



HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

-be the Church, everywhere



Unsplash Photo by Rachel Son

“When we remember that we are made of the same earth as every other being, we learn how to stand together. Belonging is not a metaphor; it is the way creation holds us in place.”

- Robin Wall Kimmerer

“God is found in the places where lives touch and transform each other. When we build community from the margins, we discover the true shape of the holy.”

- Marcella Althaus-Ried

“God builds slowly, stone by stone, life by life, with patient love. We are invited to become part of that slow, steady construction of peace.”

- Kosuke Koyama”

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 OF EASTER

May 3, 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 "The Solid Rock" arr. L. Bergquist

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

Let us center ourselves in prayer as we gather for this time of worship...

Holy and ever-present God, we pause in this moment to remember that we are not here by accident, but that we have been drawn together by hope and love. We arrive here with worries we need to put down, questions that have no answers, news that's been hard to hear and bare. In this moment, we lay it all down. Quiet the inner noise and still our restlessness that keeps us from an awareness of you. Remind us this day that we are part of you and one another. Open us to something true and transforming in the music, in the silence, in the scripture, in the faces of our children. And may we leave this place held by one another and a little more connected than when we arrived, ready to be the Christ this world needs. Amen.

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

Jana Harrison

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

One: We come from different places, have different stories, and different roads that led us here.

Many: Yet here we are, welcomed and held by the same Love.

One: Some of us are carrying joy, and some of us are carrying grief. Some are carrying questions, and some are carrying lots of faith.

Many: Yet here we are, all in one place.

One: We are not all the same. We do not all look the same, love the same, or see the world the same.

Many: Yet it is in our differences that the fullness of God is seen.

One: We are living stones, each of whom belongs to the one who is the cornerstone of all things.

Many: So let us be fitted together, into the community God is calling us to become.

One: So come, let us worship the God who builds with the stones the world has rejected, the God who is making something new out of all of us together.

Many: We come, as we are and in the likeness of Christ. Amen.

* Hymn 386

“The Church’s One Foundation”

AURELIA

**The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord;
We are Christ’s new creation by water and the word;
From heaven Christ came and sought us in love to set us free;
With precious blood Christ bought us for all eternity.**

**Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth,
One charter of salvation, one God, one faith, one birth,
One name together blessing, one holy food we share,
To one hope we are pressing, at one in work and prayer.**

**’Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of our war,
We wait the consummation of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious, our longing eyes are blessed,
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.**

**Yet we on earth have union with God, the Three-in-One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! God give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly, may live eternally.**

Monthly Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Ourselves: I am an essential part of Christ, called to heal and uplift the world.

Neighbor: You are an essential part of Christ, called to heal and uplift the world.

World: We are an essential part of Christ, called to heal and uplift the world.

Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Jana Harrison

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

God, who is one and all, we confess that we often fail to see others as part of us, part of Your body, part of Your beloved creation. We admit that we sometimes accept the world's quick judgments, casting people aside because they don't fit our expectations. Transform our hearts, that we may recognize Your image in every person and welcome one another in love. Amen.

Words of Grace

Jana Harrison

One: Jesus looked at every person he encountered, the outsider, doubter, seeker, and sinner, and he saw them as a part of God and a part of him. In his life and ministry, we see him restore dignity, offer welcome, and declare that every life has a rightful place in God's world. The grace on this day is another chance to see and to behold the sacred holiness of the person before you.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Stories for All People

Rev. Windy Allison

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

Pam Shimberg

Our modern lesson comes from Thomas à Kempis and his revered book 'The Imitation of Christ'. In his book he says...

“Do not think yourself better than others, for you are all made of the same earth. The more you see yourself as part of the whole, the more peace you will find. For pride divides the soul, but humility builds it up and joins it to others. When you yield yourself to God, you become like a stone shaped for His building. And in that building, no stone is useless, and no place is without meaning. God knows where each belongs, and He sets them there with His own hand. Blessed is the one who accepts this with a quiet heart.”

