

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 23, 2025

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

Centering Music

“Sanctuary” #482

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
Pure and holy, tried and true;
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary—for you.
(Repeat)

Invocation

One: Holy and loving God, before the creation of the world, you had knowledge of each one of us. Through Christ, you have called us onto the pathway of redemptive love. By your Spirit, you are making us to be the Body of Christ—in this time, and in this place.

All: **You have invited us to dream great dreams, O God. Your Holy Wisdom is moving within us to discern our future. We affirm that your power can do far more than what we can ask for, or even imagine. In this time of worship, we ask you to make even more clear the pathway of our future. Grant us the faith to believe and the gifts of generosity to do your will. Amen!**

* Opening Hymn “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” #71 Vv. 1-3

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,
Join me in glad adoration!

Praise to the Lord, above all things so wonderfully reigning;
Sheltering you under his wings, and so gently sustaining!
Have you not seen—all that is needful has been
Sent by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you:
Surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
Ponder anew—what the Almighty can do,
If with his love he befriends you.

***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

The Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "[God] scatters abroad; he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your partnership with them and with all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Responsorial

Psalm 24

One: The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it, for God has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

All: Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in God's holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false and do not swear deceitfully.

One: They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from the God of their salvation.

All: Such is the company of those who seek God, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. 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 Lesson**

Matthew 7:24-29

[Jesus proclaimed:] “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these words, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes.

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

“Through it All” #452

Through it all, through it all,
I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, I’ve learned to trust in God;
Through it all, through it all,
I’ve learned to depend upon God’s Word.

(Repeat)



Message

*Imagine Together, Part 4:
Manifesting Our Future*

Pastor Rich

Song of Response

“One Bread, One Body” #689

Chorus:

*One bread, one body, one Lord of all, one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many—throughout the earth.
We are one body in this one Lord.*

*Gentile or Jew, servant or free,
Woman or man, no more. (Chorus)*

*Many the gifts, may the works,
One in the Lord—of all. (Chorus)*

*Grain for the fields, scattered and grown,
Gather to one—for all. (Chorus)*

COMMUNION LITURGY

Pastor: People of God, our discernment for the future comes from Holy Wisdom, revealed to us 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

“I Love You, Lord”

Kelly & Cheryl

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:

- 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.

Many church growth leaders say that just 1% giving can be transformational. Please see the last page of the bulletin for planned giving ideas.



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*

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, through Christ you call all disciples to proclaim and live the good news of the Gospel. By your Holy Spirit, you make us to be the Body of Christ on Earth. In one accord, we boldly affirm our shared calling and our shared mission as Community United Church, the church you are still making.

All: Christ, with you as our rock, we firmly stand. Spirit, with your gifts, we have the power to do far more than what we can ask for, or even imagine. God, with your blessing we can—and we will—live into our future: a church renewed, a church triumphant in the power of love. Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn

“We Are God’s People” #547

We are God’s people, the chosen of the Lord,
Born of God’s Spirit, established by his Word;
Our cornerstone is Christ alone, and strong in him we stand:
O let us live transparently, and walk heart in heart and hand in hand.

We are God’s loved ones, the Bride of Christ our Lord,
For we have known it, the love of God outpoured;
Now let us learn how to return the gift of love once given:
O let us share each joy and care, and live with a zeal that pleases Heaven.

We are the Body of which the Lord is Head,
Called to obey him, now risen from the dead;
He wills us be a family, diverse yet truly one:
O let us give our gifts to God, and so shall his work on earth be done.

We are a temple, the Spirit’s dwelling place,
Formed in great weakness, a cup to hold God’s grace;
We die alone, for on its own each ember loses fire:
Yet joined in one the flame burns on to give warmth and light, and to inspire.

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



Next Week:

The Last Week of Epiphany

The Transfiguration

Readings to Study:

Exodus 34:29-35

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Psalm 99

Luke 9:28-36

Theme:

Christ Transfigured, the Church Transfigured:

For the Ministries Ahead

***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 celebration of Lorre Rapp's Birthday on Feb. 18—from Kathy Koziol.

