



# Welcome

ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR

**Sunday,**

**June 30, 2024**

**10:00 AM**

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**Sixth Sunday after  
Pentecost**

**Service of Farewell  
and Thanksgiving for  
the Ministry of  
Reverend Richard  
Lanford**





# Welcome to Worship!

**SUNDAYS @ 10:00AM**

**In-person Worship.** Masks and distance recommended, not required

**Livestream on YouTube.** Live at 10am then available on our channel

**"The Redheaded Preacher" Podcast.** Available wherever you get your podcasts, includes sermon and scriptures only, posted weekly by Tuesday



## Ways to Give

**Text Your Gift.** Text your gift to [844-977-2346](tel:844-977-2346)

After a short set-up the first time, simply text your gift amount

**Use PayPal.** [PayPal.me/stpeteruccskokie](https://www.paypal.com/merchot/display?host=stpeteruccskokie)

**Send a Check.** Mail to the address below ... this way still works fine

**Set up Vanco.** Contact the church office to enroll in regular giving



## Open Communion

**All Christians** and seekers after God are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper with us the **first Sunday of every month** and special Holy Days (Christmas, Maundy Thursday, and Easter). **At-home Communion** participants are invited to provide their own elements and join when Pastor bids you, "take, eat, and drink."



## About St. Peter's UCC

We've been in the heart of downtown Skokie since 1867. We are a part of the United Church of Christ, which means we are passionate about our faith and open in our thinking. We believe in a Triune God who **loves everyone**, regardless of gender identity, orientation, race, status, or physical or mental ability, and we **joyously welcome all people** to share worship, membership, marriage, baptism, funeral, and fellowship with us.



## Contact, Follow, or Talk to Us

**Rev. Richard Lanford (Pastor):** [revlanford@gmail.com](mailto:revlanford@gmail.com)

In the office Wed-Sat (times vary) and Sundays

**Laura Olson (Office Manager):** [office@stpeteruccskokie.org](mailto:office@stpeteruccskokie.org)

Office hours Mon-Fri 9am to 2pm

**Ben Westphal (Music Director):** [bcwestphal@gmail.com](mailto:bcwestphal@gmail.com)

**Facebook/Instagram/YouTube:** [stpeteruccskokie](https://www.facebook.com/stpeteruccskokie)

**Website:** [www.stpeteruccskokie.org](http://www.stpeteruccskokie.org)

*Like, follow, or join our email list for up-to-date info about events and activities!*



**8013 Laramie Avenue, Skokie, IL 60077 | 847-673-8166**

**St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Skokie**  
**Order of Worship for**  
**Sunday, June 30, 2024 at 10:00am**  
**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

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*Welcome to worship. The music before the service is intended as a time of silent prayer and preparation.*

**PRELUDE** Selected

**THE RINGING OF THE BELLS**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** Peggy Reins

*Will those who are able please stand up*

**CALL TO WORSHIP** *Psalm 100*

**P:** Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

**C:** **Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God's presence with singing.**

**P:** Know that the Lord is God. It is God who made us, and we are the Lord's;

**C:** **We are God's people, and the sheep of His pasture.**

**P:** Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.

**C:** **Give thanks to the Sovereign one, bless God's name. For the Lord is good; God's steadfast love endures forever,**

**A:** **And His faithfulness to all generations. Let us praise our God!**

# RESPONSE "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord" SSB #1 (repeat)

*Descant*  
Sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.

*Unison*  
Sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord. Sing hal-le-

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff is a descant for the Pastor, starting with a rest and then playing a melodic line. The middle and bottom staves are for the Congregation and All, playing in unison. The lyrics are 'Sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.' and 'Sing hal-le-'.

Sing hal-le-lu-jah, hal-le-lu-

lu-jah to the Lord. Sing hal-le-lu-jah, sing hal-le-

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff continues the descant. The middle and bottom staves continue the unison accompaniment. The lyrics are 'Sing hal-le-lu-jah, hal-le-lu-' and 'lu-jah to the Lord. Sing hal-le-lu-jah, sing hal-le-'.

1 2  
jah; sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.

1 2  
lu-jah. Sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff has two endings, labeled 1 and 2. The middle and bottom staves also have two endings. The lyrics are 'jah; sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.' and 'lu-jah. Sing hal-le-lu-jah to the Lord.'.

