

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SUNDAY

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 30, 2022

Jer. 1:4-10

Ps 71:1-6

1 Cor. 13:1-13

Lk. 4:21-30

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 the 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 how 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 uplift God's healers and equity weavers, visionaries of freedom, and frontline responders—that together, we may create a just, caring, and compassionate world. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: O God of Change and Stillness, of Wounds and Repair,

All: in you we find our sense of balance—a place to land and to breathe.

One: May we grow our attention towards that which gives life,

All: and cultivate connections of community and care.

One: May grace touch all that changes us,

All: and all that we hold unfold with peace.

One: May we gather in this space claiming healing as our birthright,

All: and bring with us the medicines of service and compassion.

One: On this Health and Human Service Sunday, let us come together to transform ourselves to transform the world,ⁱ

All: and move like living water—ever adapting, ever faithful, ever full of all that could be. Amen.

OPENING MEDITATION

O God of Flesh and Bone, your Word echoes deep within us and turns our heartbeat into a song. May we linger for a moment in this blessing.

Let us pray:

I invite you to rub your hands together and create some heat between them. Bring to life the movement of our Creator, the Spark of All Life, into your hands.

Feel the heat you just created.

Now place your hands on your chest. Feel the rhythm of your heartbeat, notice the warmth you brought to your heart space.

Take a deep breath to simply feel yourself alive in this moment.

Perhaps, imagine your heart within the heart of Christ. Perhaps, envision your ancestors at your back, how you have generations behind you.

Now once again, rub your hands together, and then open them up. Feel the coolness of air caress them, the wind of the Spirit hover over them.

May this blessing take shape in you and all that you hold. May you enter this time from an embodied awareness of God's sacredness within you. Amen.ⁱⁱ

A LITANY FOR COLLECTIVE CARE

One: O Great Flow of Life, who feels our inhaled and exhaled all in the same breath,
All: anchor us in your assurance.

One: May our exhaustion collapse into your arms,
All: to be held, to be lifted, to be known in our wholeness.

One: May we rest in the alignment of this moment,
All: in the abundance of you and our right to belong.

One: O Liberator of Loneliness, who cuts down privilege and recenters the margins,
you have shown us how

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: Because there is strength in vulnerability and wisdom in intimacy,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: As white blood cells rally to a cut and mushrooms cleanse the forest ground,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: Like a midwife who catches a baby and the chaplain who sits with the dying,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: Because we are found in the web that lifts us, not the bootstraps that bind us
down,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: Where the City of God is irresistible and its sweetness of justice satisfies,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: Because resurrections never go unwitnessed and they heal the brokenhearted,

All: to be free is to be beloved.

One: As species with needs and offerings, who give and receive alike,

All: we are not meant to live this life alone.

One: So, let us hold fast to our God in between us,

All: to the collective of care alongside us today. 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 ourselves, each other, and all of creation.

One: Guide us in your ways of accountability,

All: with remedies of repair and reconciliation.

One: May our sense of self be vast enough for our faults and deep enough to let go,

All: to make space to learn from our wrongdoing, without spiraling into self-hate.

One: Spirit of Creation, teach us the grace of generative conflict,

All: that we may be open to the tension underneath authentic connection.

One: Help us to believe change is possible, in ourselves and others,

All: so our healing can ripple outwards and our shared power can break forth anew.

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 nearly 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, we have claimed our place in the ecosystem of the Spirit—alive, connected, and emergent with grace. Let us go forth from this fertile ground, ripening the wisdom we have found through justice, care, and compassion. And so, may the blessing of our Communal Creator replenish you today and always. Amen.

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

www.chhsm.org

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

www.ucc.org/health

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for Health and Human Service Sunday 2021 was written by the Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry, CHHSM Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development.



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ⁱ *Note:* this line is adapted from “transform yourself to transform the world,” found in Boggs, Grace L. *Living for Change: An Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

ⁱⁱ *Note:* the movements for this prayer were inspired by Harville, India. “Rockwood Community Call.” Presentation, Zoom, September 30, 2021.