



# HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*-be the Church, everywhere*



*Unsplash image by Jon Tyson*

“God’s home is where you are already known  
and still welcomed.”

– Frederick Buechner

“You may not control all the events that happen to you,  
but you can decide not to be reduced by them.”

– Maya Angelou

“We are already one. But we imagine that we are not.  
And what we have to recover is our original unity.”

– Thomas Merton

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**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

**January 4, 2026 | 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                                      “A Tribute to Richard Smallwood”                                      arr. J. Weddell

Welcome and Announcements                                      Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
One: May the peace of the New Born Christ be with you.  
Many: And also with you.

Chiming of the Hour

Centering Prayer                                      Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
*Let us center ourselves in prayer as we gather for this time of worship...*  
One: God of new beginnings, as we gather on this first Sunday of the new year, we quiet our hearts and turn our attention toward you. We let the noise and worries of last year fall away, making space for your presence to fill us. Remind us that you have never left us, that you dwell within us even now, and are closer to us than our own breath. Help us to feel your nearness as we worship together and open us to hear the ways you are speaking to us. Guide us on this journey home to you, to the sacred place within, the place where you have been all along. Amen.

Introit                                      “Welcome to This House”                                      D. Cowen  
Welcome to this house, open and affirming,  
In God’s Son we are all one. Hand in hand we stand.  
Welcome to this house, caring and accepting.  
In God’s Son we are all one.  
Welcome to this house of God.

Welcome to this house. Blessed by Word and Harmony.  
Child of God, born from above. Know that Christ is love.  
Welcome to this house. Filled with peace and charity.  
Child of God, born from above.  
Welcome to this house of God.

\* Call to the Heart

Suzanne Lamorey

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

One: At the turn of a new year, we gather longing for something new, something fresh, something that will make us feel whole.

**Many: We come seeking the journey home to God.**

One: We come carrying the weight of last year. The joys and sorrows, the questions and hopes, the moments when God seemed near or far away.

**Many: We come as we are, scattered and searching, ready to remember.**

One: God has not forgotten us. God is still with us, shaping a future where we feel whole and at home again.

**Many: God will lead us, gather us, and turn our mourning into joy.**

One: Today we are given a fresh start, a clean slate, a chance to begin again.

**Many: We are no longer defined by our past, but by who we are choosing to become.**

One: We are not journeying back to a God who is distant but awakening to the sacred presence that has been dwelling within us all along.

**Many: Here, we return to the awareness that God is our source, our center, the very breath we breathe. Let us now worship together.**

\* Hymn

“What a World of Sound”

HYMN OF JOY

What a world of sound it must have been for Jesus, newly-born –  
Mother Mary singing songs of praise to God that Christmas morn;  
Joseph, reaching for the child, whispering when the baby fussed;  
Songs and whispers bear the promise: You are truly God-with-us.

Surely there were sounds of women from that small community,  
Stopping by to see the baby, offering hospitality;  
Lambs were bleating, donkeys braying, children playing in the street.  
Jesus, close against his mother, felt her heart's rejoicing beat.

In that town were shepherds calling; workers there were cutting wood;  
In the distance, angry shouts and people begging for their food;  
In a doorway, someone weeping, saddened by some inner pain –  
Jesus, in your incarnation, unto each of these you came.

What a world of sound we live in; many words we daily hear.  
Mid this world's conflicting voices, be for us God's Word so clear.  
Help us listen to your story; help us hear you when we pray.  
In you, Jesus, is our hope: God came to us on Christmas Day.

## Monthly Affirmation

**Ourselves:** I release the past, and step into the new beginning God is calling me to.  
**Neighbor:** You release the past, and step into the new beginning God is calling you to.  
**World:** We release the past, and step into the new beginning God is calling us to.

## Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Suzanne Lamorey

*Join me in prayer as we confess the ways in which we separate ourselves from God...*

Loving God, we confess that we often hold ourselves captive to what has been, dwelling on past mistakes or carrying guilt that keeps us from embracing new beginnings. We allow our pain, our fears, and our unmet expectations to convince us that you are separate from us, when the truth is you have never left our side. Forgive us, transform us, and help us remember that we are free to begin again. Amen.