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

**P:** “For all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Paul wrote;

**C:** **And when the prodigal son returned, Jesus said, the father threw a party, grounded in joy and forgiveness for his return home.**

**A:** **Let us then turn from and admit our sin, that we may know again the grace of God!**

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**A:** **Great and loving God, You alone know how we have sought to be loving and honest, caring for the least of these and not wandering far from You or Your ways.**

**P:** Yet we confess this is only part of our story. It’s in our nature to go our own way, to follow Your will when it’s convenient or easy, but not so much when it’s inconvenient or requires considerable sacrifice. We let other voices entice us away and our link with You is weakened without us even being aware of it for a while. We have not followed Proverbs 31 and become a voice for the voiceless and defended the rights of the poor and needy. In a word, we have not been as faithful as we think. There have been times I as Pastor have also committed sins. Forgive us.

**C:** **There are good things You wanted us to do or say, and we did not do them or say them. There are things we said and did which grieve You, and we chose to do or say them anyway. We struggle to love those who do not love us, and often withhold forgiveness while expecting it for ourselves. There**

have been times we as a congregation have sinned.  
**Forgive us.**

**A: Forgive us these, and any and all other ways we have grieved Your Holy Spirit! Create in us new hearts, after Yours; for it is in the name of Jesus Christ we humbly pray. Amen.**

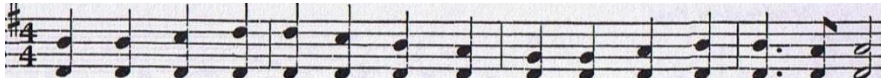
**ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *First John 4:9-11*

P: “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”


It should not surprise us, this Sunday or any Sunday, to hear again that God’s love is our salvation. God’s love as shown in Jesus Christ crucified and risen is our salvation. And that God expects us to also love freely, with God’s grace within us and among us. In response to the spectacular and enduring good news, please join me in acclamation, saying . . .

**A: Alleluia! Thanks be to God! Amen!**

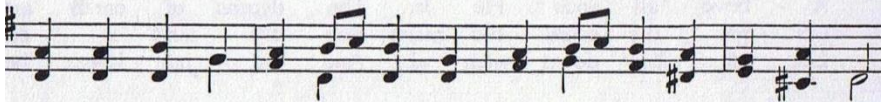
## HYMN "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" #21 (vv. 1-3)




1. Joy - ful, joy - ful, we a - dore Thee, God of glo - ry, Lord of love  
 2. All Thy works with joy sur-round Thee, Earth and heaven re - flect Thy rays  
 3. Thou art giv - ing and for - giv - ing, Ev - er bless - ing, ev - er blest  
 4. Mor - tals, join the hap - py cho - rus Which the morn - ing stars be - gan

Hearts un - fold like flowers be - fore Thee, Open - ing to the sun a - bove  
 Stars and an - gels sing a - round Thee, Cen - ter of un - bro - ken prais  
 Well-spring of the joy of liv - ing, O - cean depth of hap - py rest!  
 Fa - ther love is reign - ing o'er us, Broth - er love binds man to man

Melt the clouds of sin and sad - ness, Drive the dark of doubt a - way  
 Field and for - est, vale and moun - tain, Flow - ery mead - ow, flash - ing sea,  
 Thou our Fa - ther, Christ our Broth - er, All who live in love are Thine  
 Ev - er sing - ing, march we on - ward, Vic - tors in the midst of strife

Giv - er of im - mor - tal glad - ness, Fill us with the light of day.  
 Chant - ing bird and flow - ing foun - tain, Call us to re - joice in Thee.  
 Teach us how to love each oth - er, Lift us to the Joy di - vine.  
 Joy - ful mu - sic leads us Sun - ward In the tri - umph song of life. A - ME



*The congregation may be seated*

## MISSION MOMENT

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Carolyn Van Til

Old Testament:

Genesis 1:26-28, 31

Epistle:

Philippians 4:10-14

## MUSICAL MEDITATION Selected

*Will those who are able please stand up*

### THE GOSPEL

Matthew 22:34-40; 25:31-46

## RESPONSE

### “Thy Word”

SSB #33



Text: Psalm 119:105. Amy Grant, b. 1960  
 Music: THY WORD. Michael W. Smith, b. 1957

Text and music © 1984 Word Music, Inc. (ASCAP) and Meadowgreen Music Co./ Bug and Bear Music (ASCAP), admin. EMI Christian Music Publishing



*The congregation may be seated*

## **PASTORAL AND SILENT PRAYERS**

### **OFFERTORY INTRODUCTION**

P: We bring our offerings, not to win God's favor, but to express our thanks. We give because we cannot truly live if we only receive. We give because it will help us to continue moving forward during this upcoming time of change. It is our privilege to respond to God's mercy by doing good with the resources entrusted to us. Let us give with gratitude and joy.

