

Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ & The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Imagine Together:

A Series on Church Growth & Stewardship

February 2, 2025

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

Centering Music

“How Majestic is Your Name” #42

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.
O Lord, we praise your name. O Lord, we magnify your name:
Prince of Peace, Mighty God, O Lord God Almighty.
(Repeat)

Invocation

One: Holy and loving God, you are our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—and you invite us to be a people forever growing, changing, and becoming.

All: Jesus, you invite us to ask, search, and knock; and the scriptures promise that you will do far more for us than what we can even ask for—or imagine.

One: Spirit of God, give us the courage to accept this bold invitation: to dare to dream about all that is possible for us as *this* church—not only for the present, but for our future.

All: With Christ as our one true head, Spirit as our life and energy, and love as our law, we do dare to dream! We dare to believe! And we dare to become all that we can be as Community United Church. Amen!

* Opening Hymn

“God of the Ages, History’s Maker” #78

God of the ages, history’s Maker, planning our pathway, holding us fast,
Shaping in mercy—all that concerns us: Father we praise you, Lord of the past.

God of this morning, gladly your children worship before you, trustingly bow:
Teach us to know you—always among us, quietly sovereign—Lord of our now.

God of tomorrow, strong overcomer, princes of darkness own your command:
What then can harm us? We are your people, now and forever—kept by your hand.

Lord of past ages, Lord of this morning, Lord of the future, help us, we pray:
Teach us to trust you, love and obey you, crown you each moment, Lord of today.

***Opening Prayer**

***Sign of Peace**

One: The peace of Christ be with all of you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us share with one another a sign of peace.

First Reading**Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 3:14-21**

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial**Psalm 37:3-7**

One: Trust in the LORD and do good; live in the land and enjoy security.

All: Take delight in the LORD; trust in God and the Holy One will act. God will make your vindication shine like the light and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

One: Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently on the Holy One.

All: Do not fret over those who prosper in their way; [do not fret] over those who carry out evil devices. Amen.

Gloria*"Glory Be to God, Creator" #145**

Glory be to God, Creator, glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit, known as Three, yet God the One

As it was in the beginning, it is now and so shall be,
In a world without an ending, glory through eternity.

Holy, holy God Almighty! Holy, holy Prince of Peace!
Holy, holy Wind of Presence! Holy, holy, holy! Amen!

Gospel*Matthew 7:7-11**

"Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for bread, would give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asked for a fish, would give a snake? ¹¹If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

One: This the Gospel of Christ for the people of God.

All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!

Children's Message

Song of Preparation

"O God Beyond All Praising" #64

O God beyond all praising, we worship you today—
And sing the love amazing that songs cannot repay;
For we can only wonder at every gift you send,
At blessings without number and mercies without end;
We lift our hearts before you and wait upon your Word,
We honor and adore you, our great and mighty Lord.

Then hear, O gracious Savior, accept the love we bring,
That we who know your favor may serve you as our King;
And whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill,
We'll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still:
To marvel at your beauty and glory in your ways,
And make a joyful duty our sacrifice of praise.

Message

*Imagine Together, Part 1:
Dare to Dream*

Pastor Rich

Song of Response

"Hymn of Promise" #515

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity;
In our death, a resurrection; at the last a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.



COMMUNION LITURGY

Pastor: People of God, our dreams for the future come from our faith in Christ.

All: Our altar table is a powerful place to encounter the living Christ—who never tires of meeting us in the bread and in the cup. Here at this table, food for the body becomes food for the spirit.

Pastor: This is a table of grace. There is room around it for every soul that was, and is, and is to come.

All: We come to the table as people who are learning the way of Christ. We confess that we are not always right. But we share this faith: that those who trust in Christ Jesus will grow in the assurance of God's eternal love.

Pastor: And so, here at this Table we take bread and cup, and we ask the Holy Spirit to make it for us communion with the living Christ, body and blood, love poured out, forever!

All: Here at this Table we remember that Christ indeed gave his entire life as an outpouring of God's Love—a love that will, one day, renew all things. Amen.

Pastor: People of God, come to the Table and find the Light of Heaven as true light for our lives.

Communion Music

"To Commune with You"

Cheryl Strecker

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer ("Debts and Debtors")

One: The Lord be with you.

