

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SUNDAY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the Third Sunday after Epiphany
January 26, 2020

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

GREETING

Today, we gather together with the whole United Church of Christ in observing Health and Human Service Sunday. We bear witness to the faithful heritage the UCC has in co-creating spaces and services for lives of wholeness with communities across this country and around the world. For generations, the UCC and its predecessor denominations courageously founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages at times when such services were scarce, and the needs were great. Now, there are more than 400 UCC affiliated health care centers, hospitals, affordable housing and retirement communities, transitional housing for those experiencing homelessness or domestic violence, and service centers for children, youth, families, and those with developmental disabilities. It is thus a day to celebrate that the service, action, and fellowship of the church is vibrant beyond these church walls and our own outreach ministries.

So, let us give thanks for this collective work of the Spirit. Let us pray for God's help to respond to the suffering we see, by cultivating loving relationships and uprooting systems of oppression. And as we begin our time of worship today, let us become grounded in the vision of the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries of the United Church of Christ—together, we create a just, caring, and compassionate world. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Breath of God, you are the one
in whom we live and move and have our being.

All: **And we are the ones in whom you live and move and have your being,
for you made us in your image and likeness.**

One: May your unifying energy be felt here among us,

All: **And rekindle the fire within,
that makes us feel alive when we care for others.**

One: Let us draw from the well of living water,

All: **And be attentive to that which needs nourishing
in ourselves and in our world.**

One: Come, let us worship where all are welcome in the house of God,

All: **And find safe-haven in the heart of the Divine.**

OPENING PRAYER

God of our ancestors, of prophets from long ago and today,
you have spoken your word deep within us.

Help us to hear your wisdom and to feel it in our bones.

You have called us to a life that liberates and is liberating,
so on this Health and Human Service Sunday,
may we sense the strength we have together
to create a way when there is no way.

As people who have walked in darkness, yet have seen a great light,
may we befriend the stranger with the warmth of our hospitality.

As the Body of Christ, let us stand on the ground of the Good News
that offers healing to the broken and belonging to the lost.

Spirit of the Living God,
guide us in your ways of justice and grace. Amen.

LITANY

One: As Christ's disciples, we are called to proclaim the Good News in word and deed.

All: With God's help, let us be a voice.

One: Let us pray for health equity,

That all may share your abundant life,

by creating just conditions in which all people live, work, grow, learn, and age.

God, grant us the courage to dismantle the multitude of systems that prevent access
to and environments for health and wholeness. *[Invite people to name some of the
systems, such as racism, sexism, ableism, mentalism, colonialism, homophobia,
transphobia, mass incarceration]*

Let us be a voice for health:

All: Let us be a voice for health.

One: Abundant life for our elders!

for dignity at every season of life;

in gratitude for the gifts older adults share,

and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice with our elders.

One: Abundant life for those with mental illness!

for an end to stigma, ignorance, and rejection,

for healing across generations of trauma and addiction;

in gratitude for the gifts this community shares,

and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice with those with mental illness.

One: Abundant life for our children and families!
for an end to unjust separation,
for care that is communal and futures that are bright;
in gratitude for the gifts this community shares,
and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice with children and families.

One: Abundant life for those with disabilities!
for lives of inclusion,
for self-determination and a seat at the table;
in gratitude for the gifts this community shares,
and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice with those with disabilities.

One: Abundant life for those in need of housing!
for resilience in transitions,
for homes of safety and affordability;
in gratitude for new beginnings,
and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice with those in need of housing.

One: Abundant life for those who experience food insecurity!
for an end to hunger;
for an end to the climate collapse leading to agricultural crisis;
in gratitude for those who work for change
and for the services that support them:

All: Let us be a voice with those in food insecurity.

One: Abundant life for those in need of reproductive healthcare!
for an end to disparities in treatment,
for the freedom of patients to learn, choose, and safely access
the care that is right for them;
in gratitude for the wellness these services provide,
and for those who support them:

All: Let us be a voice for reproductive justice.

One: O God, we know your voice
from the burning bush, Mount Sinai, the Cross, and the upper room.
May we harmonize with your Eternal Echo
leading us to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all life,

and calling us to work for your justice and peace, now and always.

All: Amen.

(Note: These prayer intentions are inspired by advocacy initiatives from the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries and their *Be a Voice Advocacy Toolkit*.)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

Holy One, help us recognize
that the body does not consist of one member but many.

**All: Forgive us when we tell others that we have no need of them
because they are not like us.**

Give us courage when we do not feel that we have anything to offer
because we are different from others,
or try to exempt ourselves from responding to a neighbor in need
because we do not feel equipped for the task.

**Remind us that when one suffers, we all suffer.
And when one is honored, we can all rejoice together.**

Show us how to work together as one body
to support ministries of health and human service in response to need.
Guide us in using the gifts that each of us has
to help create a just, caring and compassionate world.

**As the body of Christ,
we offer this prayer and commit ourselves anew
to caring for one another
and for the needs of the world. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Together, we are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

In the name of Christ, we are forgiven and are freed to begin anew.

All: We all drink of one Spirit, who refreshes and sustains us. 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 <https://www.chhsm.org/find-a-provider/>)*

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

O God of remaking, rekindling, rebirthing—
refine us out of the warm fire of your love and illuminate our belonging in this space.

Dissolve whatever divides, separates, or categorizes us.

Bless us as we bring our whole selves here together,
as we share what we have as the needy and the needed.

May we embody Christ's life of service,

with our hearts and eyes wide open to his guiding light of peace.

And may the gifts we offer be used to create a just, caring, and compassionate world.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

Friends, you have heard what is good, and you know it in your heart.

So let us go from this place, emboldened by the love of God and community.

Together we share in the work of healing and service
and bear the light that outshines the night.

And may the blessing of our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter
be with you always. **Amen.**

For more information about Health and Wholeness advocacy, follow this link:

<https://www.ucc.org/health>

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for Health and Human Service Sunday 2020 was written by the Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry, CHHSM Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development, and the Rev. George R. Graham, CHHSM Vice President.



The Council for Health and
Human Service Ministries
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



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