



**HOLY COVENANT**

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*-be the Church, everywhere*



*Unsplash Photo by Josh Hild*

**“The thirst for the Infinite  
is the very pulse of our being.”  
- Rabindranath Tagore**

**“The knowing lives in the searching. Every step  
toward truth is a step toward the Creator.”  
- Joy Harjo**

**“The spiritual life is a journey of becoming who we already are.  
Our longing is the doorway through which God enters.”  
- Henri Nouwen**

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**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ PARENTS' DAY**

**May 10, 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 "Doraji" arr. K. Blackwell-Plank  
*Kristin Andes, harp*

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

Missions Moment Pam Shimberg  
*An introducing Strengthening the Church Offering*

Chiming of the Hour

Centering Prayer Rev. Christopher Czarnecki  
*Let us center ourselves in prayer as we gather for this time of worship...*

Loving God, we take this moment to pause and breathe deeply. With each breath may we be mindful that this moment is enough. Enough to be aware of your presence. Enough to listen not just with our ears, but through the wholeness of who we are. Enough to awaken to the light within, what some call the Christ, that's waiting to be awakened. May we be still enough to know it and to feel that gentle pull of love towards it. In this hour we've been given, may our hearts make space for the sacred. May we find rest in the holiness of a God who is not far off, but here in this room, here in each person, and present here with and among us, where God always dwells. 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

Terry Raley-Dennis

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

One: We come searching for meaning, for connection, for some trace of the holy.

Many: **And we find that God is in the searching.**

One: We come with our questions, our doubts, and our yearnings.

Many: **And we find that the seeking itself is sacred.**

One: We come from different places on the journey, each walking different paths.

Many: **And we find that all roads lead to the same Love.**

One: We come as witnesses to kindness, to justice, to hope.

Many: **And we find we are not bearing witness alone.**

One: So come in your restlessness, as all searching souls do.

Many: **And may we find our rest in the One who is never far away.**

\* Hymn 251

“I Greet You, Sure Redeemer”  
(vv. 1-3, 5)

TOULON

I greet you, sure Redeemer, with my heart,  
Glad for the saving love that you impart,  
Who pain did undergo for my poor sake;  
I pray you from our hearts all cares to take.

You are the source of mercy and of grace,  
Reigning omnipotent in every place;  
So rule in us and our whole being sway.  
Shine on us with the light of your pure day.

You are the life, by which alone we live,  
And all our substance and our strength receive.  
Sustain us by your faith and by your power,  
And give us strength in every trying hour.

Our hope is all in you and you alone;  
We trust the promise that your word makes known.  
O dear Redeemer, make us calm and sure,  
That in your strength we evermore endure.

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*)

Terry Raley-Dennis

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

**Holy One, we confess we can be a restless people. We fill our days with busyness and endless to-do lists, letting anxiety and worry pull our attention from the moments of grace that were there in plain sight. In our drive for productivity, we lose touch with the deepest parts of ourselves and with you. Forgive us and transform our restlessness into a holy longing that draws us back to you. Amen.**

Words of Grace

Terry Raley-Dennis

If you want to know about busy people, look at Jesus. Supervisor of the twelve, doctor to the sick, justice seeker, miracle worker, the one who was pressed and pulled from every direction. Yet even Jesus withdrew for rest. To quiet the mind, to pray, to breathe, to be restored once more in his connection to God. May we see our own restlessness not as a failure, but as an invitation to do as Jesus did. To be aware of our weariness, and to rest in the grace of God, exactly as we are. Be at peace, knowing you are forgiven and you are loved. Amen.

Stories for All People

Jean Raley-Dennis

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.**

Today we celebrate parents and those who have parented us. As we think about the vastly different connections and relationships there are to parenthood, we now take time to honor them, making space for all experiences, as we hold in prayer this day:

Those who are proud and grateful for the parents they have. Those who are holding good and tender memories of a parent. Those who are grieving the loss of a parent on this day, who has since passed and is no longer with us.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those who are healing from the abuse, violence, or neglect of a parent. Those who find their relationship with a parent to be a complicated and difficult one. Those who have longed for parental love but have found none.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those parents who have lost children to suicide, disease, or estrangement. Those parents whose children have gone missing or been abducted. Those parents who are separated from their children due to family or marital conflict.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those who have experienced miscarriage or a pregnancy that ended unexpectedly. Those who are now amid pregnancy and will soon become parents. Those who have desperately wanted or longed to be a parent to a child of their own but cannot.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those who have decided that parenting is not for them. Those who find the experience of parenthood to be challenging or difficult. Those parents who are unhoused and caring for children and families with limited resources.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those who are parents to foster children, stepchildren, or those not biologically their own. Those who delight in having not one parent but two or three or more. Those who have found parenting in their teachers, neighbors, friends, relatives, and siblings.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

Those who parent businesses, non-profits, and justice movements. Those who are parenting furry friends, and animal companions. Those who parent and tend to the earth that in return nurtures and cares for us.

