



*Unsplash Photo by Josh Applegate*

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Lent is a time when we look deeply inside ourselves to see the ways we hurt one another and our world because of our own hurt and by not living as God intends. It is a time when we commit ourselves to changes and to new beginnings, opening ourselves up to being renewed through Christ.

Ashes have long been used as a symbol of grief and sorrow for sin—all those things in ourselves and in the society of which we are a part that cause hurt and sadness in our world. Sin is what happens when we become separated from God, each other, and our true calling as human beings. Ashes remind us of our mortality: the fact that we are born, we live our lives, and then we die. Ashes remind us that we are made of the same stuff as the earth and all her creatures. We remember that we are earth of this earth and bone of its bone. “We are dust, and to the dust we shall return.”

Finally, ashes are a sign of the promise of new life emerging from death—a sign of the forgiveness, blessing, and transformation that God offers in every moment. Welcome, then, to this special service of worship. We invite you to participate with openness to change and transformation.

**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**

**March 05, 2025, 7:00 pm**

*\* Your whole self is welcomed here. Please feel free to take care of your body during worship in ways that work for you.*

Prelude

Jon Weddell

Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of Christ be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

\* Call to Worship

Eric Miner

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

One: We have been created by God; shaped and molded into a beautiful image of the divine.

Many: **From dust we are made and to dust we shall return.**

One: We take our first breaths, feel the first touches of love, and cry in fear of an unfamiliar world.

Many: **From dust we are made and to dust we shall return.**

One: We grow, we fall, we bare scars, we dance, we change, we lose love, we never remain the same.

Many: **From dust we are made and to dust we shall return.**

One: Today, we begin the Lenten journey, remembering the frailty of life and our own mortality.

Many: **From dust we are made and to dust we shall return.**

One: We now seek to follow Jesus, God's beloved child, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. In whom we see God's image most clearly.

Many: **From dust we are made and to dust we shall return. When we return embrace us, hold us, keep us. For God's beloved dust we will always remain.**

\* Hymn

“Near to the Heart of God”

MCAFEE

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God,  
A place where sin cannot oppress, near to the heart of God.

*Refrain: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God,  
Hold us, who wait before you, near to the heart of God.*

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God,  
A place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God. (R)

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God,  
A place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God. (R)

Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Eric Miner

Merciful God, we confess that we do not always live as those aware of our own impermanence. We cling to what does not give life, turn

from love, and neglect what truly matters. Yet even now, you call us to return, to release what separates us from you and embrace the grace that is always before us. In your mercy, hold us, renew us, and guide us in the way of life. Amen.

Song

“God, Be Merciful to Me”

REDHEAD 76

God be merciful to me; on your grace I rest my plea.  
My transgressions I confess; grief and guilt my soul oppress.  
Wash me, make me pure within; cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

Gracious God, my heart renew, make my spirit right and true.  
Do not cast me from your sight nor remove your Spirit's light.  
Your salvation's joy restore, make me steadfast evermore.

Words of Grace

Rev. Melissa McQueen-Simmons

Even now, says our God, return with all your heart, for you are held in steadfast love. Though we are dust, we are also beloved; though we falter, grace does not fail us. Hear the good news: there is no shame too deep, no past too broken, no heart too heavy that God cannot restore. In Christ, we are forgiven, renewed, and called to live. Amen.

Hebrew Scripture

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 (CEB)

Dawn Robinson

*As we begin this Lenten journey, hear the words from the prophet Joel as he shares the warning of a threat that is coming and that now is the time to repent and turn to God...*

Blow the horn in Zion; give a shout on my holy mountain! Let all the people of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is near— a day of darkness and no light, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread out upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes, unlike any that has ever come before them, or will come after them in centuries ahead. Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow; tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. Who knows whether he will have a change of heart and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God? Blow the horn in Zion; demand a fast; request a special assembly. Gather the people; prepare a holy meeting; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the groom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep. Let them say, "Have mercy, Lord, on your people, and don't make your inheritance a disgrace, an example of failure among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

**Many: God, I ask for mercy and forgiveness.**

Meditation

"Yet Even Now"

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Ashes

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
& Rev. Melissa McQueen-Simmons

On this night, we remember what is true: we are dust, and to dust we shall return. These ashes are not marks of despair, but signs of honesty. Honesty about our mortality, our fragility, and our deep need for God. Yet even now, God calls us to return with our whole hearts, to live with intention, to seek what matters most. So come, receive this ancient sign, not as a mark of sorrow alone, but as an invitation: to repentance, to renewal, to the sacred journey of Lent.

Tonight, we offer two forms of ashes: traditional ashes and glitter ashes.

