



THE SPIRE

EDWARDS CHURCH *of* NORTHAMPTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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November 2024

From the Senior Minister

Dear Edwards Church Community,

This year November comes with anxiety casting a shadow over the season we associate with Thanksgiving. Election day has never been as fraught, at least in the memories of most voting age citizens. I want to offer some perspective, not to minimize the reasons for concern, but to suggest another way to think about the current crisis and constructive resources for responding to it.

Perspective: I recommend the poem-prayer by Steve Garnaas-Holmes emailed to the whole community on Monday, Oct. 28. The key lines in it for me are:

God is not a Big Guy with a magic finger
he deploys now and then (but not always).

God is the Love at the heart of all being,
as constant as gravity, infinitely attentive,
and can't be more present or active than right now.

When we ask for God's help,
what we mean is to align ourselves
with the great power of God's grace already at work.

The complete prayer "Please, God ..." is at <https://unfoldinglight.net/>

It can be helpful to return to this perspective (or adopt it for the first time) when confronting anything that generates anxiety in you. A mature understanding of God must, I believe, acknowledge that the evidence for God intervening directly in history is mostly limited to the Bible. And as much as I treasure the sacred text, I do not read it as a literal record of history. Rather than show why we should rely on God



to change something unpleasant or unfair in life, I read scripture as saying – among other things – that humans need to accept their role as stewards, not just consumers, of creation. God has limited God's own power and made us responsible for the planet and all life on it.

Resources: A number of you are fans of Krista Tippet, best known for the long running On Being radio show (now a podcast). In her most recent post, Krista speaks of Palestinian and Israeli individuals who have been friends with each other and conversation partners over many years, and how their friendships have been strained by the war:

“There was so much grief being held in the bodies and spirits in that room, of course, and long friendships stressed and frayed unfathomably. But what I can report, what buoyed me, is that the long years of conversation and friendship also held in the bodies in that room were persevering, extending what love and compassion they could muster, forgiving each other when it was too much to ask.”

Since at least 2016, we have experienced increasing stress with each Presidential election cycle. The stakes, the fear, and the vitriol have escalated with each cycle. Krista Tippet is inspired by the resilience shown in her Israeli and Palestinian friends’ capacity to take the long view of belonging together. She imagines how we might knit back together the social fabric of the United States in the aftermath of this election. She sees, in the reservoirs of compassion built into friendships that are nurtured over many years, the capacity to forgive, reknit and rebuild.



She relies not only on the example of her Palestinian and Israeli friends, but on her own frequent conversation partner, the professional mediator and peace builder John Paul Lederach, who has worked with civil war combatants on multiple continents over decades to forge relationships that will hold together a lasting peace. His brand new book, *[A Pocket Guide for Facing Down a Civil War](#)*, which I have ordered but not yet read, describes the steps we can all take to cultivate relationships that will be the foundation for positive social change. Maybe even a Beloved Community or Kin-dom of God.

I did peak at excerpts online, and the gist of the book appears to be that lasting positive social change is built on the foundation of relationships, individual people who are open to knowing and being known by others who are different from themselves. Sincere curiosity and the willingness to learn and have one’s heart and mind changed is required – on all sides. It does not need all of us, but it does need enough of us.

This is not just pie in the sky stuff, friends. In a book group I have been part of for most of the last decade, we have heard from each other about groups in Israel-Palestine and here in the United States that are already engaged in this work. You could be too.

In faith, with hope, for love,

Michael

ECM Announcement

Hello!

The ECM wanted to reach out to all members of the church and update you on what has happened since Rev McSherry gave us his notice of retirement. Here are the highlights of what happened and where we are currently.

