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**“God is present in jails and in justice, in songs sung at midnight  
and in shackles falling to the ground.”**

**– Rev. Dr. Wilda Gafney**

**“There is no prison God cannot enter, no soul God does not claim as  
beloved, no system love cannot challenge.”**

**– Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis**

**“So long as there are people who are marginalized,  
the church must be a place of liberation and light.”**

**– Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez**

Founded in 1916, we are an Open & Affirming (LGBTQ+), anti-racist, and  
justice seeking church that is part of the greater United Church of Christ.

#### **OUR MINISTRY TEAM**

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

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**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**June 1, 2025, 10:55 am**

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

Prelude "Bringing in the Sheaves" arr. H. S. Livingston

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Chiming of the Hour

Introit "Come and Find the Quiet Center" BEACH SPRING

**Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,  
Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:  
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see  
All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.**

\* Call to the Heart Pam Shimberg

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

One: We gather in the presence of the Holy,

Many: **Awake to mystery, open to movement, ready to be transformed.**

One: Some of us come with songs of joy; others carry unspoken sorrows.

Many: **All are welcome here. All are needed here. All are beloved here.**

One: Injustice may lurk around us, but sacred love holds us.

Many: **In both stillness and in trembling, God is with us.**

One: Come, let us worship with wonder, courage, and hope.

Many: **Let us worship the One who meets us wherever we are and calls it holy.**

\* Hymn

“God of Great and God of Small”

N. Sleeth

God of great and God of small, God of one and God of all,  
God of weak and God of strong, God to whom all things belong,

*Refrain:* Alleluia, Alleluia, praise be to your name.

God of land and sky and sea, God of life and destiny,  
God of never-ending power, yet beside me every hour, (R)

God of silence, God of sound, God by whom the lost are found,  
God of day and darkest night, God whose love turns wrong to right, (R)

God of heaven and God of earth, God of death and God of birth,  
God of now and days before, God who reigns forevermore, (R)

Monthly Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

**Ourselves:** “God accepts me exactly as I am, in all my beauty, pride, and love.”

**Neighbor:** “God accepts you exactly as you are, in all your beauty, pride, and love.”

**World:** “God accepts us exactly as we are, in all our beauty, pride, and love.”

Prayer for Transformation (*unison*)

Pam Shimberg

Holy One, we confess that we can grow comfortable with what is familiar, even when it holds us back or hurts others. That we resist disruption, even when Your Spirit is encouraging us to move in holy ways. Forgive us and help us trust that the path to liberation often begins in discomfort, sacrifice, and disturbance. Amen.

Words of Grace

Pam Shimberg

Friends, hear these words of grace: God is not waiting for our perfection, only our willing hearts and openness. Even in our hesitation, grace finds us. To break chains, change minds, and call us forward in the footsteps of Jesus. Know you are loved, forgiven, and free in this moment to begin again. Amen.

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Song of Preparation                      “O Christ Surround Me”

GREEN TYLER

God, be the love to search and keep me;  
God, be the prayer to move my voice;  
God, be the strength to now uphold me:  
O Christ, surround me. O Christ, surround me.

Christ in the eyes of all who see me,  
Christ in the ears that hear my voice,  
Christ in the hearts of all who know me:  
O Christ, surround me. O Christ, surround me.

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

THY WORD

**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.**

Modern Lesson

Caroline Utz

*Our modern lesson for today comes from Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, who is a Zen priest, Black queer activist, and contemplative teacher. Among her writing she says...*

“Love and justice are not two. Without inner change, there can be no outer change, without collective change, no change matters. Liberation isn’t a destination—it’s a practice of presence. We must be willing to get free in our own bodies, even as we seek to dismantle the cages of systems. This is not about being perfect. It’s about becoming whole. Every act of compassion is a strike against empire. Every breath you take in awareness is a jailbreak of the soul.”

**One:**    May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

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

*Please take a comfortable posture that supports your reading and worshipping... Our Christian Lesson for today comes from Acts 16:16-34, where Paul and Silas free a spirit-possessed girl whose been enslaved and are imprisoned...*

One day, when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. She began following Paul and us, shouting, “These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!” She did this for many days.

This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!” It left her at that very moment.

Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, “These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews who promote customs that we Romans can’t accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison’s foundations. The doors flew open and everyone’s chains came loose. When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted loudly, “Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!”