## Words of Grace

Suzanne Lamorey

*Friends, hear this good news...*

God's grace gives us the space to stumble, to fail, and to try again. we are not defined by your mistakes or held captive by our past, but we are beloved, we are free, and we are given a fresh start. God has never left us and is walking with us even now, calling us home to the awareness of a divine presence that has always been within. In the name of Christ, know you are forgiven and whole. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

## Special Music

"Joseph's Song"  
Ed Vickery, vocals

M. Card

## Modern Lesson

Deborah Winston

*Our Modern Lesson for today comes from Richard Rhor, who is a Franciscan priest, author, and spiritual teacher. In his book Essential Teachings on Love, he says...*

"We cannot attain the presence of God. We're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness. God is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take. As we take another it means that God is choosing us now and now and now. We have nothing to attain or even learn. We need only recognize what already is."

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

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

*Our Scripture reading for today comes from Jeremiah 31:7-14, where the prophet shares with the Israelites what it will be like when they return home to Jerusalem...*

The Lord proclaims: Sing joyfully for the people of Jacob; shout for the leading nation. Raise your voices with praise and call out: “The Lord has saved his people, the remaining few in Israel!” I’m going to bring them back from the north; I will gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the disabled, expectant mothers and those in labor; a great throng will return here. With tears of joy they will come; while they pray, I will bring them back. I will lead them by quiet streams and on smooth paths so they don’t stumble. I will be Israel’s father, Ephraim will be my oldest child. Listen to the Lord’s word, you nations, and announce it to the distant islands: The one who scattered Israel will gather them and keep them safe, as a shepherd his flock. The Lord will rescue the people of Jacob and deliver them from the power of those stronger than they are. They will come shouting for joy on the hills of Zion, jubilant over the Lord’s gifts: grain, wine, oil, flocks, and herds. Their lives will be like a lush garden; they will grieve no more. Then the young women will dance for joy; the young and old men will join in. I will turn their mourning into laughter and their sadness into joy; I will comfort them. I will lavish the priests with abundance and shower my people with my gifts, declares the Lord.

**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  
“A Word for the Journey this Year”

White Stone Ceremony

You are now invited into a time of prayerful reflection for the word that will guide your intentions, your heart, and your actions in the year ahead. Once Spirit has spoken this word to you, write it on your stone. When you return home put this stone in a place where it will be visible to you each day, as a reminder of what is seeking to be made flesh through you this year.

Invitation to Generosity

Suzanne Lamorey

Jeremiah spoke of a journey home marked by grain, wine, oil, and flocks—signs that God's people had returned to wholeness and abundance. Let our offerings today be signs of this same journey, expressions that God is leading us toward restoration and union. As we share, we participate in God's work of gathering, healing, and love. Let us now offer our gifts with grateful hearts.

\* 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*)

Suzanne Lamorey

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

God of abundance, we offer these gifts as an act of faith and gratitude for the beginning of a new year before us. May these offerings help carry others on their journey home to you, providing comfort for the lost, hope for the weary, and love for those who feel far from your presence. Use what has been shared to bring wholeness, healing, and justice to the world. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION  
THE MYSTIC SUPPER

Hymn 348

"Jesus Is Here Right Now"

JESUS IS HERE

Jesus is here right now. Jesus is here.  
With this bread and wine true peace you'll find;  
Christ Jesus is here right now.

The Invitation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: God be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: We lift them up to God.

One: Let us give thanks to the Holy One.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Pastor: As we cross the threshold of a new year, we come to a table where God meets us exactly where we are. This is the table of the Christ child, just born and growing, who understood what it means to journey through life with all its questions and longings, it's blessings and challenges, who knew both the joy of coming home to God and the ache of feeling far from it. The table Jesus set was a table for everybody and every soul. For people of all genders and no gender, for every sexuality and expression of love, for every race and ethnicity, for the documented and undocumented, for those with resources and those without, for those with faith and those with

questions. No matter what you carried into this new year, or what you wish to leave behind or hold onto, there is a place for you here.

**Many: We gather at this table as we are, and here we are welcome.**

#### Prayer of Remembrance

Pastor: God of new beginnings, we come just bearing the gift of Jesus, whose birth we still celebrate in these days after Christmas. In sending Jesus to us, you showed us that the ordinary is sacred, that the divine dwells within us, and the heavens can touch the earth and make it its home. Soon Jesus will come announcing that the kin-dom of God was breaking in, not far away, but here and now. In breaking bread, he ate with tax collectors and sinners, with women and children, with the sick and the outcast. He showed us that in God's kin-dom all are fed, valued, and belong. As we taste this bread and cup, may we remember that you love us. You love us into wholeness, you meet us in our mess, and you are the presence that calls us forward into new life.