1. ECM has met several times with Area Conf Minister Rev. Terry Yosulo Ogawa to understand the overall transition process and most immediately how to hire an Interim Minister.
 2. ECM crafted a team of Floyd Cheung, Leon Drzewianowski, and Sandi Coyne-Gilbert to prepare the profile for the search process describing the church and the sort of Interim Minister we seek to help us in the transition.
 3. The team's profile, after some adjustments was approved and published online 9-30 (It can be reviewed by going to https://oppsearch.ucc.org/web/fastdetails.aspx?id=6395&KeepThis=false&TB_iframe=true&height=502&width=960 and click the blue "Download More Information" button)
 4. To date, ECM has received **6** applications, which indicates a lot of interest!
 5. Since ECM wants this process to go well, we are working to streamline the process and we are preparing to interview candidates, We anticipate interviewing candidates in November, with possible start dates anytime between Thanksgiving and late January or even early February, understanding that Rev. McSherry has said he is not available for two Sundays after Christmas and will retire no later than the annual meeting in late January.
- ECM is confident that we will work through this process and find the right person. Please know if you have any questions or if you want further information, please contact one of us.
Leon Drzewianowski, Mark Dion (Moderator), Sandi Coyne-Gilbert, Jeff Prince
-

ECM Meeting Minutes

October 8, 2024

Attendees: Rev Michael McSherry, Jack Hjelt, Mark Dion, Leon Drzewianowski, Jeff Prince

Absent: Sandi Coyne-Gilbert

Guest: Grace Del Vecchio (first 30 mins)

The meeting called to order 7:04 pm

Opening Devotional: Jeff Prince

Moderator: Leon Drzewianowski

Minutes: Jeff Prince and Mark Dion

Housing Insecure: Discussion of a certain housing insecure member of the Northampton community. Current housing options not ideal and used only sporadically. Church has tried to work with Northampton's Division of Community Care but found response lacking. Rev. McSherry and Mark to craft letter to Dr. Bossie communicating Edwards Church's history of interaction with individual, observations of changes, and concern with wellbeing given turn of seasons.

Advent Dinner: Worship service on December 8 to be moved to Saturday, December 7, at 4pm to be followed by Advent dinner, tree trimming and caroling at 5pm. ECM/Church to provide sandwiches, soup, salad and drinks. Congregation will be invited to bring desserts. Grace and Debbie have agreed to write announcement for Spire (and bulletin?).

Minutes: Minutes from September meeting were approved.

Interim Minister Search: Congregational Profile approved and posted to UCC site. Four applicants so far. Mark has responded to each and noted that we would respond in approximately four weeks' time. Some candidates have requested copies of past bulletins, Spires, Annual Meeting booklets and Bylaws. ECM asked Kyla to pull these documents together for distribution to candidates that are invited to interview.

ECM will meet Thursday, Oct 10, at 7pm to review candidate applications.

Mock interview scheduled for October 23, at 7pm.

Church Activity Directors: Zoe Ishmael and Violet Mark were hired to plan and host intergenerational faith formation activities as well as activities for specific age groups, such as programming for young children on Sunday morning and youth activities. Both have considerable experience working with Youth. Zoe Ishmael is a Smith sophomore and Violet Mark grew up in the Valley and attends Hampshire College. Bagel breakfast scheduled for Sunday, Oct 20, at 9am. Rev. McSherry noted that the Interim Minister will need to guide Zoe and Violet in the Faith Formation component of the job.

Church Administrator: Regularly scheduled work hours of the church administrator are: 9am – 1pm M – F plus five work-from-home hours.

Calvin Coolidge Pew: ECM has received no feedback regarding the proposal to donate the Coolidge pew to the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library & Museum. Rev. McSherry (or someone he appoints) to make an announcement at Sunday service to draw attention to our intent to give the pew away.

Church Building Closing Procedure: Janet Tucker on behalf of Building and Grounds sent ECM a copy of the updated building closing procedure/checklist that sets forth the closing expectations for groups that use the Edwards Church building. The revised procedure was received without comment.