The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He led them outside and asked, “Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?”

. . .

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household.” They spoke the Lord’s word to him and everyone else in his house. Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.

**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

“Forgotten by Empire, but Not by God”

Hymn 437

“We Shall Not Give Up the Fight”

ONLY STARTED

**We shall not give up the fight, we have only started,  
We have only started, we have only started. (2x)**

**Together we’ll have victory, hand holding hand,  
Hand holding hand, hand holding hand. (2x)**

**We shall not give up the fight, we have only started,  
We have only started, we have only started. (2x)**

Invitation to Generosity

Pam Shimberg

When Paul and Silas sang in prison, their voices reached beyond stone walls. When the ground shook and the doors flew open, it wasn’t just about escape, it was about liberation for all. Today, we give not to earn grace, but to extend it to others. To offer what we have—our gifts, our hope, our shared faith—so that lives might still be transformed. Let us now share our gifts in such hope.

\* Doxology

LASST UNS ERFREUEN

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise God, all creatures high and low. Alleluia, alleluia!  
Praise God, in Jesus fully known: Creator, Word, and Spirit one.  
Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**

\* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Pam Shimberg

**Liberating God, bless the gifts we bring. Not for our own comfort or need, but for the breaking open of what binds the suffering and for the building up of Your kin-dom of healing. May they carry your love, peace, and justice into places of our world still waiting for a song of freedom. Amen.**

**THE MYSTIC SUPPER  
ALL ARE WELCOME AT CHRIST'S TABLE**

Invitation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

**One:** The Lord be with you.

**Many:** And also with you.

**One:** Lift up your hearts.

**Many:** We lift them up to the Lord.

**One:** Let us give thanks to the Lord.

**Many:** It is good to give our thanks and praise.

**One:** Come to this table, all who are hungry for hope. Come, not because you must, but because you are welcome. Come, whether the song in your heart is one of praise or protest, whether you are free or still waiting to be liberated. This is Christ's table—not set for the worthy, but for the willing; not for the perfect, but for all who long for the God who loves them. Here, there are no gatekeepers. There are no purity tests. There is just bread for the journey, and a cup of courage for the road ahead. Jesus set this table with enough love to hold all of who we are, and all that the world is aching to become.

Words of Institution

We remember Jesus: not just as a man of peace, but as a prophet of justice. He healed on the Sabbath. He welcomed women to lead.

He touched what was considered unclean and blessed what had been discarded. He stood with the oppressed, dined with outcasts, and spoke truth to power even when it cost him everything.

On the night he was arrested, he gathered with his friends for a simple meal. And while they were eating, he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and shared it, saying:

“This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat.”

Let this be a sign that God will always love you.

And after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared it, saying:

“This cup is the new covenant. Poured out for you and for many. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Let this be a sign that God will always be with you.

So, we remember. We remember his life of courageous love and radical welcome. We remember the pain of the world he came to heal:

the weeping of children in Gaza, the cries for peace in Ukraine, the desperation of refugees fleeing Sudan, the anguish in Myanmar.

We remember that Jesus' love is not only comforting but also confronting. It challenges injustice. It tears down walls. It shakes the foundations of this earth, like it did long ago.

### Sharing of the Elements

Holy Spirit, move through this bread and this cup, on all who will gather at this table. Make this meal a place of sacred resistance and holy rest. Nourish us with grace.

Strengthen us with courage. And when we rise from this table, may we do so ready, ready to sing with joy and march for justice, to break chains and build bridges, to love this world fiercely, just as Jesus did.

The bread of life, for you.

The cup of liberation, for you.

Take, eat, and remember: you are loved, just as you are.

God is with you, just where you are.

This table gives you what you need, so you can rise up and walk in the ways of Christ again.

Video during Communion "God of Movements and Martyrs"

D. LaMotte

<https://youtu.be/FYaEl5ombvQ>

### Prayer of Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Loving God, we give thanks for this meal of mercy and strength. You have met us here with open arms and fed us with hope. Now send us out again to sing freedom's song, to speak love's truth, and to be your people, a people of justice, joy, and peace. Amen.