**Many: Loving God, hold them close.**

God, we thank you for the gift of parenthood. For all the faces and people we have loved sitting on this altar. For the many ways parenting looks, for the life that is given, for the care that is shown, and for the love of Godly parenting, it is this we all hope to know.

**Many: Amen.**

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

THY WORD

**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.**

Modern Lesson

Terrence Hayes

*Our modern lesson comes from John O'Donohue who is a poet, author, and priest best known for his wisdom on Celtic spirituality. In one of his poems, he says...*

"Blessed be the longing that brought you here and quickens your soul with wonder. May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire that disturbs you when you have settled for something safe. May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease to discover the new direction your longing wants you to take. May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency. [And] may you know the urgency with which God longs for you."

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

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

*Scripture reading for today comes from Acts 17:16-34, where Paul visits Athens and is invited before the city's governing council to share about the teachings of Jesus...*

While Paul waited for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to find that the city was flooded with idols. He began to interact with the Jews and Gentile God-worshippers in the synagogue. He also addressed whoever happened to be in the marketplace each day. Certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers engaged him in discussion too. Some said, "What an amateur! What's he trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods." (They said this because he was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) They took him into custody and brought him to the council on Mars Hill. "What is this new teaching? Can we learn what you are talking about? You've told us some strange things and we want to know what they mean." (They said this because all Athenians as well as the foreigners who live in Athens used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing.)

Paul stood up in the middle of the council on Mars Hill and said, "People of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. As I was walking through town and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'To an unknown God.' What you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in temples made with human hands. Nor is God served by human hands, as though he needed something, since he is the one who gives life, breath, and everything else. From one person God created every human nation to live on the whole earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands. God made the nations so they would seek him, perhaps even reach out to him and find him. In fact, God isn't far away from any of us. In God we live, move, and exist. As some of your own poets said, 'We are his offspring.'

"Therefore, as God's offspring, we have no need to imagine that the divine being is like a gold, silver, or stone image made by human skill and thought. God overlooks ignorance of these things in times past, but now directs everyone everywhere to change their hearts and lives. This is because God has set a day when he intends to judge the world justly by a man he has appointed. God has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

When they heard about the resurrection from the dead, some began to ridicule Paul. However, others said, “We’ll hear from you about this again.” At that, Paul left the council. Some people joined him and came to believe, including Dionysius, a member of the council on Mars Hill, a woman named Damaris, and several others.

**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.

Sermon

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

“Restless Until We Rest in You”

Invitation to Generosity

Terry Raley-Dennis

Friends, may our giving today be an act of searching and longing for God. May what we offer today be done in the pursuit for all to experience love, justice, and welcome in the world. May what we share this day, our time, our talents, and our treasures, help others to discover the presence of God right in their midst. Let us now give generously, trusting that God is already at work in what we offer.

\* 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*)

Terry Raley-Dennis

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

**God of the searching, we dedicate these gifts to the ongoing work of seeking and seeing your presence in the world. May they go to help others find you where the hungry are fed, the forgotten are found, and the stranger before us is welcomed. Use these offerings to bear witness a love that meets people exactly where they are. In the search, may you be found. Amen.**



## WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Laura Hankins  
Children's Church: Laura Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison  
Ushers: Dominic Ciciollo, Shakti Subramanian  
Greeters: Anne Hayes  
Refreshments: Amanda Deck, Akeera Czarnecki

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

GET ALL THE DETAILS FOR NEWS AND EVENTS AT

<https://holycovenantucc.org/>

- 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 - Pentecost - Sandwich Build following Worship
- May 25 - Memorial Day Observed
- May 30 - UCC Women's Conference, Greensboro
- May 31 - Trinity 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.*

**MICHAEL G. BROOKS SCHOLARSHIP** Applications due by 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](mailto:Office@holycovenantucc.org)

## STORIES FOR ALL PEOPLE, SUNDAYS | 11:00AM

Help Lead our Stories for All People! You are invited to deliver a short children's message during "Stories for All People" on a Sunday. 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. 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 | 11:00AM - 1:30PM

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

## AIDS Walk Charlotte 2026, SAT. MAY 30 | 9:00AM - 12:00PM

*Thirty Years of Community, Compassion, and Commitment*

Truist Field, 324 S. Mint Street

Support HCUCC Team members Jeffery Edwards-Knight, Von & Melissa McQueen-Simmons, and Pastor Chris in this fundraiser! **Every dollar raised** goes toward programs that empower individuals, expand access to care, and strengthen our Charlotte community. More information and registration details are available at:

<https://carolinarain.org/walk>

## Sojourners Class - Adult Education, Sundays | 9:45 AM

May 10, 17 & 24 No class

May 31 - June 14 Discussion of *Tattoos on the Heart* led by Suzanne Lamorey

See the newsletter for future planned discussion topics.

Plan to join us in-person, or watch for the Zoom link. All are welcome and no preparation is required.

**Please Remember in Prayer  
Members**

Mel Andersen, Martha Bomely, Kathy Habel, Jim & Faye Humphrey, 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), 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](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, 314-402-8167**

**Jon Weddell, Minister of Music**

**Dawn Simmons, Executive Assistant**

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