



Unsplash Photo by Isaac Quesad

“Birth is the ultimate act of creation,
a sacred dance between the human and the divine.”
— Rumi

“All forms of birth - physical, intellectual, spiritual or emotional -
bring one to the depths. The power to give birth originates in the
creative life spirit birthing all, the seen and the unseen.”
— Amy Wright

“Birth is an opportunity to transcend. To rise above
what we are accustomed to. To reach deeper inside ourselves than
we are familiar with, and to see not only what we are truly made
of, but the strength we can access in and through birth.”
— Marcie Macari

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
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 23, 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 "My Jesus, I Love Thee" arr. P. Rodriguez

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...

Loving God, help us become present to all that is sacred. To quiet our racing minds, ease our worries, and to recognize the permission to simply rest here in this space. May this hour be a refuge, a place of belonging, a source of inspiration, or whatever it is our heart is needing. Draw each of us closer to you, however we have come, to know and understand your presence in our lives. Reconnect us with the Christ Light that dwells within, and open us to one another, so that we might recognize something holy in every person gathered. And that when we leave this place, we do so more grounded in love, more awake to your presence, and more connected to the sacredness of all life. Amen.

Introit "There's a Spirit of Love in This Place" M. A. Miller

There's a spirit of love in this place. (2x)

You can't see it, but it's there, just as precious as the air.

There's a spirit of love in this place.

There's the presence of peace in this room. (2x)

In God's tenderness is found peace that passes human bounds.

There's the presence of peace in this room.

O, Alleluia, sing alleluia, we bless your holy name.

O Alleluia, sing alleluia, there's a spirit of love in this place.

* Call to the Heart

Laura Hankins

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

One: Our world is aching for something new to be born, and God is inviting us to imagine what that might be.

Many: **May we give birth to new ways of life, compassion, and love.**

One: We see so much hatred, division, and fear, yet what if another way is possible? What if something else is seeking to emerge?

Many: **May we give birth to new ways of living where everyone belongs.**

One: Creation is groaning beneath the weight of our neglect, and the earth is calling us into sacred relationship.

Many: **May we give birth to new ways of living that honor and protect the earth.**

One: Where violence and oppression have taken hold, God is stirring within us dreams of another world.

Many: **May we give birth to new ways of peace and justice.**

One: Let us worship together, opening our hearts to what the Spirit is seeking to bring forth among us.

Many: **Together, may we give birth to the radical and beautiful ways of God's kin-dom.**

* Hymn 18

“Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer”

CWM RHONDDA

**Guide Me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.**

**Open now the crystal fountain, where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, ever be my strength and shield,
Ever be my strength and shield.**

**When I reach the River Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on heaven's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.**

Monthly Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Ourselves: I am part of the body of Christ, and therefore part of all that is good, holy, and true.

Neighbor: You are part of the body of Christ, and therefore part of all that is good, holy, and true.

World: We are part of the body of Christ, and therefore part of all that is good, holy, and true.

Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Laura Hankins

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

God of life, we confess that there are times when the powers and problems before us feel too big. Too big that we convince ourselves there is little we can do. We fear taking risks, speaking up, or resisting what harms people. Yet while we hesitate, people continue to hurt, and opportunities to embody Your love pass us by. Help us to trust that even our smallest acts can help bring forth Your change in the world. Amen.

Words of Grace

Laura Hankins

Never underestimate what God can do through small and mighty acts of love. How a word spoken can give another person courage to act. How a helping hand can inspire someone to help another, or how a single act of resistance can create ripples far beyond us. Small acts of courage are how movements are born, how communities change, and how new things emerge. So, may the love you have to share today help give birth to a more beautiful and just tomorrow.

Stories for All People

Ed Vickery

Special Music

"Flowers Are Red"
Judah L. Jones

H. Chapin

Back to School Litany

*Angela Allison, Phyllis Johnson, Holly Middleton,
Anne Hayes, Dawn Schmitz, Tammie Holt*

Prayer for Illumination (sung)

SANCTUARY

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Modern Lesson

Deborah Winston

Our modern lesson for today is from Valarie Kaur, who is a civil rights leader, filmmaker, author, and faith leader. The quote comes from her bestselling book "See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love." In her book she says...

