



HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

-be the Church, everywhere



Photo by Microsoft Image Creator

**“Love is the force that dares to enter the impossible,
carrying hope and new life where none seems possible.”**

- Paula Gooder

**“Love is our vocation and our work; it is the presence we carry
into every space, every heart, every moment.”**

- Thomas Merton

**“Love invites us to slow down, to remember what matters,
and to resist systems that exhaust or discard people.”**

- Tricia Hersey

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.

HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ LOVE

December 21, 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 "Journey to the Manger" E. Butler
Dawn Robinson, Patrick Washburn, piano duet

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 "Away in a Manger" arr. C. Moglebust
Handbell Choir

* Call to the Heart Ed Vickery
Please take a comfortable posture that supports your reading and worshipping...

One: In this season of waiting, we gather with hearts of longing and hope.
Many: **We come seeking a love that holds us, shapes us, and sends us forth.**

One: We remember Mary, who carried love in her body before she ever held it in her arms.

Many: **We remember a love brave enough to trust God and change the world.**

One: We gather in a world pained by injustice, where many still wait to be seen and valued.

Many: **We come believing that love is still present, working and making room for all.**

One: God's love is not distant, but it takes on flesh, moving among us, and calling us each by name.

Many: **We open our hearts to this love, ready to both receive it and share it.**

One: So come, let us worship the God who enters the world through love.

Many: **Let us worship the God who invites our love to give birth to something new.**

* Hymn 135

“O Come, All You Faithful”

ADESTE FIDELES

O come, all you faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come now, O come now to Bethlehem.
Come and behold the ruler of all angels:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

God of true God - Light of true Light -
Born of the Virgin's womb in human form;
Truly our God, begotten, not created:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing all you messengers of heavenly love:
“Glory to God, all glory in the highest”:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

Amen, Lord, we greet you, born this happy morning;
Jesus to you shall all glory be given;
Word of our God now in flesh appearing:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

2025 Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy

Advent Candle 4: Love

Markus & Kristen Fuchs

Today, we light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of Love.

[Light the candle]

We light this candle to remind us that God's love is the source of all things. Love is the power which causes us to offer forgiveness, to embrace the forgotten, to liberate the oppressed, to see each other as sacred and whole.

This love is not simply sentimental feelings, it is also a force that can be fierce, healing, and liberating. As this candle burns, we remember that to love as Christ did is at times the willingness to risk ourselves for the sake of others. We light this candle trusting that it is God's love which endures.

One: When people are afraid or holding fear...

Many: **We light the candle of love.**

One: When we are tempted to exclude or turn away...

Many: **We light the candle of love.**

One: May this light remind us that God's love dwells among us...

Many: **And calls us to love one another.**

C. Schalk

Flicker and flame and glow with love, light up the world around you.

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

arr. A. C. Whitworth

Rev. Glencie Rhedrick

Our Creator, who is ever-present, holy is Your name. In this season of waiting, let Your kin-dom draw near, and let Your will be done in our hearts, as it is in Your heavenly realm. Give us today the bread of hope, to sustain our faith as we journey toward the manger. Forgive us for the times we rush past Your presence and help us forgive those who have wounded us. Lead us away from the distractions that dim Your light and deliver us from the shadows of fear and doubt. For Yours is the kin-dom of promise, and the power of love, now and forever. Amen.

“When Mary Walked Through Woods of Thorn”

Our Modern Lesson for today comes from bell hooks, who was Black feminist, influential poet, social and cultural theorist, and activist. In her book All About Love she says...

“Love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust. When we choose to love, we choose to act in ways that nurture spiritual growth in ourselves and in others. Love is not passive; it is an action, a practice. It requires that we move beyond fear and domination. Love challenges injustice because injustice violates the dignity love seeks to protect. To love well is to imagine a world where everyone belongs. Love is the foundation of freedom.”

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

Song “Canticle of the Turning” STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN
(Meg Houlihan, vocalist, and band)

Refrain:

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
And the world is about to turn.**

* Gospel Lesson Luke 1:46b-55 (CEB) Ed Vickery
Please take a comfortable posture that supports your reading and worshipping.
Our Gospel reading for today comes from Luke 1:46b-55 (CEB), where Mary
expresses praise for God's intervention in her life and the life of her people...

Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

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
 “Love Is All I Have to Give You”

Invitation to Generosity Ed Vickery
At Holy Covenant, we celebrate the many ways you share your gifts: through pledged support, spontaneous generosity, and acts of love in our shared life. If you'd like to give today, you can scan the QR code on the back of your bulletin to access our secure online giving options. Thank you for sustaining the ministries of love, welcome, and justice we are creating together.

In this season of Advent, we remember that God entered the world through love. Love is all Mary had to offer, and that love took on flesh and changed the world. As we give today, may we offer that same love—love made visible, love that feeds, love that liberates, love that widens circles. Let us give generously, trusting that when love is shared, God continues to bring new life into the world.

Offertory

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”
Handbell Choir

arr. C. Moglebust

* Doxology

W Żłobie Leży

Glory be to the Creator, Glory be to the Christ,
Glory be to the Spirit, our praise to you arise.
Here we offer to you gladly all the gifts that you impart,
As we glory in your presence, giving from a grateful heart.

* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Ed Vickery

Please join me in a prayer of dedication for the gifts we have received...

Loving God, we offer these gifts in gratitude, knowing they are signs of love made real. Bless what is given and use these offerings to lift the oppressed and to care for your world. May all these gifts and our lives become vessels of your love in a world longing for healing and justice. We dedicate all that we are and all that we have to you. Amen.

* Hymn 144

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

MENDELSSOHN

Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all you saints arise, join the triumph of the skies;
With the angel host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Refrain: Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time the Savior comes, off-spring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh, the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased on earth with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel. (R)

Hail the Bearer of God’s peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness,
Light and life our Savior brings, risen with radiant, healing wings.
Mildly laying glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us all from earth, born to give us second birth. (R)

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

WONDERFUL CHILD

Jesus, Jesus, oh, what a wonderful child.
Jesus, Jesus, so holy, meek, and mild.
New life, new hope the child will bring.
Listen to the angels sing, “Glory, glory, glory,” let the heavens ring!

We give thanks for all who have made a joyful noise for God and for HCUCC this year!

We are grateful for each of you, your interest in singing or playing, your dedication and teamwork, and your gifts in music for each of us to enjoy!

Participating with the choir, band and/or handbell choir in 2025:

Angela Allison, Kristin Andes, Martha Battles, Lee Brigman, Roman Chmura, Joy Decker, Tina Dickens, D Evans, Brian Hankins, Dorrie Hankins, Laura Hankins, Autumn Holt, Tammy Holt, Meg Houlihan, Eileen Howe, Judah L. Jones, Sally McLester, Eric Miner, Diane Neese, Alice Phelan-Young, Sally Phelan-Young, Dawn Robinson, Benjamin Rudolph, Cheryl Sexton, Dawn Simmons, Beth Sharp, Robert Shepherd, Mary Tarr, Steven Tarr, Ed Vickery, Darline Warren, Patrick Washburn

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*Parts of the liturgy were 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

Greeters: Pam Shimberg

Refreshments: Martha Battles, Kristen Fuchs

Deacon of the Month: Martha Bomely (Suzanne Lamorey)

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

GET ALL THE DETAILS FOR NEWS AND EVENTS AT
<https://holycovenantucc.org/>



Your generosity builds a more inclusive church!

Explore secure options available online

<https://holycovenantucc.org/giving/>

CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT <https://holycovenantucc.org/events/>

- 12/24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
(Chili Supper 5:30pm / Service 7:00pm)
- 12/28 Guest Preacher Rev. Judah L. Jones
- 12/31 4th Annual NYE Game Night 6:30-8:30pm
- 01/11 Room In The Inn

CHRISTMAS EVE CHILI (& SOUP) SUPPER & CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Tuesday, December 24, 2025 | Supper 5:30 PM | Service 7:00 PM

Join us on Christmas Eve for one of Holy Covenant's most beloved holiday traditions – an evening filled with warmth, laughter, and light. We'll begin with a Chili (& Soup) Supper at 5:30 PM in the Gathering Room, followed by a Candlelight Worship Service at 7:00 PM in the Sanctuary.

This sacred night brings us together as one community to celebrate the story of Jesus' birth with familiar carols, scripture readings, and the glow of candlelight – a moment to rest in the love and peace of Christ that continues to shine in our world. Sign up to bring chili, soup or a side.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-53825271-christmas#/>

YEAR-END GIVING - THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

Holy Covenant's fiscal year ends on Tuesday, December 31. Contributions for 2025, or prepayments for 2026, **must be received at the church by noon on 12/31/2025**, or postmarked on or before 12/31/2025 if being mailed. **Please use the secure address of: Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269.** Questions about year-end contributions, stock gifts or electronic giving may be directed to Treasurer, Martha Bomely, 704-804-0640, or Dawn Simmons at office@holycovenantucc.org. Please let them know if you plan to make a stock gift so we can include the value of this gift on your year-end giving statement. We are blessed by your generous support of the ministries at Holy Covenant!

Please Remember in Prayer

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

Members

Mel & Christine Andersen, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Teresa Eller, Kathy Habel, Eileen Howe, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Linda Miller, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Benjamin Rudolph, Anita Taylor, Sally Phelan-Young

Friends & Family Members

Erica Stone & family in the recent death of her husband, Alan (Laura Hankins) Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Joan Bowling (Kristen Fuchs), Lester Brigman (Lee Parrish), Kim Chamberlain (Kevin Decker), Gayle Clay (Jay Whitley), Erica Echeverri, Gloria Echeverri (Melissa Noll), Jason Field (Benjamin Rudolph), Samuel Head (Benjamin Rudolph), Jack Hillard (Barbara Schneller), Doug Howe (Eileen Howe), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Matt, Brianna and Rhiannon Pacewicz (Dom Ciciollo), Frank Roach (Kristen Fuchs), Tom, Beth and Ariel Rudolph (Benjamin Rudolph), Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Ed Stack (Martha Bomely), Damon & Tiffany Turner (Terry Raley-Dennis), Tara Washburn (Patrick Washburn), Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley)

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, Senior Pastor
RevChris@holycovenantucc.org, 314-402-8167

Jon Weddell, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, Executive Assistant

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