



# HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*-be the Church, everywhere*



*Unsplash Photo by Jim Tegman*

“There is a crack in everything.  
That's how the light gets in.”  
— Leonard Cohen

“Hope is being able to see that  
there is light despite all of the darkness.”  
— Desmond Tutu

“You carry the light of God within you,  
not as a distant star, but as a fire meant to be felt.”  
— Howard Thurman.”

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 IN LENT ~ STAR WARS SUNDAY

March 15, 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 "Redeeming Love" arr. R. A. Williamson  
*Patrick Washburn, piano*

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
One: May the peace of 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...*  
God of stars and galaxies, of every universe we have yet to discover, we are in awe that you know our name. In awe that in a cosmos so old and so vast, you have placed within each of us a light that cannot be dimmed.  
So, we come today not to find the light, but to remember we are the light. Not to earn your love, but to remember the truth that we have never been without it. As we prepare for worship this day, still the noise in us now. Quiet the voices that tell us we are not enough, not wanted or worthy. Let all of this and more fall away like stars burning out in the sky. And in the silence of what remains, let us feel the pull of this ancient and holy Force, what we might call the love of God, the presence and power in which we now live, worship, and rest. Amen.

Introit "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley" LONESOME VALLEY  
**Jesus walked this lonesome valley. He had to walk it by himself.**  
**Oh, nobody else could walk it for him. He had to walk it by himself.**

\* Call to the Heart

Terry Raley-Dennis

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

One: We gather today as people of light, called from the far corners of the world and into God's radiant love.

Many: **This is the way.**

One: We come as those who believe that the Force that holds us in love is a love that is stronger than fear, empire, or death.

Many: **This is the way.**

One: We come with joy, with questions, and with doubts, knowing all of it is welcome here, and none of it is too much for God.

Many: **This is the way.**

One: We come as those who refuse to look away from the troubles in our world, and who believe the light of Christ can end them.

Many: **This is the way.**

One: We come to worship, to be reminded of the light within us all, the light of love, of Christ, and of our living God.

Many: **This is the way. Let us now worship as one.**

\* Hymn

"Lead Me, Guide Me"

R. Smallwood

*Refrain:*

Lead me, guide me, along the way, for if you lead me, I cannot stray.  
Lord, let me walk each day with you. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

I am weak and I need your strength and power  
To help me over my weakest hour.  
Help me through the darkness your face to see.  
Lead me, O Lord, lead me. (R)

Monthly Affirmation

**Ourselves:** I open my heart to a new path, trusting the light of God to guide my way.

**Neighbor:** You open your heart to a new path, trusting the light of God to guide your way.

**World:** We open our heart to a new path, trusting the light of God to guide our way.

Song of Preparation

"Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive"

DETROIT

"Forgive our sins as we forgive," you taught us, Lord, to pray,  
But you alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.

Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Terry Raley-Dennis

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

**Gracious God, we confess that we can be not so different from those who have come before us. Like Jonah or Anakin Skywalker, we too can give into our fears and worries at times. Like the disciples Thomas or Luke Skywalker, we let our doubts get the best of us, letting uncertainty keep us from stepping fully into who we have been called to be. And like Peter or Han Solo we struggle to join the good fights, bringing our voices and presence to the injustices where we are needed most. Forgive us, transform us, and call us back to the light within. Amen.**

Song of Transformation

“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

Terry Raley-Dennis

*Friends, hear this good news...*

Just as the Jedi believed the light was never fully lost in those who strayed from the path, Jesus never gave up on people. He called them back every single time. Just as Yoda saw potential in the most unlikely of students, Jesus saw the Christ in fishermen, in tax collectors, and in outcasts and said, “You are exactly who I need in my inner circle.” The same eyes that saw them see you too. And no matter your fears or your failures or your wandering, the light in you has never gone out. In the name of Christ, you are forgiven. You are restored. Now go and be a light and force for God in this world. Amen.

Song of Response

“Return to God”

M. Haugen

**Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy.**

**Come seek the tender faithfulness of God.**

Stories for All People

Tammie Holt

Song of Preparation      “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”      SOJOURNER  
I want Jesus to walk with me. (2x)  
All along my pilgrim journey, oh I want Jesus to walk with me.

Jedi Meditation      Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
Please use this time of silent meditation for the prayer concerns on your heart.

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*) “Take, O Take Me as I Am”      J. L. Bell  
Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;  
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

Modern Lesson      Phyllis Johnson  
*Our first modern lesson for today is from Yoda in the movie “The Empire Strikes Back”. He is remembered saying...*

“Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? And well you should not. For my ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes.”

*And our second modern lesson comes from Eric A. Clayton’s book, “My Life with the Jedi: The Spirituality of Star Wars”. Eric is the deputy director for a Jesuit organization, and author on Ignatian spirituality. In his book he says...*

“This constant invitation to start anew and course-correct when mistakes have been made is the story of our Christian faith too. We know that as human beings fully alive and grappling with our unique vocations, there are times when we live in the light and times when we touch the darkness. We get up and keep going, because ours is a faith built on hope and faith in a God who loves us, even in our darker moments.”