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

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

Christian Scripture

1 Peter 2:2-10 (CEB)

Jana Harrison

Our Scripture reading for today comes from 1 Peter 2:2-10, where the author of this letter speaks of Jesus as the cornerstone and his earliest followers as living stones...

Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, since you have tasted that the Lord is good. Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God’s perspective it is chosen, valuable. You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Thus it is written in scripture, *Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed. So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God’s own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren’t a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you hadn’t received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

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.

“We Are Living Stones”

Invitation to Generosity

Jana Harrison

God gathers us into a community where no one is cast aside and every gift has purpose. As we give today, we are participating in God’s work of restoring dignity, belonging, and hope in the world. Let us now offer what gifts we have and who we are, trusting that it is good, and that God is weaving all of it into something far greater than we can imagine.

* 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*)

Jana Harrison

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

Holy One, receive these gifts and shape our hearts, that we may help build Your kin-dom of justice, compassion, and belonging here among us. Use what has been offered, our resources, our time, our energy, and use it to strengthen the ties that bind us together. Make us co-creators with You in a world where every person is seen and every life is given the room it needs to flourish. Amen.

**SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION
THE MYSTIC SUPPER**

*At Holy Covenant UCC, all are welcome to Christ’s Table.
Elements are grape juice and bread, wafers, or gluten free options.*

Anthem

“Christ We See You”

K. Medema

The Invitation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki & Rev. Judah L. Jones

One: There is a table being set, not for the deserving, but for the hungry.

Many: **And we are hungry.**

One: There is room being made, not for the perfect, but for everyone.

Many: **We come; each has a place.**

One: A holy feast is being prepared, not for the few, but for all.

Many: **It looks so good, and together we come.**

Words of Institution

The table you see before you was not built by the powerful or the privileged, but by the one they called Jesus. A low-class carpenter and rabbi, who had concern for the downtrodden, the outcast, and the poor. And those invited to his table were not perfect nor were they of high social status, instead they were fishermen and doubters, tax collectors and betrayers, imperfect people who didn't get it right and argued about who would be greatest. And still Jesus set the table to welcome them.

This table is built in the same likeness. Not from sameness, but from difference. Not from perfection, but from need. It is a table where those the world has rejected find a place. It's where the weary are fed, the lonely are found, and the ones who've been told they don't belong are asked to pull up a chair and stay awhile. All are welcome and everyone has a seat. No one must prove themselves worthy, because the one who built it already declared you are worthy; you are welcome.

So come, especially those who've been told they don't fit or those who are carrying more than they can hold. Come, all who are somewhere between belief and doubt, between grief and hope, between who you were and who you are becoming. This table was built for you. These many stones, rough edges and all, are exactly who Christ had in mind when he said the words, "Come to me."

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 broken bread remind you that even what is broken can feed the world.]

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 overflowing cup remind you that love always finds a way.]

Sharing of the Elements

Music during Communion “What Wondrous Love Is This” arr. J. Evanovich
Mary Tarr, violin

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of tables and cornerstones, you have fed us once again with the bread of life and the cup of grace. As we rise from this table, make us a people shaped by your love, molded by your grace, and sent into the world to build the loving kin-dom empire never could. May we be bread for the hungry, may we set tables in places of need, and may we never forget all are welcome to it. Send us out now, to be Your body in the world. Amen.

- * Hymn 400 “Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation” REGENT SQUARE
Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of our God and precious, binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help forever, and our confidence alone.

To this temple, where we call you, come, O God of Hosts, today!
With your constant, loving kindness, hear your people as they pray. Give
your fullest benediction: grace to follow Christ the Way.

Here renew your servants' vision, that by faith they may attain
Peace and hope, renewed compassion, strength to comfort those in pain,
Tears and grief transformed to gladness in your everlasting reign.