\* Hymn 498

“Jesu, Jesu”

CHEREPONI

*Refrain:* Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,  
Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

Knelt at the feet of his friends, silently washing their feet,  
Jesu, you acted as servant to them. (R)

Neighbors are rich and poor, varied in color and race,  
Neighbors are near and far away. (R)

These are the ones we should serve, these are the ones we should love;  
All these are neighbors to us and you. (R)

Loving puts us on our knees, showing our faith by our deeds,  
Serving the neighbors we have from you. (R)

Kneel at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet,  
This is the way we should live with you. (R)

\* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

\* Benediction Response 181

BRING FORTH

Bring forth the reign of mercy, bring forth the reign of peace;  
Bring forth the reign of justice, bring forth the city of God!

Postlude

“Rock of Ages”

arr. R. Wetzler

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*The liturgy for today’s service was written by 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, Laura Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison  
Ushers: Shakti Subramanian, Laurence Winston, Dave Shimberg  
Greeters: Patti Unger, Pam Shimberg  
Refreshments:

### WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

**Stay connected!** There are many new events in our future! 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/>

**CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT** [holycovenantucc.org/events/](https://holycovenantucc.org/events/)

#### **BROOKS SCHOLARSHIP 2025-26, Applications Due June 15**

The purpose of the Michael G. Brooks Scholarship Fund is to encourage youth in both their educational growth and their service to God. Scholarship funds up to approximately \$2,000 will be considered annually for all applicants. Contact the church office or JoAnn Jellison, [joannjellison@yahoo.com](mailto:joannjellison@yahoo.com) for the Process and Procedures document for this scholarship and the application.

**DAYTIMERS COVENANT GROUP LUNCHEON** meets this Thursday, June 5, at noon. All are welcome.

#### **RACE, POWER & TRUTH: AMERICAN COUP SCREENING AT HOLY COVENANT** **Sunday, June 22, 1:00-3:00 PM**

In partnership with PBS North Carolina and Working Films, we invite you to a powerful screening and discussion of *American Coup*, a new documentary revealing the tragic truth behind the 1898 Wilmington Massacre and the violent overthrow of a multi-racial, democratically elected government. **Screening begins at 1:00 PM** with refreshments available beforehand. **Discussion begins at 2:00 PM** with two special guests: **Tom Hanchett** - Local historian exploring the context behind the coup and **Justin Perry** - Trauma-informed therapist facilitating discussion. This event is a Racial Justice and Equity contribution to our **Year of Wellness** and a courageous act of truth-telling and healing. RSVP requested <https://holycovenantucc.org/american-coup-screening/>

## **HCUCC CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF OPEN AND AFFIRMING! JUNE 29**

On Sunday, June 29th, Holy Covenant will joyfully celebrate the **25th anniversary of becoming an Open and Affirming (ONA) congregation** – a bold milestone in our church's ongoing witness to extravagant welcome, inclusion, and love. This celebration will coincide with the **official launch of our new website**, an online space that reflects who we are: a faith community rooted in justice, love, courage, and compassion. To mark the occasion, we're inviting **members and friends of Holy Covenant** to share what ONA has meant to you. **Submit a video message** between 30 seconds and 2 minutes. Share your story, your gratitude, or your hopes for the future. All are welcome! You can record with your smartphone or computer. If you're not sure how, we have folks ready to help (or borrow a grandkid!). **Deadline for submissions:** June 13

Let's celebrate the radical welcome that defines who we are – and honor the beautiful, brave journey that brought us here.

### **Please Remember in Prayer Members**

Family and Friends of the late Dr. Isabelle Reedy Powell

Markus & Kristen Fuchs in the recent death of Markus' father, Eugen Fuchs.

Mel & Christine Andersen, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Jim Dwiggin, Tina Ettesen, Laura Hankins, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Lee Parrish, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Darline Warren, Sally Young & Alice Phelan

### **Friends & Family Members**

Family and Friends in the death of Carol Stewart, Darline Warren's sister-in-law; Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Linda Burby, Reva Dixon, Kim Dixon VanFleet (Diane Neese), Gloria Echeverri (Melissa Noll), Kent Hansen (Kristen Fuchs), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Dave Johnson, Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Tracy Reed (Dawn Simmons), Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Tara Washburn (Patrick Washburn), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Brian Weddell (Jon Weddell), Kim Wiggs-Gamblin, Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley)

**If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to**

**[prayers@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org)**.