

PNEC Sunday November 20, 2022

Gathering Thoughts: *"Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other."* –David Spangler

Call to Worship

One: We gather in this place to worship God.

All: We come together in community and worship.

One: We lift our hands and our voices, our hearts and our spirits to God.

All: We come together in community and worship.

One: We are the family of God, siblings following Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

All: We come together in community and worship.

Prayer of Invocation

O Creator of all that was, is and will ever be, we seek you. We know you are present with us, but we ask you to open our hearts so we may feel your presence more deeply. Gathered in this place we seek to be community in covenant with each other and with You. Bless us as we go about our praying, singing, and worshipping in this very moment and in this very place. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Holy One, we come into your presence and seek your mercy and forgiveness. Often, we think of ourselves and our own community to the exclusion of others and our covenantal relationships. We forget to care for one another. We forget to care for the least and the lost, those who believe differently from us, those excluded from community, those marginalized and even hated. Sometimes we are the instruments of violence, distrust and hate. Remind us that we are called to love, not to disregard, to spread joy not hopelessness, to seek your will rather than our own. We come before you asking for your forgiveness.

Silent prayers added

Assurance of Pardon

Friends, we are the beloved children of our Creator God. We are held in God's embrace and known more fully than we can imagine. We are recipients of God's love and grace, God's mercy and blessing. Know this, we are forgiven.

Scripture Readings: from the lectionary for Reign of Christ: Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Luke 1:68-79; Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Add scriptures on covenant from Genesis, Exodus, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Malachi, Psalms, Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians or Hebrews

A Covenant Message

The United Church of Christ was formed in 1957, as a union of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches and the Congregational and Christian Churches. There were long discussions about to what doctrines or theological interpretations the newly formed denomination would adhere. As the conversations continued some key beliefs were established as the denominational foundations. These are categorized in sections of the constitution but also in the framework of “what we believe” as the United Church of Christ. These beliefs are:

We believe in the triune God: Creator, resurrected Christ, the sole Head of the church, and the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings about the creative and redemptive work of God in the world.

We believe that each person is unique and valuable. It is the will of God that every person belongs to a family of faith where they have a strong sense of being valued and loved.

We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey and that each of us is at a different stage of that journey.

We believe that the persistent search for God produces an authentic relationship with God, engendering love, strengthening faith, dissolving guilt, and giving life purpose and direction.

We believe that all of the baptized ‘belong body and soul to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ No matter who – no matter what – no matter where we are on life’s journey – notwithstanding race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, class or creed – we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of faith. All persons baptized – past, present and future – are connected to each other and to God through the sacrament of baptism. We baptize during worship when the community is present because baptism includes the community’s promise of ‘love, support and care’ for the baptized – and we promise that we won’t take it back – no matter where your journey leads you.

We believe that all people of faith are invited to join Christ at Christ’s table for the sacrament of Communion. Just as many grains of wheat are gathered to make one loaf of bread and many grapes are gathered to make one cup of wine, we, the many people of God, are made one in the body of Christ, the church. The breaking of bread and the pouring of wine reminds us of the costliness of Christ’s sacrifice and the discipleship to which we are all called. In the breaking of bread,

we remember and celebrate Christ's presence among us along with a 'cloud of witnesses' – our ancestors, family and friends who have gone before us. It is a great mystery; we claim it by faith.

We believe the UCC is called to be a united and uniting church. "That they may all be one." (John 17:21) "In essentials–unity, in nonessentials–diversity, in all things–charity," These UCC mottos survive because they touch core values deep within us. The UCC has no rigid formulation of doctrine or attachment to creeds or structures. Its overarching creed is love. UCC pastors and teachers are known for their commitment to excellence in theological preparation, interpretation of the scripture and justice advocacy. Even so, love and unity in the midst of our diversity are our greatest assets.

We believe that God calls us to be servants in the service of others and to be good stewards of the earth's resources. 'To believe is to care; to care is to do.'

We believe that the UCC is called to be a prophetic church. As in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted.

We believe in the power of peace, and work for nonviolent solutions to local, national, and international problems.

We are a people of possibility. In the UCC, members, congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear ... for after all, God is still speaking,...¹

Thus, it is important for our congregations to understand that they are the center of the denomination, supported by associations and conferences which are supported by the national setting. No setting speaks FOR the others but rather TO them. Our covenantal responsibility is to listen with respect, seek understanding and then to form and share our own thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Just as with welcoming of ideas from many people and many sources, the United Church of Christ also welcomes all people as beloved children of God, of worth and value.

As a part of our support to your local congregation, the Penn Northeast Conference provides the following:

- Support for the discernment, authorization, ordination and oversight of authorized ministers;
- Resources and educational support for congregational governance, conflict management, leadership development, faith formation, search and call, congregational vitality and development;
- Support for community and global mission needs through the efforts of the Disaster Response Team and Amigos de Guatemala, our Ecumenical Support Mission Team which include relationships with the churches in Germany and the Church of South India;

¹ <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-believe/>

- Resource support in areas of Racial Justice, Mental Health Awareness, Justice and Advocacy work; and
- Financial program and scholarship support through the YEA, GEM, GTW and Longsdorf Funds

Through the Conference our voice is shared through the Council of Conference Ministers, the Mid-Atlantic Region, the Lehigh Conference of Churches, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, UCC General Synod, and the staff of the national setting. None of this is possible without your partnership in our mutual ministry.

Prayers of the People

One: Holy one, we gather this morning and bring to mind the cares of our heart. You know our prayers before they are spoken, but it is good that we speak them aloud and in our hearts.

One: We remember those who are ill or injured. We seek your healing touch for them and their caregivers. We especially pray for those whose names we share:
read the names and/or share aloud

One: We remember those who live in loneliness or grief, those who have lost loved ones, or are feeling isolated and alone. We especially pray for those whose names we share:
read the names and/or share aloud

One: We remember all the places where violence lives and is perpetrated, homes, communities, nations. We pray for peace to be in our homes, within our families, within and between our communities, and in our world. We especially pray for those whose names or locations we share:
read the names and/or share aloud

One: We pray for your church, in all its manifestations and settings. We pray for this local church, for The Penn Northeast Conference, for the United Church of Christ and all our ecumenical and interfaith partners. We pray for all those who minister in your name, offering spiritual leadership and care. Help us to proclaim in one voice your love, mercy, compassion, kindness, and love.

One: We offer you thanks for all you have given us: homes in which we live, food which we eat, air to breathe, the earth beneath our feet and the sky above us. We sometimes take for granted the gifts you have given us and we pause now to thank you for those gifts now:
share aloud

One: We thank you for the opportunity to bring our concerns and prayers to you without fear, knowing that your loves surrounds us in this moment and in all moments to come.

All: Amen.

Call to the Offering

As we gather this morning, we return to you God, a portion of the gifts you have shared with us. This morning we especially remember the gifts offered to us by our conference and offer an additional gift to support its work. Remind us that together our gifts multiply and provide for your ministry in the world.

Prayer of Dedication

Holy One, we dedicate these gifts to the work of your church here in this place and throughout our conference. Remind us that all we do, all we give, is for our praise of you and your glory. Amen.

Benediction

Heavenly One, God of All, we have come to the end of our time of worship. As we go forth from this place, continue to move our hearts so we may be the people you call us to be. Strengthen us for the days ahead and remind us that you, Our Creator, hold us in your embrace as we seek to follow our brother and Savior Jesus Christ, through and with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Our worship, in this place, ends. Yet, may we live our lives as worship and in service to you and all your creation. Amen and Amen!