"Love is more than a feeling. Love is a form of sweet labor: fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving - a choice we make over and over again. If love is sweet labor, love can be taught, modeled, and practiced. This labor engages all our emotions. Joy is the gift of love. Grief is the price of love. Anger protects that which is loved. And when we think we have reached our limit, wonder is the act that returns us to love."

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

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

Hebrew Lesson

Exodus 1:8-2:10 (CEB)

Laura Hankins, Rev. Windy Allison

Our Hebrew Lesson for today comes from Exodus 1:8-2:10 (CEB), where we hear about the oppression of the Israelites and Moses is born.

Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. He said to his people, "The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. Come on, let's be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land." As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work. The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah: "When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth and you see the baby being born, if it's a boy, kill him. But if it's a girl, you can let her live." Now the two midwives respected God so they didn't obey the Egyptian king's order. Instead, they let the baby boys live. So the king of Egypt called the two midwives and said to them, "Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the baby boys live?" The two midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because Hebrew women aren't like Egyptian women. They're much stronger and give birth before any midwives can

get to them.” So God treated the midwives well, and the people kept on multiplying and became very strong. And because the midwives respected God, God gave them households of their own. Then Pharaoh gave an order to all his people: “Throw every baby boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile River, but you can let all the girls live.”

Now a man from Levi’s household married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that the baby was healthy and beautiful, so she hid him for three months. When she couldn’t hide him any longer, she took a reed basket and sealed it up with black tar. She put the child in the basket and set the basket among the reeds at the riverbank. The baby’s older sister stood watch nearby to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her women servants walked along beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. She said, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children.” Then the baby’s sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter agreed, “Yes, do that.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I’ll pay you for your work.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. After the child had grown up, she brought him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I pulled him out of the water.”

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

“We Can Be Midwives Too”

Invitation to Generosity

Laura Hankins

Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...

There are things in this world worth nurturing, protecting, and helping to grow. Our generosity is one way we tend to the ministries, people, and dreams we believe should have a future. Through what we give, we help create spaces of welcome, sustain the work of justice, care for our neighbors, and nurture hope where it is needed most. Let us now share a portion of our own good to help nourish the life and love God is seeking to bring forth among us.

* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH, words by M. Luti

Praise God whose mercies never cease;
Whose justice raises up the least;
And sits all creatures down to feast;
God's mercy is our hope and peace! Amen.

* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Laura Hankins

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

Many: Good and giving God, receive these gifts and may they become instruments of your peace, love, and justice. May they feed, may they shelter, may they inspire, and may they nurture the hope of a world all can flourish. Use what has been shared to give birth to new possibilities, and may we trust that through our unique and collective gifts, your kin-dom is being born among us. Amen.

* Hymn 307

"Glorious Things of You Are Spoken"

AUSTRIAN HYMN

Glorious things of you are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
One whose word cannot be broken formed you for a blessed abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake your sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded, you may smile at all your foes.

See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal Love,
Well Supply your sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint, while such a river ever will their thirst assuage:
Grace which, like our God, the Giver, never fails from age to age?

'Round each habitation hovering, see the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering, showing that their God is near!
Thus deriving from their banner light by night and shade by day,
Safe they feed upon the manna which God gives them when they pray.

Savior, if of Zion's city we through grace a part may claim,
Let the world deride or pity, we will glory in your name.
Fading is all worldly pleasure, all earth's boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasures, none, but Zion's children know.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response “Send Us Out” J. M. Talbot
Send us out to proclaim the reign of your kin-dom,
Send us out to proclaim and to heal,
Send us out with your power and your authority
To overcome and to heal the world.

Postlude “I Need Thee Every Hour” arr. J. Vogt

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Back to School Litany was inspired by and adapted from “Praying for Students of All Ages” by Benjamin P. Snoek, Reformed Worship. The liturgy for today’s service was 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

Ushers: Dave Shimberg, Shakti Subramanian, Laurence Winston

Greeters: Pam Shimberg

Refreshments: Bold & Beautiful Covenant Group

WHAT’S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT



*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.

A SIMPLER WAY TO SERVE!