All: ***And also with you.***

One: People of God, let us center our hearts and extend the spiritual power within us. *Let us pray:* For the prayer requests that have come to us today, whether joys or sorrows...*[prayer requests are presented]*...We also pray for everyone who has asked their name to be on the prayer list *[see last page of the bulletin]*. Holy and Loving God, in your wisdom, meet all of these needs in the perfect way of your grace.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: For the continued growth of our church, for our shared discernment of who Spirit is calling us to be; and for all that we hold in the silence of our hearts, we come to you in the confidence of quiet, O God, and lift our petitions privately to you. *(Silent prayer)*...Almighty God, Sovereign of Heaven, shower your blessings upon all people! Move the mountains in our lives, or help to move us so that we might be fully at peace. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray...

All: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors—and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever." Amen.

A Testimony of Praise for the Church

Offering:

God is inviting us to serve in response to God's great love for us, so that the whole world may know the fullness of God's peace.

How is God calling you this week to give of your time, talent, and resources?

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Liberty House
- Service Sunday
- Ladies Outreach Ministry
- Prayer Ministries
- Children's Church
- Instrumental or vocal music offerings
- Lector and worship assistance
- House & Grounds team

Financial Opportunities:

- Many church growth leaders say that just 1% giving can be transformational
- Planned weekly or monthly financial gifts (see the last page of the bulletin for ideas)
- Donating altar flowers, candles, and other church supplies

Church Growth Opportunities:

- Invite a family, friend, or neighbor to church
- Share our website or social media posts on your preferred pages
- Share a story about what you love about Community United with people who don't know us yet.
- Put a church logo bumper-sticker on your car.



Every gift is great. Let us all give joyfully!

**If you are not in the sanctuary, online donations can be made at:
www.communityunited.church**

*Or, if you prefer to mail in a check, that can be addressed to the church at:
1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508*

Offering & Offertory

“Dreamers”

Bob Martin

Offertory Prayer of Thanksgiving

*Congregational Response #44

*Praise God, from whom all blessing flow!
Praise God, all creatures here below:
Praise God above, you heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*



*Departing Prayer

One: Holy and loving God, as we dare to dream of our future, we also ask that your Spirit grant us discernment to know what pathways you are calling us to walk in—and how to grow.

All: We pray for those who are not yet members of our church, but soon will be. We pray for the inspiration to be disciples who grow this church into its future. And we dare to believe that you will accomplish far more than we can ask, or even imagine, in Jesus' name. Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn "They Did Not Build in Vain" #542 Vv. 1, 3, 4

They did not build in vain
Who founded here a church
As witness to God's love amid a world of pain,
For still, to those—who wish to see, this place proclaims God's mystery.

Those who have loved this place,
A cloud of witnesses,
Surround and urge us on as we now run our race,
And so we lay—aside each sin in our desire to strive and win.

Though the horizon's bend
Conceals the way ahead,
The footprints on the road show Christ waits at the end;
In him alone—our faith shall stand who waits for us at God's right hand.

**Thank you for worshipping with us this morning
at Community United Church!**



Next Week:

Worship & Sermon Series:

Imagine Together: Church Growth & Stewardship

Readings to Study:

Jeremiah 29:11-13

Proverbs 29:11-12, 14, 19

Psalms 119:33-38, 41-50

Matthew 25:31-40; Luke 4:16-21; John 10:14-16

Theme:

Imagine Together, Part 2:

Discerning the Vision

***Need to contact us for prayer, conversation, or to connect with a
small group or church ministry?***

1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

(814) – 864 – 4429

www.communityunited.church



Community United Church

The altar flowers this morning are given to the glory of God and in memory of Penny's mother on her birthday, and in celebration of Granddaughter Payton's 21st Birthday – from Ron & Penny Churley

UPCOMING EVENTS IN FEBRUARY:

February 2 – 23, 2025:

Imagine Together – Church Growth and Stewardship Series

February 2: Imagine Together, Part 1: Dare to Dream

February 9: Imagine Together, Part 2: Discerning the Vision

February 16: Imagine Together, Part 3: We Have Everything We Need

February 23: Imagine Together, Part 4: Manifesting our Future

This week's midweek opportunities to connect, learn, serve, and worship

February 5, 2025:

6:30 PM: Bible Study in the Fellowship Hall

Special invitation: The Ladies Outreach Ministry is sponsoring a winter items collection for the children at Grover Cleveland School. They will be collecting hats, scarves, and gloves for kids. The staff of the school also said that they are "*desperately in need of boots and winter appropriate shoes.*" The Ladies Outreach Ministry will collect items until February 16, 2025.

