

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 9, 2025

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

Centering Music

“Step by Step” #494

O God, you are my God, and I will ever praise you.
O God, you are my God, and I will ever praise you.
I will seek you in the morning, and I will learn to walk in your ways;
And step by step you'll lead me, and I will follow you all of my days.
(Repeat)

Invocation

One: Holy and loving God, you created us to be co-creators with you through the powers of imagination, dreams, and visions. From our dreams you call us onto the path of discernment, to know the way to go.

All: **Spirit of God, grant us wisdom and a shared sense of who you are calling us to be, as this church, in this time—through Jesus Christ, the One whose power is at work within us. Amen.**

* Opening Hymn “Christ the Eternal Lord” #335 Vv. 1-2, 4

Christ the eternal Lord—whose promise here we claim,
Whose gifts of grace are freely poured on all who name your Name;
With thankfulness and praise we stand before your throne,
Intent to serve you all our days and make your glory known.

Christ the unchanging Word—to every passing age,
Whose timeless teachings still are heard set forth on scripture's page;
Transform our thought and mind, enlighten all who read,
Within your word by faith to find the bread of life indeed.

Christ the unfading Light—of everlasting day,
Our morning star in splendor bright, the Life, the Truth, the Way;
That light of truth you give to servants as to friends,
Your way to walk, your life to live, till earth's brief journey ends.



***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 Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 29:11-13

¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

Responsorial

Psalm 119:33-38, 41-50

One: Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

All: Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

One: Turn my heart to your decrees and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; be gracious to me according to your word.

All: I find delight in your commandments because I love them. I revere your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes. 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 Lessons

Matthew, Luke, and John

Matthew 25:31-40

[Jesus said these words:]“When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’”

Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

John 10:14-16

[And Jesus said:] "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

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 "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" #489

Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
Send us love, send us power, send us grace.

(Repeat all)



Message

*Imagine Together, Part 2:
Discerning the Vision*

Pastor Rich

Chorus:

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

When I feel afraid, think I’ve lost my way, still you’re there right beside me.

And nothing will I fear as long as you are near.

Please be near me to the end.

(Chorus)

I will not forget your love for me, and yet my heart forever is wandering.

Jesus, be my guide and hold me to your side;

And I will love you to the end.

(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.

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?

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

Offering & Offertory

"You'll Never Walk Alone"

John Driscoll

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, we believe that your Holy Wisdom is stirring in each one of us to discern where your Spirit is leading us into our future.

All: Grant us the faith, hope, and love that will empower us to become all that you are making us to be. Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” #496

What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning—leaning on the everlasting arms.*

O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning—leaning on the everlasting arms.*

What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning—leaning on the everlasting arms.*



**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:

1 Corinthians 12:1-14

Psalm 95:1-7

Mark 12:41-44

Theme:

Imagine Together, Part 3:

We Have Everything That We Need

***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 Kathy Koziol's mother birthday and sisters' birthday, Peg and Ellen!

UPCOMING EVENTS IN FEBRUARY:

February 2 – 23, 2025: *Imagine Together – Church Growth and Stewardship Series*
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

February 12, 2025: *This week's midweek opportunities to connect, learn, serve, and worship*
7:00 PM Spirits & Spirituality Location: TBD

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:

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, Peyton Lily, Toni Stevenson, Dave Woledge, 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:

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



Imagine Together: Vitality

Shared by the United Church of Christ

Nicodemus, initially criticized by Jesus, gradually evolves into a vibrant follower. His narrative highlights the importance of spiritual curiosity in maintaining vitality, addressing the tendency for stagnation and fear of change.

How could a commitment to curiosity be transformative for us?

The Covid pandemic forced churches to explore new ways of ministry. However, in this post-pandemic moment, many return to familiar patterns of the past. Have we lost our ability to experiment?

The story of Nicodemus serves as a model for gradual transformation, contrasting with more dramatic biblical conversions. As Rev. Dr. S. Chapin Garner notes, *“Curiosity led Nicodemus from darkness to light, from ignorance to understanding, from stagnation to vitality. If we want to not only imagine but experience vitality, all we need to do is steward our natural God-given curiosity. Accept invitations. Explore new places. Get to know different people. And when the spirit within us is piqued...trust that prompting is from the Lord, and get excited to not only imagine, but experience, where we will be led!”*

Embracing curiosity can be the key to experiencing and maintaining vitality.

How can we steward curiosity in our congregation?

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