- * Benediction Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

- * Benediction Response 581 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 “Rock of Ages” arr. R. Wetzler

*Songs in this service are used by permission.
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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, Dave Shimberg, Sally McLester

Children's Church: Laura Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison

Ushers: Shakti Subramanian, Laurence Winston, Kevin Edwards-Knight

Greeters:

Refreshments: Angela & Windy Allison

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

GET ALL THE DETAILS FOR NEWS AND EVENTS AT

<https://holycovenantucc.org/>

- **May 4-6 - Retired Servants Spring Retreat**
- **May 06 - Daytimers Covenant Group Luncheon 12:00**
- **May 16 - Unity in Diversity Event**
- **May 20-25 - Church Office Closed**
- **May 23 - Project Linus drop-in event at HCUCC 10:00am-3:00pm**
- **May 24 - Sandwich Build following Worship**
- **May 25 - Memorial Day Observed**

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.

MICHAEL G. BROOKS SCHOLARSHIP Now through May 15, 2026

Calling all students preparing for post-secondary education! Holy Covenant awards annually a modest scholarship. Preference is given to high school students planning to go to college. Contact the church office for the application.

LET'S CELEBRATE OUR 2026 GRADUATES

We would love to celebrate the accomplishments of those who are graduating in 2026! Please send a photo along with their name, (and their relationship to you), and a brief description of their alma mater and what future pursuits they might have!

Office@holycovenantucc.org

STORIES FOR ALL PEOPLE, SUNDAYS | 11:00AM

Help Lead our Stories for All People! If you would like to deliver a short children's message to our youth during "Stories for All People" on a Sunday, or Sundays of your choosing, please consider the opened dates out ahead. You will receive an email the during the week before your chosen Sunday that will include the scripture reading for that week so that you can link your message into the message congregants will receive while the children are in children's church. Please sign up for no more than 3 dates. For more information, contact Dawn Robinson, or members of our Christian Education Ministry team.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-63107138-stories>

UNITY IN DIVERSITY, SAT. MAY 16 | 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM

HeartLight Spiritual Center, 7300 Mallard Creek Rd, Charlotte, NC 28262

"Unity in Diversity," a hosted in partnership with fellow faith leaders from New Thought Communities across Charlotte; a meaningful time of shared listening, connection, singing, prayer, fellowship, and social action in support of our neighbors experiencing hunger. Presenters from Holy Covenant United Church of Christ, Awaken Spiritual Community, Heart Light Spiritual Center, and Unity of Charlotte will each offer a reflection on "Unity in Diversity" from their unique faith perspectives. Our time together will include singing, meditation, and a community potluck to close the morning.

Bring a non-perishable food item or a love offering that will go directly to **Nourish Up**, one of Charlotte's largest food network providers. Please register for this event for an accurate head count and to know whether you plan to bring a dish to share at the potluck. More information, including a list of suggested donations and to register:

https://open.substack.com/pub/revchriscz/p/join-us-for-unity-in-diversity?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email

Please Remember in Prayer

Members

Mel Andersen, Martha Bomely, Kathy Habel, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Melissa Noll, Lee Parrish, Anita Taylor, Alice & Sally Phelan-Young

Friends & Family Members

Amanda (Linda Burby), Laura Allison, Joan Bowling (Kristen Fuchs), Lester Brigman (Lee Parrish), Kim Chamberlain (Kevin Decker), April Dawson, Erica Echiverri, Gloria Echiverri (Melissa Noll), Cherice Fequiere (Deborah Winston), Jason Field (Benjamin Rudolph), Mario Gaetani and family (Kristen Fuchs), 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), Judson Hulse (Kristen Fuchs), Renee Lewis (Martha Battles), Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Matty McKinnon (Joy Decker), Sakhi Naushad (Stephanie Herrin), Michael Reed (Dawn Simmons), 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. 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, 314-402-8167

Jon Weddell, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, Executive Assistant

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