

THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Vol. 34 No. 4

April 2024

From the Senior Minister

Dear Edwards Church Community,

Christ died on the cross and rose as the church. – Rev. Carl Scovel

Since the first Easter, faithful followers of Jesus have gathered to offer each other comfort and assurance, to share how they understood what they were going through, and what sense they could make of their current situation in light of what their traditions led them to expect. In his daily meditation at www.unfoldinglight.net this April 1, the morning after Easter Sunday, Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes offered this understanding of Easter:

Yes, Easter is the bedrock
(rolled away) of our faith,
but before we settle into that exultant groove,
pause and give a moment
simply to be startled, and maybe offended,
as if God has made death into an April Fools' prank—
or to be afraid, even,
that God upends everything we thought we knew,
that neither we nor our beliefs are in control,
that God will act and we will be dumbfounded.
Even our glib Easter faith will be blown away.
Faith is not certainty, but astonishment.

Make no mistake, Easter most certainly means that life is stronger than death and will keep coming back in the face of it. Love triumphs over hate, after two nights in the grave. Christ IS risen, indeed! The same power, the same vitality and push to create new expressions of the life and love Jesus came to share will always find new ways to rise from whatever grave the forces of death and indifference try to bury it in.

But that does not mean that the back and forth struggle between life and death is over. Easter does not mean that the Good Fridays in our lives can be avoided, but it does mean that they do not get the last word. We still need to face hard times and persist through them to arrive at Easter morning, searching for and finding the risen Christ in different settings. Like Mary Magdalene, we may struggle to recognize him. We may mistake him for a more ordinary character we expect to find in our current setting, until he speaks our name (as he does to Mary in John's gospel), or an angel, a messenger from God, tells us where to find him (as in the other gospels).

New attempts are made in every generation to deny the truth of God's love for all of creation. It is resisted, arrested, even executed, but it rises again and again, as often as it must. Likewise, the community of the church searches in every age to recognize and then proclaim the risen Christ, in whatever form he takes at the time. People of faith share the story from generation to generation, so that each new age will know to look for the Risen One, who will keep rising and finding ways to make himself known.

There is much concern about the future of the church and especially about how we can attract and retain more young people. Last fall, Rev. Shannon Farrand-Bernardin gave a presentation at The First Congregational Church of Hatfield titled "Young Adults: What Brings Them to Church and Why They Stay". Although the focus is young adults, the drift of her recommendations has, I think, pretty clear implications for what any church needs to do to keep cultivating new life among younger people. To listen to her presentation, go to this link and scroll almost all the way to the bottom: <https://www.hatfieldchurch.org/pews-news/category/events-activities>

What Shannon is proposing is what the United Church of Christ has been claiming to practice since it was formed in 1957. Referring to our animating spirit as followers of Jesus, the UCC Constitution declares: "[Our denomination] affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God." However it might challenge some of our cherished ways of holding and understanding our faith, Perhaps having honest conversations with younger adults and teens would show them that we mean it when we say we are welcoming, and that we want them to be the next generation to nurture and grow the church as they make it their own. Then they can pass it on.

As Rev. Steve put it in his April 1 devotional:

that neither we nor our beliefs are in control,
that God will act and we will be dumbfounded.
... Faith is not certainty, but astonishment.

May we be open to seeing the risen Christ in new incarnations, and may we welcome the ways in which younger people astonish us.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

From the Bridge Associate Minister

Dear Faithful Friends,

Lent has gone by. Easter has gone by. Eastertide is with us! Thank goodness we have the encouragement to stick with those resurrection stories for a good 50 days. I don't know about you, but I tend to "move on" too quickly sometimes. Even moving on from something as marvelous and life changing, as new life. I can use all the reminders I get to slow down and smell the flowers, which might be why one of the resurrection stories is set in the garden and Jesus is often imagined to be a gardener.

Tend the garden of our lives Jesus. Tender our hearts Jesus. Help us tend to the world.

This month our Youth Group joins those of you who will be putting your hearts and hands to tending to the Cathedral in the Night on April 7th. The youth, leaders and parents, will be helping load up the food you are offering. We will take it to the Cathedral, stay for worship, and tote it all back to Edwards. We have connected with the youth at First Churches and St Johns and have asked them to add to our youth energy by contributing sandwiches or desserts on that day.

The Youth Group has expressed interest in helping the Edwards Church gardeners (see, there is a connection here between Easter and youth!) cleaning out the garden beds and/or planting spring bulbs. We are also looking forward to an after Eastertide activity of collecting food for the Food Bank – keep listening as we figure out the details.