All Sunday worship volunteer roles – refreshments, usher/greeter, reader, and more – are now in one convenient sign-up. No more hunting through separate lists! Join our ministries: <https://tinyurl.com/HCUCCSundays>

UPCOMING DATES TO REMEMBER

- Aug. 23: Resilience Workshop following worship today
- Aug. 30: Music Sunday; Sandwich Build following worship
- Sep. 07: Labor Day - office closed
- Sep. 13: Rally Day with All Church Potluck
- Sep. 18 & 19: Congregational Strategic Planning Weekend
Please RSVP and plan to attend!
- Sep. 26: RJ&E Civil Rights Trail Outing, Davidson College
Sculpture & Museum. Save the Date!

MAKE A WILL FOR FREE

August is nationally recognized as **Make-A-Will Month**, and we're excited to share that the UCC Pension Boards partners with FreeWill to offer members and friends of the United Church of Christ the opportunity to create or update a will at **no cost**. Creating a will is one of the most important gifts you can give your loved ones. It provides peace of mind, ensures your wishes are clearly known, and helps protect those you care about by making difficult decisions a little easier during an already challenging time. Whether you're creating your first will or updating an existing one after a life change, now is a great time to take this important step. To create your free will sponsored by UCC Pension Boards through FreeWill, go to <https://tinyurl.com/2026Will>.

WHAT'S YOUR BATTERY LIFE? TIPS FOR ADAPTING IN A TRYING WORLD

Ever had one of those days? You tossed and turned all night, and as you dash out the door to meet your walking group you notice the cat spit up on the living room floor again. You clean it up and jump in the car. You hope you could make up time on the road, but who are you kidding? It's Charlotte! Of course there's road construction. If this is the way your day starts, how much capacity do you have left for your other commitments? Join Alix Felsing after worship today for an interactive discussion about resilience, and how you can adapt effectively to your version of **all the things.** **We'll meet from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in the choir room.** If you haven't registered yet, join us anyway!

Congregational Strategic Planning Weekend September 18-19, 2026

*Where is God calling Holy Covenant as we look ahead?
What kind of church do we want to become, and
what ministries, priorities, and commitments will help us get
there?*

On Fri., Sep. 18 (5:30-9:00 PM) and Sat., Sep. 19 (8:30 AM-3:00 PM), our congregation will gather for a Strategic Planning weekend facilitated by a consultant from the national setting of the United Church of Christ. Strategic planning gives us an opportunity to listen to one another, celebrate who we are, consider the needs of our church and community, and discern where we are being led to focus our energy and resources in the years ahead.

The conversations we have during this weekend will help shape the mission and vision and establish priorities to guide Holy Covenant for the next 3-5 years. For this process to truly reflect the desire of our congregation, we need your voice at the table. Whether you have been part of Holy Covenant for decades or only recently started attending, we want your ideas, hopes, and dreams for our church to be part of the conversation.

To attend and help us imagine a future for Holy Covenant, **please RSVP using the QR code by Monday, September 1.**
If you need help registering,
please contact the church office.



**Please Remember in Prayer
Members**

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

Friends & Family Members

Farug Brown Bey (Jeffery Edwards-Knight), Joan Bowling (Kristen Fuchs), Lester Brigman (Lee Parrish), Randy & Tina Buie (Diane Neese), Kim Chamberlain (Kevin Decker), Cecelia Ciciollo (Dom Ciciollo), April Dawson, Mario Gaetani and family (Kristen Fuchs), Ann Garret (Holly Middleton & Dawn Schmitz), Ivory Garvin and family (Von McQueen-Simmons), Charlie Holt (Autumn Holt), Judson Hulsey (Kristen Fuchs), Janet Kominski (Dawn Simmons), Renee Lewis (Martha Battles), Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Matty McKinnon (Joy Decker), Geraldine Mobley (Jeffery Edwards-Knight), Brenchia Thomas, Steve Thomas (Jeffery Edwards-Knight) June Washburn (Patrick Washburn), Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley)

If you wish to add someone to the prayer list, please send a note to
prayers@holycovenantucc.org.

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, MDiv, MBA, Senior Pastor
RevChris@holycovenantucc.org

Jon Weddell, MDiv, MSW, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant

Mailing address: P.O. Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269
3501 West W.T. Harris Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28269-8510
www.holycovenantucc.org 704-599-9810