UPCOMING EVENTS IN FEBRUARY & MARCH:

February 2 – 28, 2025: *Imagine Together – Church Growth and Stewardship Series*
February 23: Imagine Together, Part 4: Manifesting our Future

Church and the Paranormal:

February 23: Winter Monsters with Josh Mizikowski, 12:45 PM

The Ladies Outreach Ministry:

February 25: Brown Bag Lunch in Fellowship Hall, 12:00 PM

March 2, 2025: Transfiguration Sunday, 11:00 AM

March 5, 2025: Ash Wednesday, 6:30 PM

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:

Pat Czytuck, 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, Toni Stevenson, Dave Woledge, Ev Smith, Karis Fenton, Ruth Schmidt, Carol & Doug Rodgers, Jane Moran, Josh Cook & Danny Kaeberlein, The Vadzemnieks Family, Doug Moore, Reverend Susan Strouse & Reverend Barbara Peronteau, and John & Tina Schnarrs

Current Council Members:

Mike Pruzinsky (President), Debbie Anderson (Vice President), Melanie Vadzemnieks (Treasurer), Nancy Alberico (Secretary), Janice Skelly, Angel Conrad, Michele Vahey, Justin Graff, and Mark Davis

Need to contact our Council President? Please email at: mpruzinsky@icloud.com

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Imagine Together: What Might Generosity Look Like for You?

By Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson

When I was a first-year student at Union Theological Seminary in New York, I had world renowned theologian Dr. James Cone as my professor for Systematic Theology. In our first class I remember him saying: "We all do theology. Theology is God-talk." A theology of money is God-talk about money.

Conversations about money are taboo in our society. We reluctantly talk about the cost of items we purchase; we are hushed in our conversations about money; and silent in discussing our investments or what we earn. Money is a topic which creates discomfort for many, with most not knowing how to ask for what is needed or what is owed. If our conversations about money are challenging, then finding our way to God-talk on the subject could be even more challenging.

Such a theology starts with how we understand God present and with us in our lives and in the world around us. The prophet Malachi taught a theology of money that says God will bless what is given. The blessing is on the giver and on what is given. The tithe in this case is the expectation of giving. God is present blessing what is given back to God for use in the house of God. Malachi resonates an expectation that one will give back to God regularly and in line with the expectations of the religious order of his day. This is one way to think about money and how we give. There are others.

A theology of money continues with a clear-eyed understanding of how much money we have. If I am giving a portion of what I have, then I should be knowledgeable about what my financial obligations are, including my desire to give in supporting the mission and ministries of the church. Whether investing, spending, or giving we should pay attention to what we have, in order to give from what we have whether a tenth, or another fraction, or amount of our choosing. When we give value and meaning to what we have, we give from abundance rather than from scarcity, from knowledge rather than fear.

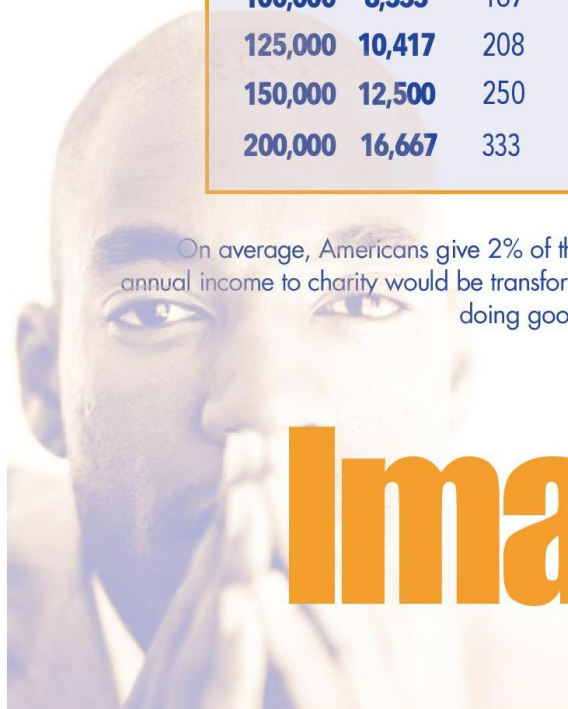
Curious about planned-giving?

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