Our Sunday Friends Time continues this month and we hope that you are seriously considering being a second adult on a Sunday morning (or even a first adult on the Sunday I am not here, which this month is April 14th and also on April 21st when I am preaching and Michael is away from church.) Remember, in case you forget, that "friending" is what we are doing, and your hand of friendship is welcomed. Click here to connect with me about joining in the Sunday friendship fun.

ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org

Finally, I want to say again how wonderful it is for me, your Bridge Minister, to be with you in this season of life. I have met many of you; in worship, in our book group, at your homes, during the Lenten Wednesday gatherings, and out in the world. I am excited to see the search committee working toward searching out and finding the person who will be on the "other side of the bridge." Meanwhile, what a joy it is to be here with all of you. In grace and peace, Marguerite

ECM Meeting Minutes

7:15-8:38 PM on March 18, 2024

In attendance: Michael McSherry, Jack Hjelt, Mark Dion, Adam Simon, Marguerite Sheehan, Sandi Coyne-Gilbert, Jeff Prince,

Excused: Heather Bell

Opening Devotional: Mark

Facilitation of Meeting: Mark Dion until Jack Hjelt returned.

Minutes from the last meeting: no questions

Music Team update: Mark Dion and Adam Simon: Kimaya Diggs concert, almost \$1000 to be given to Cancer Connection. Great success. As outreach it was strong so we will continue to do it.

April 28 Zara Bode Little Big Band, “Big Band” with 7 people for Crossroads Concerts. Beneficiary to be decided.

Crossroads concerts are coming together. The music team reaches out to different people who might be willing to do a fundraising concert. Discussion regarding previous Crossroads. One successful concert last year, the group Les Boulevardiers brought in over \$1,000. They want to return. Crossroads was created as an outreach for music team. The music team will meet next week or week after.

The Finance Team met last Thursday. List or summary of suggestions from Deb Dietrich regarding bylaws should describe the relationship between finance and ECM. With Leon no longer on ECM, we need to strive to get someone who will serve on both. Currently, Michael is the only person who attends both in an ex-officio capacity. We are in a good place with the budget. Discussion at the finance meeting about how to best communicate with ECM. Sabra is constructing a communication to make this connection. Results of operation YTD and brief bullet points from the treasurer. Jeff will take Deb’s suggestions and incorporate them into the bylaws.

Marguerite’s email summarizing her activities for the month was discussed. We appreciate all she is doing in her role.

Jack did return and assumed the facilitator’s role again.

Michael’s presentation regarding the job description for our Faith Formation Minister. There are a few sentences being worked on but Michael suggests we will get this finalized, and get it to the UCC so we can add it to the open opportunities in the UCC who might be interested in this position. Michael asked Marguerite how this works, as he believes she has been in the process more recently. Terry is a resource for people who might express their interest. We hope that this document sent to us should be reviewed and if you have any feedback send it back to Michael. Marguerite asked about the revision should we wait for those included sentences or now. There was a question on the \$5,000 earmarked for this search including transportation, meals and hotels.

Mark made a motion seconded by Jack to give the \$5,000 for the search.

An issue regarding security was brought to the ECM's attention last month. Mark shared he had gotten in touch with some other ushers and the person who brought the concern to the ECM. Should we keep the front door open during worship or lock it for security reasons? The usher group recommended locking the front door at a specific time with a sign: "YOU ARE WELCOME HERE AT EDWARDS CHURCH Our worship service has started. If the door is locked, please tap on the door and the usher will greet you." The usher will need to be near the front door so they are aware of someone arriving. After discussion by the ECM, Michael, Marguerite, and Adam, there were many questions left unanswered. The ECM will consult with the SNECUCC and local agencies for guidance.

Other business: we are going to have an executive session at the conclusion of other business, bylaws. Marguerite and Adam will be excused.

Jeff presented update on the by-laws. Assignments were handed out after the annual meeting. The original idea was to remove the clerk's position from ECM which was for Ella who offered to be the clerk as long as she did not have to serve on the ECM. Jeff has done a great deal of work on distancing the clerk from the ECM but he is not sure this is the best idea. As an alternative, we might need someone to remain on ECM and operate as the clerk. Jeff would be the person if we keep both clerk and ECM together to assume the clerk position. The group thanked Jeff for his willingness to do this work.

Next meeting: April 15 7:15pm we will check with Heather to ensure we have the largest group present

Facilitator: Mark Dion

Opening Devotional: Jack Hjelt

Closing Devotional: Marguerite Sheehan

Agenda:

Minutes: Sandi Coyne-Gilbert

Jeff did the closing prayer.

Meeting closed at 8:38

An executive session was started at 8:39pm to discuss a personnel issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandi Coyne-Gilbert



You're Invited to a Parade!

