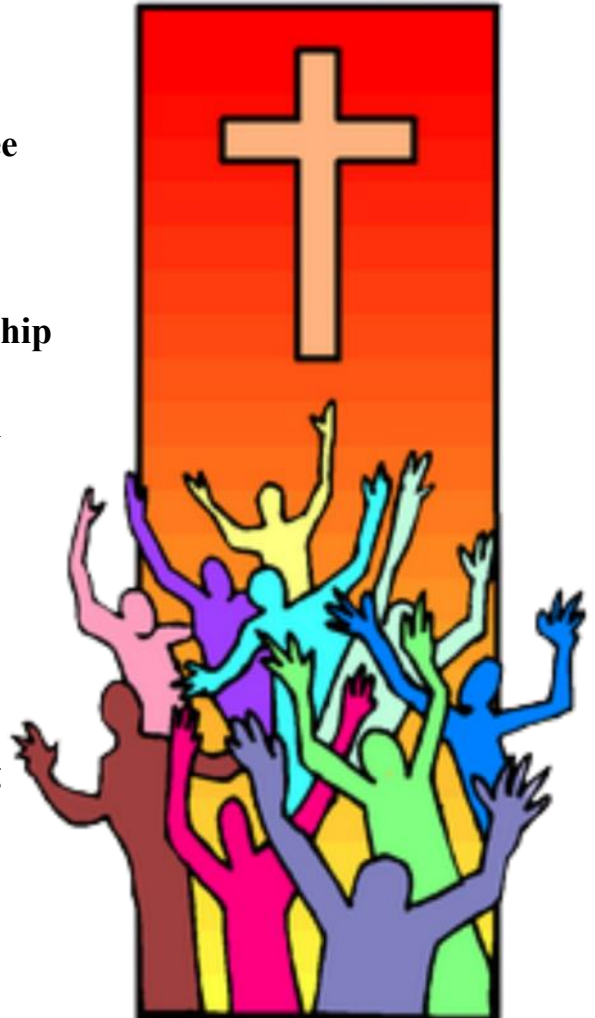
December 24 - Christmas Eve intergenerational worship

Those interested in helping nurture our kids in their faith contact Deb Moore at

ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

Young Adults

This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on December 3rd 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 2:00 – 3:00 p.m in the Edwards Room from . 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.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Pamela Lamlein	Katherine B. Cook
Shannon Small	Scott
Jensen Kroll	Hazel Waller
Sheri Cheung	Diane Roeder
Alex Koester	Susan Voss
Sarah Pease	Wendy Zadworny
Caroline Prince	Greg Boucher
	Jared Koester

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 enjoy meeting in person. There need not be a special reason to meet. 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
 FoH = Friends of the Homeless
 B&G = Building & Grounds
 M@C=Music at the Crossroads

December 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	1	2 11:30 MANNA 4:00 Worship
3 1:00 Young Adults 1:00 M@C Rehearsal	4 9:30 NPC 4:00 IRAG 6:00 RVS 7:00 Music	5 7:00 Gamblers Anon	6 9:30 NPC 12:00 Bible Study	7 8:30 Infant Group 9:30 NPC 7 Choir	8 11:30 MANNA 7:30 M@C	9 11:30 MANNA
10 10:00 Worship 11 Youth Group	11 9:30 NPC 7:00 ECM	12 2:00 Prayer Shawl 7:00 Gamblers Anon	13 9:30 NPC 12:00 Bible Study 5:30 FoH 7:15 ECM	14 8:30 Infant Group 9:30 NPC 7 Choir	15 11:30 MANNA	16 9:30 Pageant Rehearsal 11:30 MANNA
17 10:00 Worship	18 9:30 NPC	19 7:00 Gamblers Anon	20 9:30 NPC 12:00 Bible Study	21 8:30 Infant Group 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visitation 7 Choir	22 11:30 MANNA	23 11:30 MANNA
24 7:00 Worship	25 9:30 NPC	26 2:00 Prayer Shawl 6:30 FF COP 7:00 Gamblers Anon	27 9:30 NPC 12:00 Bible Study	28 8:30 Infant Group 9:30 NPC 7 Choir	29 11:30 MANNA 4:00 Worship	30 11:30 MANNA
31	1	2	3	4	5	6