



# HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*-be the Church, everywhere*



*Unsplash Photo by Anthony Tran*

“I did then what I knew how to do.  
Now that I know better, I do better.”

– Maya Angelou

“Your career, interests and relationships are important,  
but they are only important insofar as they lead you  
toward a deeper understanding of yourself.”

– A.H. Almaas

“Self-reflection is a humbling process. It’s essential to  
find out why you think, say, and do certain things...  
then better yourself.”

– Sonya Teclai

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  
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 22, 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 "Give Me Jesus" arr. M. Hayes

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...*

Gracious and ever-present God, we come this morning not with all our questions answered or all our struggles resolved, but just as we are: complicated and beautiful, wounded and hopeful, certain about some things and unsure about others. We come because something in us knows that this is where we led to be, and that in your presence, we can be honest about who we are. This is a season of looking inward and we trust that you meet us in the looking. And that whatever we find within ourselves, you have already seen it and already decided we are still worth loving. So settle us now, Holy One. Quiet the noise inside us. Open our hearts to what this hour might offer. And give us, if we need it, just a little more courage than we came in with. 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

Jeffery Edwards-Knight

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

One: We come following a Jesus who traveled difficult roads, sat with outcasts, and refused to look away from the truth of what he saw.

**Many: We come, O God, ready to follow where he leads.**

One: We come following a Jesus who spent forty days in the wilderness, who faced the depths of his own temptations, and who emerged knowing exactly what he was called to do.

**Many: We come, O God, willing to face the hard truths within us.**

One: We come following a Jesus who stopped and spoke to marginalized people, touched the unclean, healed the sick, and gave sight to those who could not see.

**Many: We come, O God, asking that our own eyes be opened.**

One: We come following a Jesus who was not afraid to grieve what he lost, who wept at the tomb of his friend, who called what was dead and commanded it to rise again.

**Many: We come, O God, trusting that you are not finished with us yet.**

One: We come in this holy season of Lent, carrying our own troubles, our own truths we have yet to face, and our own longing for new life.

**Many: We come, O God, with the courage to look within. Let us now worship, as we start the journey inward. Amen.**

\* Hymn 553

“There Is a Balm in Gilead”

BALM IN GILEAD

*Refrain:* There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.  
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. (R)

Don't ever feel discouraged, for Jesus is your friend,  
Who, if you ask for knowledge, will never fail to lend. (R)

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,  
You can tell the love of Jesus, who died to save us all. (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*)            Jeffery Edwards-Knight  
*Join me in prayer as we confess the ways in which we separate ourselves from  
God...*

God, who knows the depths of our hearts, we confess that self-reflection is hard and difficult work, and that we are not always willing to do it. It is easier to focus on what others have done, to justify our actions, and to avoid the uncomfortable truths that looking inward might reveal. Meet us in our reluctance, O God, and give us the courage to look within. So that our Christ-self might rise and so that we might be transformed. 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            Jeffery Edwards-Knight  
*Friends, hear this good news...*

The God to whom we bring ourselves is not a record-keeper of our wrongs, nor a God who is waiting to condemn us. But a God whose fundamental nature is forgiveness. A God who does not hold our failures against us but holds them in transforming love, releasing us from their grip. And in that release, frees to see differently, to choose more wisely, to be more loving, and to become more wholly the people God has always known us to be. Friends, know you are forgiven. Now go and live like it.

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            Ed Vickery

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.

Prayer & Silent Meditation      Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
Prayer concerns will be shared before going into a time of meditation.

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      Brian Hankins  
*Our modern lesson for today is from Howard Thurman, who was a theologian, minister, educator, and civil rights leader. In his Inner Life lecture series and talks he says...*

“There is in every person an inward sea, and in that sea there is an island, and on that island there is an altar. Nothing can get by the angel standing guard over that altar unless it has the mark of your inner authority upon its brow. I must accept myself. I must find out — not with morbidity, not trying to be a psychologist or a psychiatrist, just being an ordinary human being who is trying to learn how to live. You and yourself just sit down and have a session. A straight, honest-to-goodness session. Ask yourself: What am I after? What is my point anyway? Why do I do such stupid things? Because it is only in that honest sitting with yourself that you begin to chart your inward sea and find the thing that is authentic in you.”

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

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

Scripture Lesson      Psalm 130 (NIV)      Jeffery Edwards-Knight  
*Our scripture reading for today comes from Psalm 130, where the psalmist cries out to God about the error of their ways and the depths of the troubles they're in...*

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

**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

“The Courage to Look Within”

Invitation to Generosity

Jeffery Edwards-Knight

Throughout his ministry, Jesus gave without reservation. He gave his time, his presence, his healing, and ultimately his life, and did so in the hope of making the world a better place. He fed the hungry, he welcomed the outcast, and he reminded anyone who would listen that the measure of life is not based on what we accumulate, but on what we give away. As we bring our gifts today, may we be invited to share in this same spirit. Trusting that the gifts we share have the power to become part of something greater than ourselves.

\* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

**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*)

Jeffery Edwards-Knight

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

**Many:** Abundant God, we offer these gifts as an act of love and faith. Use them through us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, heal the broken, and build the Kin-dom here on earth that Jesus believed was possible. May what's been given today be a reflection of the transformation happening within us, a sign that we are becoming more generous, more compassionate, and more committed to where the Christ within us is needed in the world. Amen.

\* Hymn

“Give Me Jesus”

SPIRITUAL

**In the morning when I rise (3x), give me Jesus.**

*Refrain:*

**Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.**

**You can have all this world, give me Jesus.**

**At midnight was my cry, (3x) give me Jesus. (R)**

**Oh, when I am alone (3x), give me Jesus. (R)**

**And when I want to sing, (3x) give me Jesus. (R)**

\* 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

“God’s Eye Is on the Sparrow”

arr. C. E. Walz

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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: JoAnn Jellison, Youth Group:

Ushers: Laurence Winston, Dave Shimberg Greeters: Deborah Winston

Refreshments: Terry Raley-Dennis

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

- Mar. 22 - New Member Class II; Sandwich Build 12:30pm
- Mar. 28 - Game Night - 6:30-8:30pm
- Mar. 29 - Welcome Sunday for New Members; Palm/Passion Sunday
- Apr. 02 - Maundy Thursday - Meal 5:30pm, Worship 7:00pm
- Apr. 05 - Easter Worship 11:00am, Egg Hunt to follow
- Apr. 06 - Easter Monday office closed

*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:**

What a caring congregation! Giving to One Great Hour of Sharing totals \$2,379.94 as of Friday, March 20. OGHS is a UCC special offering, so these gifts are in addition to people's tithes and "regular" offerings. Thank you!



Your love will bless people both in the U.S. and abroad through disaster relief; sustainable development; essentials like food, water, and shelter; advocacy and resettlement assistance for refugees and displaced persons; and combatting injustice in its many forms. The online giving portal (QR Code) will be open through the end of March. And one can contribute any time by check or cash, designating OGHS on the memo line or the outside of the envelope.

**NEW MEMBER / INQUIRER CLASS TODAY**

If you are interested in becoming a member at Holy Covenant or would like to explore what becoming a member means, please join us after worship in the conference room.

**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), Diana Ciciollo (Dom Ciciollo), 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), Michael Reed (Dawn Simmons), 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.

**Holy Week Services & Events**

Mar. 29 – Palm/Passion Sunday 11:00am  
Welcoming 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

**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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