Personnel Handbook: Jeff and Rev. McSherry presented a draft copy of the revised Handbook for ECM review and received comment. In particular, ECM asked that (i) Long Term Leave be relabeled as Short Term Leave and (ii) the Handbook state that Edwards Church does not contribute to the Massachusetts Unemployment System and therefore employees should not expect unemployment benefits. Rev. McSherry agreed to incorporate these changes among other edits and re-submit to ECM.

Outreach Update: Two donations in response to hurricane Helene: \$1,000 allocated to UCC Disaster Relief Fund. \$10,000 donation to World Central Kitchen is pending and expected to be approved. Routine contributions are ongoing as well.

Music update: Laura Frogameni speaking with Dan Kane singers about a possible concert. Otherwise, three events planned:

- October 17th: [] (not a Music at the Crossroads event)
- February 28th: Blue Heron (is a Music at the Crossroads event)
- March 22nd: [Folk Story Telling]

Other Business:

- Rev. McSherry will not be available the Sundays after Christmas and New Year's. In addition, he will not be available for First Night. Regarding First Night, Rev McSherry has communicated to the Arts Council that Edwards would prefer to be done by 10pm. Rev. McSherry and Mark will work together on staffing volunteers.
- Finance Committee did not meet in September but will meet next week. Finance asks that Adam begin to prepare a 2025 budget request. Also ask Rev McSherry for thoughts on what resources might be needed for Faith Formation.
- Stewardship: Leon to work with Rev. McSherry to organize Stewardship effort (congregational letter, arrange pulpit announcements)
- Jack and Chris Hjelt: Jack reminded ECM that he and Chris will leave for North Carolina in December

Next meeting: Monday, November 11 at 7 pm.

- Agenda: Jeff
- Minutes: Sandi
- Facilitator: Mark
- Opening Devotional: Jack
- Closing Devotional: Leon

Closing Prayer: Rev. McSherry provided the closing prayer.

The regular meeting closed around 8:30 pm and ECM went into Executive Session

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Prince

Open and Affirming Announcement

The Open and Affirming Team is going on hiatus. It was the task of the ONA Team to review and update the Church Welcoming Statement. The new Welcoming Statement was approved and is now in the bulletin each month. The ONA Team provided the congregation with information about changes to make our church more welcoming to LGBTQ+ people and families, such as using inclusive language in Scripture readings, the importance of recognizing and using chosen pronouns

when addressing each other and providing nametags with options for pronouns and, with the help of the Building and Grounds Team, signs and bathrooms have been updated so non-gendered bathrooms are identified and available to all. There is a Progress Pride flag on the church building that helps community members to identify Edwards Church as an Open and Affirming congregation. Even though the ONA Team will not be meeting regularly, Edwards Church will continue to participate in the Northampton Pride Parade with First Churches in May. Thank you for your support of the LGBTQ+ community.

Building an
Inclusive
Church



Cathedral in the Night Announcement

The cathedral in the night team provided 90 servings of taco salad, dozens of sandwiches and desserts to the Cathedral community in October. Along with the Sunday meal we also provide individual packages of baby wipes, cereal bars, water and applesauce that can be given out when Pastor Steph does her walk around the community on Wednesdays. Our next scheduled partnership will be Sunday, December 1st. If people are able, consider purchasing underwear, mostly men's boxers, size medium and any size women's underwear. There will be a box to collect the packages on the nametag table each Sunday in November.

Sometimes there are gaps in the partner schedule which make it difficult to provide the Cathedral meal. Thanks to the generosity of the Edwards congregation we are collaborated with St. John's and First Churches by providing the frozen lasagnas, cold cuts to make sandwiches and individual packages of cookies for an additional meal in October. St. John's and First Churches provided the people power since our Team already served in October. Know that Pastor Steph and the Cathedral community appreciates all the support that Edwards Church provides.

The Advent Party is Coming!



Save Saturday, Dec. 7 for one of our favorite Edwards Church traditions!