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

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

Scripture Lesson

Ephesians 5:8-14 (CEB)

Terry Raley-Dennis

*Our scripture reading for today comes Ephesians 5:8-14, where a writer of Paul urges followers at the church in Ephesus to live into their identity as the light of Christ...*

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. Therefore, test everything to see what's pleasing to the Lord, and don't participate in the unfruitful actions of darkness. Instead, you should reveal the truth about them. It's embarrassing to even talk about what certain persons do in secret. But everything exposed to the light is revealed by the light. Everything that is revealed by the light is light. Therefore, it says, 'Wake up, sleeper! Get up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

**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

"Be People of Light"

Special Music

"Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness"

B. Farrell

*Refrain:*

**Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.**

**Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.**

Invitation to Generosity

Terry Raley-Dennis

In a galaxy of need, we are called to be more than bystanders – we are called to be part of the great Rebellion, the ones who show up, who give, and who refuse to let death or the difficulties of the world have the last word. What we offer today is not just money, it is a declaration that love is something we invest in, that justice is worth funding, and that the light of hope will not go out on our watch. Let us now give generously, joyfully, and with the full force of our faith.

*This Sunday is the official **One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday**. This special offering is one of the five annual offerings collected by the United Church of Christ and goes to support both domestic and international mission work around the world.*

\* Doxology  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God all creatures here below,  
Praise God above all heavenly hosts,  
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

\* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*) Terry Raley-Dennis  
*Please join me in a prayer of dedication for the gifts we have received...*  
Generous God, we turn these gifts over to you, trusting they will go where your light and love are needed most. Use what's been offered to strengthen ministries that locally and abroad that feed the hungry, stand with the marginalized, and make churches like ours a place and sanctuary that welcomes all. May these resources be a force for good in our community and in our world, given in the name of the one who is the light of the world. Amen.

\* Hymn "We Are Marching" SIYAHAMBA  
We are marching in the light of God,  
We are marching in the light of God. (2x)  
We are marching *marching, we are marching,*  
Ooo *marching,*  
We are marching in the light of God. (2x)

We are singing in the light of God...

\* Benediction Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

\* Benediction Response WORLD PEACE PRAYER  
Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,  
From despair to hope, from fear to trust,  
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace;  
Let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,  
Let peace fill our universe.

Postlude J. Williams

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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  
Children's Church: Youth Group:  
Ushers: Shakti Subramanian Greeters: Pam Shimberg, Dominic Ciciollo  
Refreshments: Bold and Beautiful Covenant Group

**Holy Week Services & Events**

Mar. 29 – Palm/Passion Sunday 11:00am  
Installation of New Members

Apr. 2 – Maundy Thursday Service 7:00pm  
Soup & Bread Dinner 5:30-6:30pm

Apr. 5 – Easter Worship 11:00am  
Egg Hunt for Children following Worship

*We are currently welcoming donations from now until March 29 to fill up Easter eggs! Cash donations can be placed in the green bucket located in the gathering room.*

**WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT**

**GET ALL THE DETAILS FOR NEWS AND EVENTS AT**

<https://holycovenantucc.org/>

- Mar. 15 - Consistory - 12:30pm
- Mar. 18 - Children & Youth Programming Meeting - 7:00pm Zoom
- Mar. 22 - New Member Class II; Sandwich Build 12:30pm
- Mar. 22 - New Member / Inquirer Class II - 12:30pm
- Mar. 28 - Game Night - 6:30-8:30pm
- Mar. 29 - Welcome Sunday for New Members; Palm/Passion Sunday



*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.*

**ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING:  
OUR LOVE OFFERING TO THE WORLD**

We will be receiving this special offering through March/Lent.



**NEW MEMBER / INQUIRER CLASS MARCH 22**

If you are interested in becoming a member at Holy Covenant or would like to explore what becoming a member means, please reach out to Pastor Chris, or contact the church office, [office@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:office@holycovenantucc.org).

**Please Remember in Prayer**

**Members**

Tina Dickens and family in the recent death of her sister, Betty Koester  
Mel Andersen, Martha Bomely, Kathy Habel, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Anita Taylor, Alice & Sally Phelan-Young

**Friends & Family Members**

Joan Bowling (Kristen Fuchs), Lester Brigman (Lee Parrish), Kim Chamberlain (Kevin Decker), Jason Field (Benjamin Rudolph), Ann Garret (Holly Middleton & Dawn Schmitz), Samuel Head (Benjamin Rudolph), Jack Hillard (Barbara Schneller), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charlie Holt (Autumn Holt), Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Sakhi Naushad (Stephanie Herrin), Frank Roach (Kristen Fuchs), Tom, Beth and Ariel Rudolph (Benjamin Rudolph), Tiffany Turner (Terry Raley-Dennis), Dave & Jennifer Ward (Jay & Cathy Whitley), 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). We periodically adjust our prayer list. If you would like to have someone added back, please contact the office.

**OUR MINISTRY TEAM**

**Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, Senior Pastor**  
[RevChris@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:RevChris@holycovenantucc.org), 314-402-8167

**Jon Weddell, Minister of Music**

**Dawn Simmons, Executive Assistant**

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