

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SUNDAY

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 28, 2018

Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

GREETING

Today, we observe Health and Human Service Sunday in the United Church of Christ. Alongside many other congregations, we celebrate the UCC's long, faithful heritage of advocating justice and extending care and compassion in Christ's name, here in our congregation, across this nation, and around the world.

For hundreds of years, the UCC and its predecessor denominations courageously founded schools, hospitals and orphanages at times when such services were scarce and needs were great.

Today, more than 400 health care centers, affordable housing and retirement communities, homeless shelters, and service centers for children, youth, families, those with developmental disabilities and acute care hospitals, bear witness to the United Church of Christ's continuing testament of mercy and kindness.

Today, we give thanks for these diverse ministries, and lift them in our collective prayers, as we celebrate the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, whose mission is to create a just, caring, and compassionate world. And let us celebrate the many member institutions. Let us remember that they are not an "extension" of the church. They are the church in action! And their bold witness is ours!

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: When we love God by serving others,
People: **we fulfill the greatest of the commandments.**

When we share bread with the hungry poor,
then light shall break forth like the morning.

When we bring in those who are cast out,
then righteousness shall go before us.

When we are foolish to believe that love can save the perishing,
then the message of the cross is being lived and proclaimed.

When we stand on our heads to understand the wisdom of God,
then the poor are raised up, the low ones lifted high.

When we extend mercy,
then we receive mercy.

So, let the one who boasts,
boast in the Lord!

For God is the source of your life, in Christ Jesus.
Let us rejoice and be glad!

OPENING PRAYER

God, who heals, and asks us to heal in your name:
In Christ, you showed us a more excellent way,
asking us to follow in the way of justice, kindness and humility.
We believe the kin-dom of heaven belongs to all who work your will.
On this Health and Human Service Sunday,
shape us in the image of Christ, the optimist, the healer, the risk-taker,
who preached possibility, who lived compassion, who taught mercy.
Make pure our hearts, that we might serve others and, thus, see God.
Teach us again what is truly pure and noble in your sight. **Amen.**

LITANY

ONE: Let us pray together:

ALL: In love, God calls us to health and wholeness in our own lives:

ONE: For all who care for us emotionally, physically and spiritually;
For all who hold us, encourage us and challenge us,
who stir us emotionally to make healthy responses
to the ebb and flow of living;
For all who provide guidance and support
for our sexual and mental health,
We give you thanks.

ALL: In love, God calls us to mission among those in need:

ONE: For all who offer food or shelter or a listening heart;
For all who gently hold a troubled hand
or sit silently in simple accompaniment;
For all who offer therapy or surgery,
who bring intervention or enable rehabilitation
with a full measure of hope,
We give you thanks.

ALL: In love, God calls us to care for the least among the children of God:

ONE: For all who honor and care for those who are aging,
who rock babies and children in need of comfort
in an unkind and terrifying world;
For all who offer care in community clinics and at health fairs,
who diligently work to end epidemics,
who value the disabled among us;
For all who see each person's worth
and actively oppose discrimination,
We give you thanks.

ALL: In love, God calls us to open our hearts to the meaning of discipleship:

ONE: Grant that we may have the wisdom and will, O God,
to embrace the healing and service ministry
of Jesus Christ and make it truly our own.

ALL: Inspire us, Holy One, to trust that your healing love
will use our humble efforts to bring
health and wholeness to us
and to the whole human family.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: With what shall we come before the Lord? Shall we come before God with burnt offerings, with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil, with a calf just one-year old?

All: No! Let us, instead, do what the God *actually* requires, to do what is *truly* holy: Justice. Kindness. Humility. These are God's highest objectives.

So, forgive us, Holy One, whenever we believe that you require more than we can give or afford, when we excuse or exempt ourselves from responsibility for our neighbor in need.

Doing justice, let us join and support ministries of health and human service.

Loving kindness, let us create a just, caring and compassion world, together.

Walking humbly with you, strengthen us to comfort those who mourn, to fill the hungry and thirsty with good things, to walk in peace.

Restore us to your holiest intentions. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

No longer need you plead your case to the mountains,
nor be weary and heavy-hearted. You are set free to be love in the world.
Just re-examine your priorities and trust in the godly potential placed within you.
Then, all mercy, goodness and blessing will follow you, as you claim God's call to be a foolish vessel for the wisdom that is compassion.

Thanks be to God.

CALL TO OFFERING

[Note: The words below are designed for use for your regular church offering. However, on Health and Human Service Sunday, some congregations choose to designate a portion of their offering, or make a special gift, to support a UCC-related health and human service ministries near or dear to them. For a list of such ministries, go to chhsm.org/find.]

In 1858, one of our UCC forebears, Pastor Louis Edward Nollau, appealed to his congregation, now known as St. Peter's United Church of Christ in St. Louis, for money to build a home to support young children orphaned by a great cholera epidemic. Later, one member chastised Nollau, insisting the church did not have enough funds for such an ambitious project. To this, the pastor replied. "No, ... But we have the children."

Today, Pastor Nollau's vision, Evangelical Children's Home, is more than 150 years old and has always evolved and adapted to meet the changing needs of children. Now referred to as "Every Child's Hope," ECH has more than 200 employees across Missouri, dedicated to preventing child

abuse, treating emotional trauma and mental health issues, and providing critical services to 1,400 youth and children annually — in our name, as members of the United Church of Christ. Pastor Nollau's dream — and the dream of the generous people of St. Peter's Church — lives on.

Today, as you present your offering, I invite you to do so believing that great things are possible for those who see great human need as a call to advance the love and compassion of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us be that kind of church, as our forebears have taught us.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

God, use these gifts to do wondrous acts of justice and compassion in your name.
Where people are aging in isolation, growing up in violence, or suffering in silence,
may our United Church of Christ have the courage to be a witness to a more excellent way.
Through these gifts, enable us to be your justice, kindness and humility in the world —
where your realm is made known in love. **Amen.**

BENEDICTION

Friends, you have heard what is good, and you know it in your heart.
So let us go from this place,
believing in the power of one to do great things in the world.
And let us believe when that amazing grace is multiplied in community,
all things are possible.
Go into the world, to be a blessing!
And may the blessing of our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter
be always with you. **Amen**

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for Health and Human Service Sunday 2018 was written by the Rev. Dr. J. Bennett Guess, Vice President, Council for Health and Human Service Ministries. The litany was composed by the Rev. William R. Johnson, former CHHSM Vice President for Member Relations, in 2008.



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