**Many: We remember God's love and claim it as our own.**

#### Words of Institution

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gathered for a last meal among friends. And at that table as they ate, he took bread, gave thanks for it, blessed it and broke it, and said: *"This is my body, given for you. Whenever you eat it, remember me."*

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

In the same way after supper, Jesus took the cup. And after giving thanks he blessed it, poured it, and gave it to his disciples and said: *"This cup is the new covenant, poured out in love for all people. Whenever you drink it, remember me."*

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

#### Sharing of the Elements

Music during Communion (*adapted*)

COME, SHARE THE LORD

"We Gather Here in Jesus' Name"

**We gather here in Jesus' name;**

**Christ's love is burning in our hearts like living flame;**

**For through Christ's sacrifice, the whole wide world unites.**

**Come, take the bread; come, drink the wine; come, share the Lord.**

No one is a stranger here; everyone belongs.  
Finding our forgiveness here, we in turn forgive all wrongs.

Christ joins us here; and breaks the bread;  
Our God who pours the cup is risen from the dead;  
The one we love the most is now our gracious host:  
Come, take the bread; come, drink the wine; come, share the Lord.

We are now a family, of which our God is head.  
Though unseen, Christ meets us here in the breaking of the bread.

We'll gather soon in glory rise;  
We'll see the wonder of our God and of our Christ.  
Now we anticipate the feast for which we wait:  
Come, take the bread; come, drink the wine; come, share the Lord.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Loving God, we give thanks for this meal and the reminder that we are not alone. As we rise from this place and step forward into the new year, may we carry with us the truth we have tasted here: that your love sustains us, your grace renews us, and your presence dwells within. Send us out to live as people who know we belong to you and to each other. Make us instruments of your peace, give us the courage to speak truth to power, and to work for justice even when it is hard. May we remember that every day is a chance to begin again, and that you are always inviting us home to the awareness of your love. Amen.

\* Hymn "Live into Hope" TRURO

Live into hope of captives freed, of sight regained, the end of greed.  
The oppressed shall be the first to see the year of God's own jubilee!

Live into hope! The blind shall see with insight and with clarity,  
Removing shades of pride and fear, a vision of our God brought near.

Live into hope of liberty, the right to speak, the right to be,  
The right to have one's daily bread, to hear God's word and thus be fed.

Live into hope of captives freed from chains of fear or want or greed.  
God now proclaims our full release to faith and hope and joy and peace.



\* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

\* Benediction Response 154

GO TELL IT

**Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere.**

**Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!**

Postlude

**“Sleep Holy Babe”**  
*Sally Duffy, organ*

arr. Thomas Mailloux

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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:

Refreshments: Joy Decker, Amanda Deck

## 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/>*

*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 to access our secure online giving options. Thank you for sustaining the ministries of love, welcome, and justice we are creating together.*

**CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT [holycovenantucc.org/events/](https://holycovenantucc.org/events/)  
01/11 Room In The Inn**

Volunteers are still needed. Please check SignUpGenius:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-59047169-room#/>

### **NEW HEARING ASSIST SYSTEM NOW AVAILABLE**

Thanks to a generous donation, Holy Covenant has received a new **wireless hearing assist system** for use during worship services and church events. These devices send the worship audio **directly to a personal receiver**, helping those with hearing challenges better hear the service, sermon, music, and announcements. **Before worship or an event**, speak with a greeter or usher to request a hearing assistance receiver. **After the service or event**, please return the **receiver** so they can be cleaned, sanitized, and recharged for next time. Personal earbuds are yours to keep.

### **SOJOURNERS CLASS, SUNDAYS at 9:45AM**

Rev. Jay Whitley will lead us in a study of five of the minor prophets. Connect with him for materials for this study.

### **FREEDOM TO READ: EXPLORE OUR NEW BANNED BOOK LIBRARY PAGE**

<https://holycovenantucc.org/news-listings/freedom-to-read-page-launch/>

### **Please Remember in Prayer**

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

#### **Members**

Jon Wallace and family in the recent death of his father, Pete Wallace  
Mel Andersen, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Teresa Eller, Kathy Habel, Jon & Linda  
Heaslet, Eileen Howe, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Linda Miller, Sue & Bill Pascucci,  
Benjamin Rudolph, Barbara Schneller, Anita Taylor, Sally Phelan-Young

#### **Friends & Family Members**

The Family of Zackary Cash (Jay & Cathy Whitley)  
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), 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), 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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