

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE SUNDAY

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 28, 2024

[Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)

[Psalms 111](#)

[1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#)

[Mark 1:21-28](#)

Recommended Scripture: It's better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (MSG)

GREETING

Today, we gather together with the whole United Church of Christ in observing Health and Human Service Sunday. We bear witness to the tradition, and the history being made today, of how the UCC has embodied extravagant welcome through service. 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 disabilities. These ministries continue to show up in the most challenging circumstances—and do so with a hope that has come alive. 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: Embodied Eternal, what might it mean for us to resonate together? That vibe. That hum. That feeling of flow. That "yes." On this Health and Human Service Sunday, we come beside you with echoes of care that have lingered in our souls.

All: Your service is alive. Let us feel its pulse.

One: We know you not only as the Divine Physician, but as the Holy Housing Manager, the Sacred Social Worker, and the Chaplain to the Cosmos, too. Your healing work has no bounds, no set roles or rules, no singular calling.

All: Your healing is breathing. Let us enter its flow.

One: We've been here long enough—pulled too many double-shifts and overnights—to know that oppression and despair can spread like wildfire. And yet, in all of those clocked hours, we find ourselves in Kairos time, on God's time. Here, we measure our calendars by connection, set our alarm bells to attention, and are charged by the speed of sound that made the universe.

All: Our service is alive. Let us feel its pulse.

One: Come, let us bring our solidarity to ceremony and ritual.

All: Our healing is breathing. Let us enter its flow.

One: Come, let us worship our God who created us for partnership,

All: who made us for love, to not go it alone. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Scripture tells us that love “binds everything together.” It is how we are held. It is how we exist at all. Let us reawaken ourselves to love's presence in this community through service. May our worship not be a rote motion, but rather an experience of relationship with you and those gathered here. Open in us what love is requiring of us today, O God, and may we respond in faith. Amen.

SOUND MEDITATION FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS

[Sound Healing YouTube Video Link](#)

In this 10-minute video, Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) offers a sound meditation prayer. If you would like to use it, it can be played at any point during the service or another time.

To increase accessibility, please turn on the closed captions (CC). The video also has text to provide non-verbal/non-audio cues to the different parts of the meditation. Additionally, the meditation incorporates inclusive embodiment practices that include humming, deep breathing, and attention to one's heartbeat by placing your hands (or simply your awareness) on your heart. A full transcript of the meditation can be found in the YouTube video's description.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: Beloved, though we'd hope that service would bring out the best in us,

All: we sometimes show up more impatient than present, more hardened than heartened.

One: Sometimes the pressure of the calendar, expectations, old dynamics, and the chaos of life can make us act, and even believe, that we are far from love and loving.

All: Forgive us for the ways we hustle, bargain, and settle for counterfeit versions of service.

One: Help us to discover that the Gospel is worth the risk of showing up just as we are. May your love and assurance live in our hearts rent-free.

All: And may we make a home of extravagant welcome out of your reconciling grace for all. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Spirit of Service, you show us how in caring for others and ourselves in right-relationship, we find our way back to discipleship. In you we find that the true meaning of service is justice and joy. In you, we find that joy will not be weaponized to diminish accountability or grief. Rather, it makes room for it all to belong in your presence. Joy is not frivolous, nor a luxury, nor a distraction from what matters. It is the Good News that holds the wholeness of life, all of us, inside its realness. In true joy we find its worth in love, which is both the cost and the gift of living. Help us to join heart to heart here today, to consider it all joy. Amen.

OFFERATORY PRAYER

God Incarnate, through the life of Jesus, you gave us reason to have hope in the service of others. You showed us how hope is not about a predictable and “sure thing”—but is rather about the arc of acts of loving. Hope gives bones to relationships and cannot exist without them. Help us to learn to trust the long nights of our lives and ministries, that you are with us regardless of the outcomes we think we know. May the gifts that we offer here today be blessed by the beauty of service, which allows us to build the kin-dom of God moment by moment, choice by choice, alone and together. 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 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 ancestors have taught us.

BENEDICTION

One: Let us join together in this collective benediction! In reverence, we call upon the guidance of the Four Directions that know the way of the Creator.

All: Direct us as we find our pathways to healing.

One: In reverence, we call upon the courage of the Fugitive Slaves, who imagined a new world into being.

All: Support us as we seek to create the safety of the Promised Land in the here and now.

One: In reverence, we call upon the wisdom of the Ancestors, like Shiphrah and Puah, who refused to participate in genocide and midwifed freedom into life.

All: Guide us as we work for a just and peaceful world for all.

One: And in reverence, we call upon the Holy of Wholeness, who made us from and for love.

All: Strengthen us to go forth from this place to embody healing and service in the name of Christ. 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: <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/>

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for Health and Human Service Sunday 2024 was written by the Rev. Dr. Elyse Berry, CHHSM's Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development.



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