



Picture by Oksana Berko (Unsplash)

“Have we made our world a safe and inviting place
to everyone that would enter in?
Are we kind, gentle and protective toward all of those
with whom we come in contact?
Do we work at ridding our world of the clutter of anger,
selfishness, avarice and fear?
How each of us treats the world around us
we are treating our God.”

– Harvey A. Green

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

October 15, 2023, 10:55 am

** Please take a comfortable posture that supports your
worshiping, reading, and singing.*

Prelude “We Come to the Hungry Feast” arr. M. Sedio

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of Christ be with you!

Many: And also with you.

Introit “Let Us Build a House” ALL ARE WELCOME

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat;

A banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;

As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

All are welcome; all are welcome; all are welcome in this place.

Many: God of Comfort,

One: send your Spirit to encompass all those whose lives are torn apart by violence and death in Israel and Palestine. You are the Advocate of the oppressed and the One whose eye is on the sparrow. Let arms reach out in healing, rather than aggression. Let hearts mourn rather than militarize.

Many: God of Justice,

One: give strength to those whose long work for a just peace might seem fruitless now. Strengthen their resolve. Do not let them feel alone. Show us how to support their work and bolster their courage. Guide religious leaders to model unity and reconciliation across lines of division. Guide political leaders to listen with their hearts as they seek peace and pursue it. Help all people choose the rigorous path of just peace and disavow violence.

Many: God of Love,

One: we lift up Palestine and Israel – its people, its land, its creatures. War is a monster that consumes everything in its path. Peace is a gift shared at meals of memory with Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Let us burn incense, not children. Let us break bread, not bodies. Let us plant olive groves, not cemeteries. We beg for love and compassion to prevail on all your holy mountains.

Many: God of Hope,

One: we lift up the cities of the region: Gaza City and Tel Aviv, Ramallah and Ashkelon, Deir El Balah and Sderot, so long divided, yet so filled with life and creativity. Come again to breathe peace on your peoples that all may recognize you.

Many: God of Mercy,

One: even now work on the hearts of combatants to choose life over death, reconciliation over retaliation, restoration over destruction. Help us resist antisemitism in all its forms, especially in our own churches. All people, Israelis and Palestinians, deserve to live in peace and unafraid, with a right to determine their future together.

Many: God of the Nations,

One: let not one more child or elder be sacrificed on altars of political expediency. Keep safe all people from unjust leaders who would exploit vulnerability for their own distorted ends. Give wise discernment to those making decisions to pursue peace. Provide them insight into fostering well-being, freedom, and thriving for all. Teach all of us to resolve injustices with righteousness, not rockets. Guard our hearts against retaliation, and give us hearts for love alone.

Many: Strengthen our faith in you, O God of All Flesh,

One: even when we don't have clear answers, so that we may still offer ourselves nonviolently for the cause of peace.

Many: Amen.

(We will observe the lighting of a candle and a moment of silence)

* Call to Worship (*responsive*)

Lloyd Spencer

All those easily able and willing please take a comfortable posture that supports your worship...

One: People of God, look about and see the faces of those we know and love...

Many: **Neighbors and friends, sibling in Christ, a community of kindred hearts.**

One: People of God, look about and see the faces of those we hardly know...

Many: **Strangers, sojourners, forgotten friends, ones who need an outstretched hand or listening ear.**

One: People of God, look about and see all the images of God assembled here.

Many: **In each of us, God's spirit shines for all to see.**

One: People of God, come, let up worship together.

* Hymn 332

"As We Gather at Your Table"

BEACH SPRING

As we gather at your table, as we listen to your word,
Help us know, O God, your presence; let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;
Teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love's victory known.

Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;
Send us forth to love and serve you, bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;
May we still behold your image in the world you died to save.

Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that feast
Where triumphant Love will welcome those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy bind us nor will pride our peace destroy,
As we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.

Daily Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Yourself: **I am** invited to be in relationship with God and God's creation.

Neighbor: **You are** invited to be in relationship with God and God's creation.

World: **We are** invited to be in relationship with God and God's creation.

Prayer of Transformation & New Life (*unison*)

Lloyd Spencer

Please join me in a unison prayer of transformation and new life...

Inviting God, you call us to the party that is life with you, yet our busy lives keep us from responding. You make Your peace known to us, but we lash out in anger and fear. You reveal the forsaken right before us, but we disregard their needs and at times refuse to even see them. Today, we confess the ways in which the invitation to Your party is not extended to all but too often denied.

Words of Grace (*responsive*)

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: As we turn back to God from our old ways of living and being, we remember the truth of our existence. We remember a spark of the divine lives right within us. It is sacred and holy, something that can never be taken from us. When this spark is ignited and fueled by our relationship with God, we have the capacity to rise into the fullness of our Christ Potential. And once awakened when fear arises...

Many: we return to love.

One: When the ego rages...

Many: we speak peacefully to it.

One: When the oppressed cry out for justice...

Many: we fight against injustice.

One: When there is suffering in the world...

Many: we seek to bring healing to it.

One: In Christ there is forgiveness. There is transformation. And there is new life. May yours begin today. Amen.