*(Our glitter ashes are environmentally safe and biodegradable.)*

Glitter ashes are a visible sign that repentance and hope can coexist. While Christianity is often portrayed as intolerant toward the LGBTQ+ community, we offer glitter ashes reclaiming this day as a time not only to turn back to God but also to proclaim love, justice, and inclusion. Glitter has long been a symbol of resilience, courage, and flourishing in the queer community. By blending glitter with ashes, we bear witness to the profound relationship between death and new life, the heart of our faith. These ashes are for everyone, especially those who have been hurt or excluded by the Church. We offer glitter ashes on Ash Wednesday, to proclaim a faith that empowers rather than harms, a faith that reflects Christ's boundless love for all.

Come, receive the sign of the cross in ashes. Allow that which needs to change to be released, that which needs death to die, and that which needs forgiveness to be forgiven. Open yourself to the transformation that will unfold as we journey together through Lent toward Easter.

**“Remember that you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”**

After the imposition of ashes, respond with:  
**“Yet, out of death comes new life.”**

Prayer of Transformation

Rev. Melissa McQueen-Simmons

God of Grace, Source of Life,  
You know us completely, in all our brokenness and beauty.  
You see the places in us where we long for change,  
And hold gently the pain we carry in silence.  
Help us to release the burdens we can no longer bear,  
And embrace the healing that begins in our hearts,  
That we may live with renewed courage, love, and purpose.  
Transform us on this Lenten journey,  
So that we may reflect your justice, your mercy, and your peace.  
Through Christ, who calls us to love, to grow, and to heal we pray, saying,  
**Many: Amen.**

\* Hymn

“Abide with Me”

EVENTIDE

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The shadows deepen, Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Christ who changes not, abide with me.

I need your presence every passing hour;  
I need your grace to foil the tempter's power.  
Give me your love my guide and stay to be.  
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

\* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Postlude

Jon Weddell

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*Parts of the liturgy for today's service were written or adapted from  
UCC Worship Ways, Jon Weddell, and Rev. Christopher Czarnecki.*

*Candid photographs and/or video recording share our work and witness  
and invite others into the fellowship of our congregation. Some pictures/video  
may be published in church print publications, on our website or on our  
official social media sites. If you do not wish to have your image published,  
please contact the church office by phone or email.*

**WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:**

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison, Shakti Subramanian,  
We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Do you like  
talking to interesting people and being helpful? **Greeters and  
ushers, liturgists and readers are needed** starting at 10:30 every  
Sunday. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the  
SignUpGenius link:



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

**Please Remember in Prayer  
Members**

Linda Carver, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Sharon Landis,  
Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Darline  
Warren, Sally Young

**Friends & Family Members**

Sandra (Carl & Phyllis Johnson), Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd),  
Melissa Brown, Reva Dixon, Kim Dixon VanFleet (Diane Neese), Jeanne Hord  
(Diane Neese), Pam McGill & Pam Culp (Melissa Noll), Deby Gumpfer (Dawn  
Simmons), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie  
Hildebrand), Charles Jernigan (Lee Parrish), Dave Johnson, Richard Lease (Barb  
Schneller), Earl & Susie Morgan (Ed Vickery), Larry & Karen Roark (Ed Vickery),  
Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Brian Weddell (Jon  
Weddell), Kim Wiggs-Gamblin, Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley), John Zastrow (Barb  
Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to  
[prayers@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org).

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Lent Begins March 5 through April 17

### Lenten Devotionals

#### “YOUNG VOICES: STEPPING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS”

This 47-day devotion walks you through Lent and concludes with the good news of Easter Sunday. All entries were written by UCC youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 35.

See these daily devotions on our Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/HCUCC.Church>

We will have a limited number of printed copies available.

### Sojourners Class

On Sunday, March 9, we will begin a book study of *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* by Marcus Borg and John Crossan.

We gather In-person or via Zoom: Meeting ID: 895 6175 8099 Passcode: 986788

### April 6

On the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, join us for “Mix-it-up” Sunday,  
with a Spring Brunch Potluck following worship.

Pastries, Muffins, Casseroles and Salads

### April 13

Palm & Passion Sunday:

Let's celebrate our Confirmants together!

### April 20

Easter Worship 10:55am

Bring fresh flowers for the cross

### April 27

Celebrate Earth Sunday with the Creation Justice Team

### OUR MINISTRY TEAM

**Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, MDiv, MBA, Senior Pastor**

**RevChris@holycovenantucc.org, 314-402-8167**

**Jon Weddell, MDiv, MSW, Minister of Music**

**Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant**

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