Your small but mighty Open and Affirming Ministry Team would love to have folks join us to represent Edwards Church at the Hampshire Pride Parade. It's a fun and festive way to spend time together as we march in a contingent with other area UCC churches.

Date

Saturday, May 4

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 Street & Old Ferry Rd.)

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

11:00 am: Parade steps off & marches up Bridge St. to Main St., ending at 12 noon downtown at the corner of Main & Old South St.

12:00-5:00 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!) as well as entertainment & special speakers.

RSVP by May 1st 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! We'll be providing free water to festival attendees and assisting First Churches with their button-making station. We're looking for folks to work in teams of two for 1-2 hour shifts from noon-5 pm. Reply to Debbie Davis if interested in helping in this fun way to get to know folks from Edwards & First Churches!

Thanks for seriously considering this invitation to join us in fun & fellowship and 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, Carla Wirzberger, Jude Almeida & Michael McSherry

Update from Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group **Migrant Crisis in Western Massachusetts**

Responding to a deepening migrant crisis in western Massachusetts, the Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group (VIRAG) has set a goal to raise \$5,000 by April 30th from its members, other individuals, neighborhood groups and houses of worship. Edwards Church is one of the member churches. Help VIRAG meet its goal of purchasing one hundred \$50 gift cards for our three local resettlement agencies: Ascentria Care Alliance, Catholic Charities and Jewish Family Service of Western Mass to distribute to individuals and families who have fled desperate situations. Contributors can make out checks to Edwards Church with a note in the memo section of the check saying “VIRAG Gift Cards” and mail or deliver them to Edwards Church, 297 Main St., Northampton, MA 01060. More information about this project will be in the April Spire or talk to Carla Wirzburger.

Hold the date: Haiti, a Desperate Search for Safe Haven, April 7, 3-5PM on Zoom

VIRAG is presenting a Zoom program including recent refugees from Haiti. Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0lcO2sqzoiHdfngvZp7q2nzfiRXsljrW9B>

Other news about regional migrant needs:

Catholic Charities sent out a long list about new or like new household items needed by new migrant families. There will be a list posted at church and included in the April Spire.

For more information contact r.azad@diospringfield.org

Jewish Family Services of Western Mass accepts monetary donations as well as donations via their wish list on Amazon or bikes through their memorial bike fund.

For more information: <https://www.jfswm.org/donate/>

Ascentria Care Alliance accepts monetary donations as well as looking for volunteers.

For more information:

<https://www.ascentria.org/service/services-for-new-americans/>

(scroll down page for links)

Migrant Crisis in Western Massachusetts: Project Gift Cards

From Politico Massachusetts 2/29/24

‘WE ARE ON OUR OWN’ Help is not coming from Washington, where border policy has become political football. A deal that could have sent millions of much-needed dollars to Massachusetts and other states sheltering migrants remains dead.

Responding to a deepening migrant crisis in western Massachusetts, the Valley Interfaith Refugee Action Group (VIRAG) has set a goal to raise \$5,000 by April 30th from its members, other individuals, neighborhood groups and houses of worship. These funds will enable area resettlement agencies to distribute gift cards to individuals and families who have fled desperate situations, many of whom are now living in area motels as temporary shelters.

The resettlement agencies use a dedicated federal funding stream to provide services to fully vetted refugees who arrive with employment authorization and a path to citizenship. Recently, however, these agencies are overwhelmed and are scrambling to shelter and meet the basic needs of hundreds of “humanitarian parolees” and migrants from the southern border and elsewhere. Unlike vetted refugees, these individuals and families arrive without employment authorization or a clear path to citizenship. Vital federal funding to assist this effort is blocked due to a legislative impasse in Congress.

Help VIRAG meet its goal of purchasing one hundred \$50 gift cards for our three local resettlement agencies: Ascentria Care Alliance, Catholic Charities and Jewish Family Service of Western Mass. Contributors can make out checks to Edwards Church with a note in the memo section of the check saying “VIRAG Gift Cards” and mail or deliver them to Edwards Church, 297 Main St., Northampton, MA 01060.

Calling New Worship Leaders

We are blessed with a number of regular worship participants who enjoy providing the Welcome and leading the Gathering Prayer, others who will provide the Invitation to the Offering and Dedication of the same, and still others who prefer to read scripture. If you have watched, listened and wondered “How do I get involved?” then this is the opening you’ve been waiting for. Please contact Michael at minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org or call the office at (413) 584-5500. I am happy to meet you and offer whatever degree of orientation you prefer. And all of us will be grateful for your involvement.

New Quilt Project!

Can you join us for a bit of fun? No sewing involved, no experience needed, ALL ages welcome!