Response to God's Grace

GOODNESS IS STRONGER

**Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death.**

Victory is ours; victory is ours through God who loves us. (2x)

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Song of Preparation

"Now"

R. Cooney

Now is the moment, now is the time.

This very day there is salvation.

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

The Lord's Prayer

Adapted from Dr. Rocco A. Errico (translation from the Aramaic)

Our Creator who is throughout the universe.

Let your name be set apart.

Come your counsel.

Let your desire be, as in the universe, also on the earth.

Give us bread for our necessities this day.

And free us from our offenses, as also we have freed our offenders.

And do not let us enter our worldliness,

but set us free from error.

For belongs to you the kin-dom, power, and song, from ages to ages.

Sealed in faithfulness, let this be our way.

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

CHEREPONI

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,

Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

Hebrew Lesson

Isaiah 25:1-9 (CEB)

Jana Harrison

Our Hebrew Lesson for today comes from the Book of Isaiah 25:1-9, where the prophet praises God for all God has done...

Lord, you are my God. I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, planned long ago, faithful and sure. You have turned the city into rubble, the fortified town into a ruin, the fortress of foreigners into a city no more, never to be rebuilt. Therefore, strong people will glorify you; the towns of tyrant nations will fear you. You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress, a hiding place from the storm, a shade from the heat. When the breath of tyrants is like a winter storm or like heat in the desert, you subdue the roar of foreigners. Like heat shaded by a cloud, the tyrants' song falls silent.

On this mountain, the Lord of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples a rich feast, a feast of choice wines, of select foods rich in flavor, of choice wines well refined. He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples, the shroud enshrouding all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe tears from every face; he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth, for the Lord has spoken. They will say on that day, "Look! This is our God, for whom we have waited— and he has saved us! This is the Lord, for whom we have waited; let's be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church;

Many: Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

* Gospel Lesson

Matthew 22:1-14 (NLT)

Lloyd Spencer

Our Gospel Lesson for today comes from the Gospel of Matthew 22:1-14. Where Jesus shares the parable of the wedding party...

Jesus also told them other parables. He said, “The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!

So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!’ But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.

The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren’t worthy of the honor. Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

One: For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.

Many: Thanks be to God.

The Good News

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

“Have You Got Your Invitation to the Party Yet?”

Stewardship Moment

Invitation to Generosity

Lloyd Spencer

Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...

As the confetti falls and the glitter sparkles, as the sound of your music soothes our souls and the spiritual food we've eaten fills our mind, we know now is the time to extend our gratitude. With our gifts we give thanks for the grand party God has invited us to. Let us now share our time, talents, and gifts in the hope of a loving ministry here at Holy Covenant that continues with its all to welcome everyone.

Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Lloyd Spencer

Please join me in a unison prayer of dedication for all we will receive...

Good and giving God, may the gifts we now return to you become a blessing for your whole community, enriching and empowering us for the work to which you call us. Through this church and its people, use these gifts to widen the circles of exclusion to create inclusion, to transform the differences we hold into peaceful decisions, and to turn the despair and hurt of the world into the possibility of hope. For this and more we pray, Amen.

* Doxology

BARUCH HASHEM ADONAI

Baruch hashem Adonai. Baruch hashem Adonai.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Baruch hashem Adonai.

* Hymn

“A King Planned a Party”

ASH GROVE

A king planned a party – a feast, rich and hearty.

He sent invitations to all of his guests.

So what could be better than getting a letter

And being invited and welcomed and blessed?

"My work needs attention," said one, "Not to mention,

My family is growing. There's so much to do."

"My farm," said another, "Is big, and – oh, brother –

I'm busy with hobbies I want to pursue."

"The wedding is ready! My guests are not worthy!"

The king told his servants when nobody came.

So go search the alleys, the hills and the valleys,

And bring in the poor and the blind and the lame."

That day there was singing and halls that were ringing

With laughter and joy in that wonderful place.

For those who attended knew how they depended

Upon the king's generous mercy and grace.

O God, you invite us! You seek to delight us.
Your table is ready for those who say "Yes!"
Do we make excuses when you want to choose us
To sit at your table, forgiven and blessed?
And, Lord, as you welcome us into your Kin-dom,
May we reach to welcome the world by your grace.
You love the outsider. Now may we reach wider
To welcome the world with your loving embrace.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

HALLE, HALLE

Halle, halle, hallelujah! (3x) Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Postlude

"You Satisfy the Hungry Heart"

arr. A. M. David

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*Portions of this service have been adapted by Life in Liturgy, Lectionary Liturgies
by Thom M. Shuman, Rose Marie Berger (Senior Editor of Sojourner's Magazine).*

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Shakti Subramanian, Deborah Winston,
Laurence Winston

We welcome all in our congregation to participate!

Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>



Many thanks to the EastSiders Covenant Group for providing today's refreshments following worship. Covenant Groups are a way for you to stay connected with people in your area, neighborhood or zip code. Contact Ed Vickery, ed.vickery@att.net, if you'd like to be a part of any of our Covenant Groups: Daytime Saints; EastSiders; Southside; Bold & Beautiful; Plaza Midwood; Mountain Island, and Unstructured.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Stay connected! Check out all the current happenings in the weekly newsletter via Constant Contact. Not seeing it in your inbox? Sign-up here: <https://holycovenantucc.org/newsletters/>

STEWARDSHIP 2024

As we develop our church spending plan for the coming year, please help us in that planning by letting us know what you intend to contribute to the church. Send your pledge as soon as possible through one of the three options below. Thank you for your prayers for God's continued transformational work through Holy Covenant, for our new Settled Pastor and for God's spirit to move within each of our lives as we discern what gifts each of us can offer to God to strengthen God's ministry through Holy Covenant to our members, our community, and beyond. We are at 35% of goal for General Fund (\$140,000 operating fund), and 37% of goal for **Building Fund** (\$40,000 capital fund). Thank you to all who have shared their pledge!

Submit your pledge by one of the following methods:

1. Online through the church's website
<https://holycovenantucc.org/make-your-pledge-online/>,
2. E-mail your pledge to the church office at office@holycovenantucc.org or
3. Mail the pledge card to:

Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269

Because of you our church changes lives.

LITURGIST TRAINING, OCTOBER 22 at 12:30PM

Explore what serving as a liturgist/reader would be like. Attending the training does not commit you to serve; it just means you're thinking about it. **RSVP** Kristin Andes at kjandes@aol.com.

CROP WALK, OCTOBER 22 at 1:30PM

It's not too late to decide to walk with us on church property. Contact Tina Dickens - taichitina@gmail.com if you can join us or support the team in another way with money or prayers. Please make checks payable to CWS/CROP or use this link to donate online.

<https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2023/team/holy-covenant-ucc-4>

ALL SAINTS DAY SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29

You are invited to bring a picture of a Saint in your life to place on our altar for worship as we honor All Saints Day (11/1/2023). It can be a picture of a parent,

loved one, friend, Jesus, or even a mystic or guru whose teachings have touched you. After our worship service on this day, please remember to take your saint with you!

NEW MEMBER/INQUIRER CLASS, OCTOBER 29 at 12:30PM

Are you interested in learning more about our denomination, Holy Covenant UCC, and the United Church of Christ? Do you wonder why we do what we do? Let's get together and talk about! Please RSVP, church office, 704-599-9810 or office@holycovenantuc.org. All are welcome!

YOUTH HYGIENE KIT BUILD, AND ADULT SANDWICH BUILD, OCTOBER 29

The Youth contingent is Missions and Justice is planning to prepare meal bags to be distributed at the Greyhound station for migrant travelers and the families while the rest of us are planning to prepare 400 sandwiches for the Men's' Shelter. The Young and Not-So, the Regulars as well as our New Folks...please join us in the camaraderie that these events inspire!!! Pizza will be served too!

NEW MEMBER/PASTOR INSTALLATION SERVICE, NOVEMBER 5

Join us for this day of celebration here at Holy Covenant! We will welcome new members into the church and install Pastor Chris as the new settled Pastor. We anticipate several visitors with us, including some of Pastor Chris's family and our Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Warren Casiday.

HOLY COVENANT UCC'S ANNUAL MEETING/POTLUCK, NOVEMBER 19

Holy Covenant will host its Annual Meeting during and after our regularly scheduled worship service. Hear from our ministry teams what they have been up to, and members will vote on the 2024 Budget and elect the next class of consistory members. Stay for fellowship and a potluck in the gathering room. Bring your favorite dish!

NEIGHBORS IN NEED SPECIAL OFFERING, OCTOBER 2023

This year's Neighbors In Need (NIN) collection will be shared- one-third of support to benefit the [Council for American Indian Ministry \(CAIM\)](#). Two-thirds are used by [Justice and Witness Ministries](#) to provide grants to UCC churches and organizations as well as supporting a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects. We will accept this offering throughout the month of October. We thank you for your support and generosity!

Various methods are available for your convenience. Schedule offerings, one time or recurring, through your bank's online payment system. Mailing a check, from home or a financial institution? Please use this secure address:

Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269

Donate online at HolyCovenantUCC.org/give-2/. Look for the *Give Today* button. Questions can be directed to the church office, office@holycovenantucc.org or 704-599-9810.



PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Jimmy & Dawn Simmons in the death of Jimmy's father, James W. Simmons
Linda Carver, Gary & Linda Clark, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel,
Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry
Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita
Taylor, Bill & Kim Tyler

Friends & Family Members

Karen & Billy (Kim Tyler), Melissa Brown, Craig Crismon (Melissa Noll), Erika Eckel
& family, David & Cecelia Griffin (JP Griffin), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie
Hildebrand), Darin Jellison and family (Jo Ann Jellison), Matty & Simone McKinnon
(Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Sue Parrish
(Terry Raley-Dennis), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Susan Rayfield (Martha
Bomely), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Barbara
Rutelonis (Eric Miner), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher Sizemore
(Tina Ettesen), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery),
Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to
prayers@holycovenantucc.org.