### **OFFERTORY**

*If you donate electronically, feel free to place a yellow "Electronic Giving" card into the plate as it comes around so you can enjoy participating in the physical act of giving.*

### **RESPONSE**

"The Doxology

#551

**A: Praise God from whom all blessings flow!**

**Praise God all creatures here below!**

**Praise God above, you heavenly host!**

**Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost! Amen.**

*The congregation may be seated*

### **SERMON**

"A Posture of Soul"

Will those who are able please stand up

## HYMN "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

SSB #2



1 Great is thy faith - ful - ness, O God my Fa - ther; there is no  
 2 Sum - mer and win - ter and spring - time and har - vest, sun, moon, and  
 3 Par - don for sin and a peace that en - dur - eth, thine own dear



shad - ow of turn - ing with thee; thou chang - est not, thy com -  
 stars in their cours - es a - bove join with all na - ture in  
 pres - ence to cheer and to guide; strength for to - day and bright



pas - sions they fail not; as thou hast been, thou for - ev - er wilt be.  
 man - i - fold wit - ness to thy great faith - ful - ness, mer - cy, and love.  
 hope for to - mor - row, bless - ings all mine, with ten thou - sand be - side!

### Refrain



Great is thy faith - ful - ness! Great is thy faith - ful - ness! Morn - ing by



morn - ing new mer - cies I see; all I have need - ed thy



hand hath pro - vid - ed; great is thy faith - ful - ness, Lord, un - to me.

Text: Thomas O. Chisholm, 1866-1960

Music: FAITHFULNESS, William M. Runyan, 1870-1957

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## SERVICE OF FAREWELL

### GREETING

*Church President Peggy Reins:*

Our church family is constantly changing.

People come and go. Babies are born. Children grow up.

People commit themselves to one another.

Loved ones and friends among us come to the end of their lives.

Individuals move into our community and church life.

Others leave us, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities.

It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with Beth and Pastor Richard Lanford, who are leaving.

### REMEMBRANCE AND RECOGNITION

*Rev. Harriet Dart:*

On March 29th, 1992, Saint Peter's United Church of Christ called the Rev. Richard Allen Lanford to serve as Pastor and Teacher. He began such service on July 1st of that year.

*Pastor Richard:*

I thank St. Peter's United Church of Christ, its members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown me these last 32 years. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made. I am grateful for the ways my leadership

has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

**C: We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave to explore new paths. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask your forgiveness for our mistakes. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

*Pastor Richard:*

**I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.**

## **VOWS OF RELEASE**

*All who are able may stand for these or similar words.*

*Rev. Dart addressing the congregation*

Do you, the members and friends of Saint Peter's United Church of Christ, release Richard Lanford from the duties of Pastor and Teacher of this congregation?

**C: We do, with the help of God.**

*Rev. Dart*

Do you offer your encouragement for his ministry as it unfolds in new ways?

**C: We do, with the help of God.**

*Rev. Dart addressing the authorized minister*

Do you, Richard, release this local church from turning to you and depending on you?

*Pastor Richard*

I do, with the help of God.

*Rev. Dart*

Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and on the relationship with another who will come to serve?

*Pastor Richard:*

I do, with the help of God.

## **WITNESS OF THE ASSOCIATION / CONFERENCE**

*Church officers come forward.*

*Rev. Dart:*

On behalf of the Illinois Conference, the Chicago Metropolitan Association, and the United Church of Christ, I witness to the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. The member churches of our association and conference hold each of you in prayer. We pledge our support in the transitions signified in this service.

*Officers:*

Thanks be to God.