On April 7th, immediately following our worship service, the quilt team will be working on a new quilt for a Friends of Children client. In the past, many of you have asked how we come up with our designs and what our process is like as all our quilts are made from donated scrap fabric. Working with scraps can be a challenge as sometimes it feels like barely controlled chaos. So now, we are asking for your help – we have a large pile of 2 ½” squares that we need to combine into quilt blocks. We are halfway through but we need your help to finish designing the quilt.

- Again, there is no sewing involved. It's easy as 1 – 2 – 3 .
- 1. pick 4 pieces of fabric – 2 lighter ones and 2 darker ones – from our pile of squares.
- 2. Arrange your choices to make a 4-patch. ($2+2=4$)
- 3. stick them to a piece of paper that we will provide, and you did it!
- It should only take 5 to 10 minutes of your time.
- Warning – it can be fun and addictive! You can make more 4-patches and help even more.
- Do you know the Inch Worm song? ($2 +2=4$; $4+4=8$, $8+8=16$)

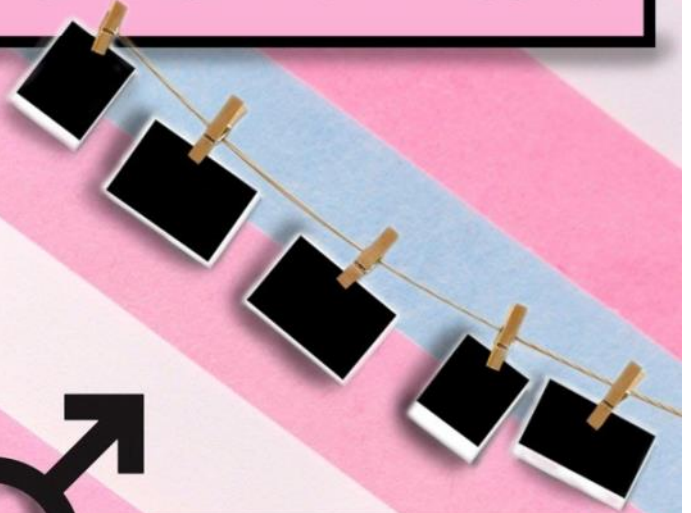
We will have almost 900 fabric squares for you to choose from and we want you to have fun making your choices. We will be there to help and encourage you along the way if you wish.

Next step - the quilt team will take your 4-patch designs and sew them together. As they are completed, we will be displaying them in the back of the sanctuary so **you can watch your designs grow to become a quilt** - A quilt that will be donated to Friends of Children for a young adult to receive as they start out on their own.



Two week photo exhibit

“Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families”!!



FREE Open House with local speakers from the book!!!

Hosted by First Church Amherst.
165 Main St. Amherst MA.
Questions? Need to arrange a different time? contact us at: 413-313-6317 or 413-668-4189

*Fun and informative!
*Celebrate trans lives!
*The exhibit consists of photographs of the lives of trans and nonbinary people and their families!

OPEN HOUSE:
APRIL 7TH 1-4PM

VIEWINGS:
APRIL 9TH, AND 16TH
FROM 6-8PM

APRIL 12TH, 13TH ,14TH,
19TH AND 20TH
FROM 1-4PM



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. Marguerite and Michael 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
Marguerite ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-687-1418

April 2024

NPC = Northampton Parent's Center
 NMCC= Northampton Music Community Center
 FoH = Friends of the Homeless
 B&G = Building & Grounds

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 9:30 NPC 7 VJV	2 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon.	3 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 7 B&G	4 8:30 Infant NPC 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA 7 Choir	5 11:30 MANNA	6 11:30 MANNA 7:30 Culomba in Concert
7 10 Worship 11:30 Pastor Congregation Relations 1 Young Adults 1:30 NMCC Performance 4 NPC Family Fun	8 9:30 NPC 5 Truth School 7 VJV	9 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anon.	10 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study 5:30 FoH 7 Music	11 8:30 Infant NPC 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visita- tion 6:30 AA 7 Choir	12 11:30 MANNA	13 11:30 MANNA
14 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group	15 9:30 NPC 7 VJV 7:15 ECM	16 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon.	17 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	18 8:30 Infant NPC 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA 7 Choir	19 11:30 MANNA	20 11:30 MANNA
21 10 Worship 11:30 Pastor Congregation Relations	22 9:30 NPC 7 VJV	23 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anon.	24 9:30 NPC 12 Bible Study	25 8:30 Infant NPC 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA 7 Choir	26 11:30 MANNA	27 11:30 MANNA
28 10 Worship	29 9:30 NPC 7 VJV	30 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon.				