What: A beloved Edwards Church tradition to celebrate Advent together! Worship service, tree trimming, carol singing, and a scrumptious light dinner.

When: Saturday, December 7 at 4 pm. Our worship service will immediately be followed by trimming the tree & carol singing at the sanctuary, and a light supper served buffet-style in the Edwards Room.

Why on Saturday? Downtown Northampton will be the site of the Hot Chocolate Run, a fundraiser for Safe Passages, on Sunday morning, Dec. 8. Due to road closures and parking at a premium for this event, we'll hold our worship service and Advent Party on Saturday.

What should I bring? Bring friends & family to share in the fun! You're also invited to bring cookies or some other sweet to share for dessert - preferably something that doesn't require utensils because folks won't be eating at tables. Desserts can be homemade or store-bought, your choice!

What's for dinner? Assorted finger sandwiches, chips, cheese and crackers, and beverages – things that are easy to eat while standing or transitioning back & forth between caroling, tree trimming and enjoying refreshments. Gluten-free sandwich, snack & dessert options will be provided.

If you're interested in helping with decorating and/or food set-up or clean-up, please call or email Debbie Davis: debradavis1217@gmail.com or 413-626-5117.

This event has been a favorite Edwards Church tradition for many years and you won't want to miss it! Mark Saturday, December 7th on your calendar now!

COME AND CHECK OUT WHAT
THE NORTHAMPTON PARENT'S
CENTER HAS TO OFFER!

Northampton Parents Center

Fall Schedule

WEEKLY 9/9-12/19



Monday
**INDOORS
@ NPC**

Tuesday
**INDOORS
@ NPC**

**PLAYGROUPS ARE
9:30AM-11:30AM**

WEDNESDAYS WILL BE
INDOORS AT NPC IF THE
WEATHER IS RAINY!

Wednesday
**OUTDOORS @ THE
HAMPSHIRE
REGIONAL YMCA
PLAYGROUND**

Thursday
**INDOORS
@ NPC**

INFANT GROUP
STARTS AT 8:30!

NORTHAMPTON PARENTS CENTER IS LOCATED IN THE LOWER LEVEL OF EDWARDS CHURCH

297 MAIN STREET. PLEASE USE PUBLIC PARKING AND THE BACKDOOR ENTRANCE.

WE ARE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE!



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Grace Lively	Claire Cheung
Elizabeth Young	Jody Kinner
Krisinda S. Semb	William Roeder
Elias Almeida	Lindsey Ann Wells
Jack Mattison-Gulotta	Susan Anderson
Heidi Kinner	Kai Hutchison
Susan Banas	Louise P. Montague
Samuel A. Grant	Mabel Cheung

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. Michael enjoys 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 him at the church office (413) 584-5500 or on his cell phone.

Michael minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-531-9729

November 2024

NPC = Northampton Parent's Center
HSA = Hampshire Support Alliance

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 11:30 MANNA 7 AA	2 11:30 MANNA
3 10 Worship	4 9:30 NPC 4:30 Truth School	5 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon.	6 11 Bible Study	7 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA	8 11:30 MANNA 7 AA 7 Smithenpoofs	9 11:30 MANNA
10 10 Worship	11 9:30 NPC 7 ECM	12 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anon.	13 11 Bible Study 5:30 HSA 6 Investment	14 9:30 NPC 4 Care & Visitation 6:30 AA	15 11:30 MANNA 7 AA	16 11:30 MANNA
17 10 Worship 3 NPC Family Fun	18 9:30 NPC	19 9:30 NPC 7 Gamblers Anon.	20 11 Bible Study	21 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA	22 11:30 MANNA 7 AA	23 11:30 MANNA
24 10 Worship	25 9:30 NPC	26 9:30 NPC 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Gamblers Anon.	27 11 Bible Study	28 9:30 NPC 6:30 AA	29 11:30 MANNA 7 AA	30 11:30 MANNA