

# HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SUNDAY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany  
January 31, 2021

*Deut. 18:15-20*

*Ps 111*

*1 Cor. 8:1-13*

*Mk. 1:21-28*

## 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 of wholeness with communities across this country and around the world. The UCC and its predecessor denominations courageously founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages during times of pandemic, war, and social upheaval. 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. These ministries continue to show up in the most challenging circumstances—and do so with the fervor of healing and justice. It is thus a day to celebrate that the life of the church is vibrant beyond our church walls and 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—knowing that by doing so, we may 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 feel your love as it touches our skin,  
breaking down all barriers to belonging.  
You have called us to a life of abundance through interdependence,  
and so on this Health and Human Service Sunday,  
may we call upon the strength we have together  
to create a way when there is no way.  
As people who have journeyed through isolation and distance,  
may we claim ourselves united in the Body of Christ.  
Spirit of the Living God,  
immerse us in the boundlessness of your presence  
and in a hope that comes like the dawn. Amen.

## LITANY OF GRATITUDE FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

- One: O God of Absolute Necessity,  
who reveals to us our interdependence and inherent worth.  
We lift up to you now all essential workers and their life-saving ministries.
- All: Let us ground ourselves in the roots of gratitude.**
- One: For sanitation and environmental service workers,  
for janitors and mask-makers,  
who create spaces of welfare and well-being.
- Many: May they too be protected and safe.**
- One: For healthcare workers and rescue breathers,  
for emergency and crisis intervention teams,  
for veterinarians and funeral directors,  
who hold both life and death in their compassionate care.
- All: May they too be held and safe.**
- One: For food service workers and farmers,  
for postal workers and transportation providers,  
who deliver sustenance and connection.
- All: May they too be nourished and safe.**
- One: For those working with children and older adults,  
for housing providers and direct service professionals,  
who cultivate community at every stage and experience of life.
- All: May they too be nurtured and safe.**
- One: For teachers and school workers,  
for poets, musicians, and artists,

who gift the world with wisdom, beauty, and joy.

**All: May they too be inspired and safe.**

One: For chaplains, spiritual directors, and therapists,  
for body workers, doulas, and traditional healers,  
who journey alongside the presence of pain as well as perseverance.

**All: May they too be companioned and safe.**

One: For activists, protestors, and organizers,  
for poll workers, policy-writers, and journalists,  
who cry out for justice and hold power accountable.

**All: May they too be heard and safe.**

One: For uncompensated caregivers,  
for family and friends,  
who lift each other up and leave no one behind, alone, or lost.

**All: May they too be supported and safe.**

One: But may they be more than just honored and safe.  
May they flourish,  
and have rest.

**Many: And have us as their rest protectors.**

One: May they feel loved  
and not alone.

**Many: Because we will show up for them,  
as they have shown up for us.**

One: Together, let us build the City of God  
one moment,  
one relationship,  
one ballot,  
one ministry  
at a time.

**Many: Amen.**

## PRAYER OF REMEMERANCE: HONORING THEIR NAMES

*Pastor Notes:*

- *We offer this special prayer in light of the many losses people have experienced this year. Like the other elements for worship, it is optional. Please use or adapt it however is appropriate for your community.*
- *If you are doing this service via Zoom, please invite people to share names in the chat. They may share just the first name, initials, nickname, or full name of the person(s).*
- *If you are doing this service in person, you may invite people to write names down on a piece of paper and place them in a basket to be read.*

- *You may also want to include naming the number of those who have died nationally from COVID-19, drug overdose, police violence, poverty, etc. as you lead this prayer.*

O God of many names, sounds, and textures,  
we come before you,  
and alongside each other,  
to honor life,  
to acknowledge death,  
to name loss,  
and to tell our stories  
as a part of your story.

We set this time apart to remember and to name  
the beloved lives lost this year.

We embrace the ways in which our bodies hold space for these names,  
sometimes in the feeling of  
a heart jumping,  
or a head turning,  
or a stomach sinking,  
or eyes tearing,  
when their name is said or read.

As co-authors of the collective story that is the Good News,  
we say their names out loud,  
and feel their souls reverberate in the air.

For we know,  
we are all part of the Eternal Echo,  
the Voice from Sinai  
that proclaims God's name  
as the sound of breath, of spirit,  
the Cry from the Cross  
that names God as the midwife to the brokenhearted  
and us the birthers of justice.

O Holy One, you who call us each by name,  
and sing to us a song of solace  
in our grief and remembering,  
who invites us to come,

with our bones that are heavy,  
and our longing to be touched,  
anoint us with the sweet oil of grace,  
to prepare us to name those we must name,  
those whose lives we honor together with our own. Amen.

*(Invite people to share names.)*

I invite you now into a posture of reverence as we read the names you have so lovingly shared with us here.

*(Read the names.)*

O God of listening, of holding, of belonging,  
we bring before you these beloveds,  
and the countless lives they touched.  
Bless our vulnerability and all that we feel.  
And guide us to hold spaces of healing and wholeness for others.  
Amen.

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: O God of Becoming,  
we claim ourselves as your beloved  
and name the messy reality of being human.

**All: In your presence, we do not shy away  
from our struggles, failings, or regrets.**

One: By your invitation, we come to you not in shame,  
but with courage, seeking right relationship

**All: With you, with each other, and all of creation.**

One: And so we collectively ask for your forgiveness.  
Forgive us for when confronted with poverty,

**All: we responded with scarcity and greed.**

One: For when the stranger came seeking refuge,

**All: and we responded with exclusion and detention.**

One: For when the sick and vulnerable needed care and protection,

**All: and we responded with negligence and entitlement.**

One: For when the imprisoned were denied justice and healing,

**All: and we responded with violence and bondage.**

One: Yet, because you first loved us,

**All: we are emboldened to live a life of return and reconciliation.**

One: Hear our prayers of reckoning and relearning,  
to live into your ways of peace,  
more and more each day. Amen.

## 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

One: O God of loaves and fishes,  
of bread and of wine,  
we bring before you our diversity of gifts,

**All: knowing that they will be multiplied for the benefit of many.**

One: O God of resurrection,  
who makes all things new,  
accept our offering to both give and receive,

**All: trusting that there is abundance in togetherness,  
and generosity in you. Amen.**

## BENEDICTION

Beloveds, today we have envisioned expressions of the Good News.  
Let us go forth, to bring our imagining to life.  
Together we share in the work of healing and service,  
bearing the light of the dusk and the dawn.  
And so, may the blessing of our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter  
shine down upon you always. **Amen.**

For more information about The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, UCC,  
please visit:

[www.chhsm.org](http://www.chhsm.org)

For more information about Health and Wholeness advocacy, please visit:

[www.ucc.org/health](http://www.ucc.org/health)

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



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