Need hearing assistance? We have four available units. Please talk to our tech crew in the back of the sanctuary.

WE REMEMBER THOSE IN OUR ARMED FORCES:

Jackson Feiock (Army), Jacob Snyder (Army), Nick Duncan (Army), Brittany Duncan (Army), Matt Duncan (Army), Tyler Anderson (Army National Guard), Shelby Wescott (Army), Jaden O'Hara (Army), Toby Charlton (Marines), Cole Posnett (Army), Hunter Miaczynski (Army) & Mathew Anderson (Army)

PRAYERS FOR:

Dorothy Moyer, Anna Silvia, Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Ralph Kester, John M., Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Tammy McIntyre, Debra Doerfer & David Magid, Annette Minich, Dave Pakulski, Ethel Davis, Chelsea Brown, Celeste Eller & Family, Michele Serafin, Linda Foll-Johnson, Peyton Lily, Toni Stevenson, Dave Wooledge, Ev Smith, Karis Fenton, Ruth Schmidt, Carol & Doug Rodgers, Jane Moran, Sharon Cooper, Josh Cook & Danny Kaeberlein, The Vadzemnieks Family, Reverend Susan Strouse & Reverend Barbara Peronteau, and John & Tina Schnarrs

Current Council Members:

Debbie Anderson, Angel Conrad, Nancy Alberico, Janice Skelly, Mike Pruzinsky, Michele Vahey, Melanie Vadzemniek, Justin Graff, and Mark Davis (new officer elections forthcoming)

Community United: Month of January in Review

Dear Members and Friends of Community United Church,

As we start the month of February, we are launching this new “*month in review*” to enhance communication about the activities, ministries, and business of the church. We will continue to publish this in your bulletin throughout 2025—on the first or second week of the month. We hope it helps to keep you up to date!

Worship

- In the month of January, our Sunday services spanned two different church seasons:
 - On January 5, we celebrated the Second Sunday after Christmas. We continued singing our carols and kept up our decorations.
 - On January 12, we celebrated the start of the season of Epiphany. This season is all about how Christ is revealed to the world—not only in his lifetime, but now, through the church (*through us!*). After the service, we were so grateful for those who stayed and helped to put away Christmas decorations and to reset the sanctuary and fellowship hall for the new season.
 - On January 19, we continued into the season of Epiphany by exploring Christ’s first miracle (or “sign,” as the Gospel of John calls it), when Jesus turned water into wine. As we learned, this sign points towards the abundance and joy Christ brings with the Reign of God.
 - Then on January 26, we had a wonderful 9:00 AM Praise & Prayer service led by Shelly Conrad, followed by our 11:00 AM service in which we explored Christ’s stated mission of liberating the oppressed—and how joining in that cause comes with the cost (and sometimes cross) of discipleship.
- Children’s Church in January was an incredible success! We are so happy to see the number of youth growing in our congregation. This is a good reminder to let people know that our ministries are for all ages. A special thanks to Angel Conrad for organizing this ministry, and for all who helped to staff it over the weeks. We can always use more volunteers for Children’s Church, so please do let us know if you’d like to help.
- Our January contemplative Resonate service was postponed due to weather (*who can forget the cold and snow*), but this special service will be offered on February 19, 2025, at 7:00 PM—so please mark your calendars to attend!

Congregational updates:

- Congregational Meeting: On January 19, we held our annual congregational meeting. Some important items from that meeting:
 - The 2025 budget was approved. It was noted there that the budget is a guideline based on estimations for the year (based on 2024 expenses). The Finance & Stewardship Committee and the Church Council will continue to monitor the budget, understanding that some of the estimates may need adjusting. As always, we all seek to be good and wise *stewards* of all the gifts collected for our church’s needs and ministries!

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- The congregational also voted to suspend Article V of the Church Bylaws in order to allow Church Council to reorganize its leadership model over the 2025 calendar year. The current plan is to move away from electing “at large” council members, and replace that with council members who serve as representatives and liaisons for: Worship, Education, House & Grounds, Outreach/Events; and Finance & Stewardship. As we discussed at the congregational meetings, council members will not take over these committees and ministries, but they will serve to represent these areas and encourage communication and growth.
- January 2025 Budget Update:
 - Offerings & revenue: \$10,785 (includes \$4,000 in grant funds)
 - Expenses: \$10,590.59 (includes annual \$2,448 website payment)
 - *Thank you for your generosity!* As we’ll explore in February, every gift is a meaningful one at this church. Every gift opens doors for sharing the unconditional and inclusive love of God in word and deed!
 - **If you would like to consider planned giving, look at the next page for some ideas that might be useful for you.**

Service:

- Giving back to the community:
 - Liberty House:
 - Monthly meal preparation and sharing; benefitting U.S. Veterans between homes and jobs.
 - Service Sunday:
 - Monthly bagged lunches, benefitting our neighbors in need through the Upper Room (in coordination with our sibling congregation: St. Paul’s UCC).
 - Ladies Outreach Ministry:
 - Continuous service to children and adults in need in the Erie area.
- **Education:**
 - Our mid-week and special quarterly educational sessions were able to take a much-needed rest (*the cold and snow forced us to do so, as well*).
- **House & Grounds:**
 - Thank you to everyone who has helped us with the occasional maintenance need, as well as all who have helped to keep the facility looking beautiful. We are especially grateful for Tony Graff taking point on House & Grounds needs! As always, developing this team helps to make our physical ministries possible.
 - You don’t have to know about electricity, plumbing, or architecture to help! We always need those with an eye for decorating; those who have a hand at cleaning; and grounds crew who know how to keep our property well-maintained. Pray about joining, based on your skills!

Thank you, All,
Pastors Rich & Joy

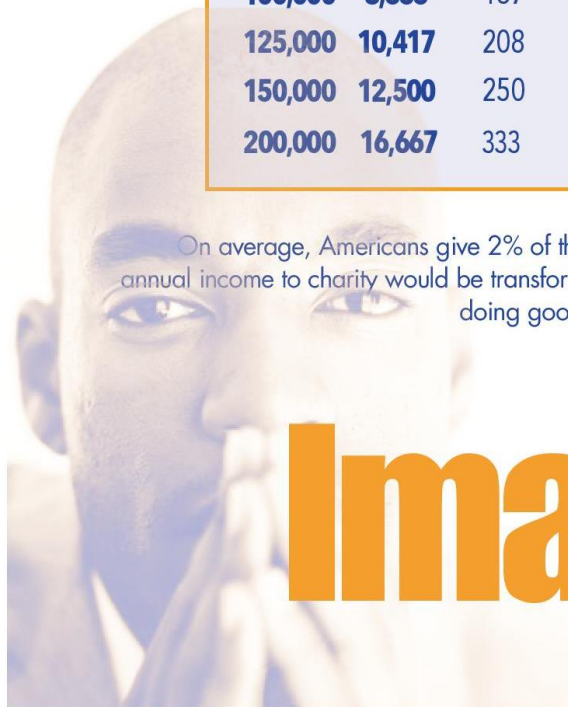
Curious about planned-giving?

As we consider our gifts of *time, talents, and resources*, the “resources” part has often been a difficult subject in churches. It goes without saying that some churches have approached finances from a place of shame or demand. We don’t do that. At Community United Church, we approach financial gifts as an invitation to help build the reign of God through our church. God doesn’t need money, but the world we live in requires us to work with it. So, following in the way of Christ, we invite people to give offerings of their own choosing—and from a place of faith and joy. Consider the guide below, prepared by the United Church of Christ, as you pray and think about planned giving for the year.

CONSIDER YOUR PLEDGE AS A PERCENT OF YOUR MONTHLY INCOME.

Annual Income	Monthly Income	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
20,000	1,667	33	50	67	83	167
25,000	2,083	42	63	83	104	208
30,000	2,500	50	75	100	125	250
35,000	2,917	58	88	117	146	292
40,000	3,333	67	100	133	167	333
45,000	3,750	75	113	150	188	375
50,000	4,167	83	125	167	208	417
60,000	5,000	100	150	200	250	500
75,000	6,250	125	188	250	313	625
100,000	8,333	167	250	333	417	833
125,000	10,417	208	313	417	521	1042
150,000	12,500	250	375	500	625	1250
200,000	16,667	333	500	667	833	1667

On average, Americans give 2% of their income to charity. Giving even 1% more of annual income to charity would be transformative for our congregation and other organizations doing good in our community.



Imagine Together