**PRAYER**

**A: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ the Head of the Church we pray. Amen.**

**BENEDICTION**

*The congregation may be seated*

**THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER****Exhortation and Invitation****Sursum Corda:**

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: *And also with you.***

P: Lift up your hearts!

**C: *We lift them up to the Lord!***

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**C: *It is right to give God thanks and praise.***

**Prayer of Thanksgiving and Consecration****The Words of Institution****Participation**

## **CLOSING PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**A: 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, and the power, and the  
glory forever. Amen.**

Will those who are able please stand up

# HYMN "They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love"

SSB #14

Guitar capo: 1; play Em  
Unison



1. We are one in the Spir - it, we are one in the Lord,  
 2. We will walk with each oth - er, we will walk hand in hand,  
 3. We will work with each oth - er, we will work side by side,  
 4. All praise to the Fa - ther, from whom all things come,



we are one in the Spir - it, we are one in the Lord,  
 we will walk with each oth - er, we will walk hand in hand,  
 we will work with each oth - er, we will work side by side,  
 and all praise to Christ Je - sus, God's on - ly Son,



and we pray that all u - ni - ty may one day be re - stored:  
 and to - geth - er we'll spread the news that God is in our land:  
 and we'll guard each one's dig - ni - ty and save each one's pride:  
 and all praise to the Spir - it, who makes us one:

Refrain C G C G Em Am



And they'll know we are Chris - tians by our love, by our love,



yes, they'll know we are Chris - tians by our love.



**CHARGE**

P: Act with faith;  
 Believe, with humility;  
 Love one another,  
 And love those whom nobody loves;  
 Serve the Lord.

**BENEDICTION** *Romans 15:13*

P: And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us go in the peace of Christ. Amen.

**C: Amen!**

**POSTLUDE**

Selected

*The music after the service is intended as a time of reflection. Pastor will be pleased to greet you at the Sanctuary doors as soon as the postlude has concluded, and our livestream has stopped.*

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**FOR WORSHIP TODAY**


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MINISTER	Rev. Richard Lanford
MUSIC DIRECTOR	Ben Westphal
DEACON	Beth Sterba
LIVESTREAM RECORDING	Jenn Schneider
NURSERY ATTENDANT	Kathy Zipperer

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# Impact of the LGBTQIA+ Acronym

LGBT and related acronyms have become widely used in recent years. It has also played a role in raising the visibility of marginalized groups, including transgender individuals.

Research suggests that while attitudes have shifted towards greater acceptance, LGBTQ+ people still face considerable homophobia and discrimination. Harassment, bullying, and workplace discrimination are not uncommon.

One advantage of utilizing a unified terminology is the ability to engage in political advocacy. Social solidarity can be used to improve visibility, combat discrimination, and advance causes including anti-discrimination and equality laws.

Unifying terms like LGBTQIA+ can help people feel connected to a larger group of people with shared experiences. But the term can sometimes seem to imply that there is a single, homogenous group when there are actually many individual communities made up of diverse individuals. These communities have some things in common, but each identity has its own unique experiences and needs.

## Challenges

While the goal of this initialism is to raise visibility and boost inclusivity, not everyone agrees about what term or variation to use. The community has been referred to by many words over the years, including many that were intended to be hurtful. So it's not unusual that the self-descriptors that people use can vary, particularly when it comes to issues related to self-expression, sexuality, and identity.

LGBT is still prevalent in use and may be preferred by some who feel that the four-letter acronym is a simpler way to represent a wide range of identities.

Others may feel left out from the standard four initials, which is why the addition of Q, I, A, and "Plus" can be helpful.

This doesn't mean that terminology won't continue to evolve and shift, particularly as people work to achieve greater representation and acceptance of transgender people especially.

# LGBTQIA+ Resources

If you are interested in learning about LGBTQIA+ issues, there are a number of resources available that can help.

- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#)
- [National Center for Transgender Equality \(NCTE\)](#)

The goal of using more inclusive terms like LGBTQIA+ is to improve visibility, recognition, and acceptance. It is important to remember that LGBTQIA+ people continue to face discrimination. Transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, in particular, are frequently the target of social and economic marginalization as well as harassment and violence.

Terms and definitions are always evolving. When it comes to something as personal as sexuality and gender identity, these terms and definitions can mean different things to different people. While working to understand and use terms such as LGBTQIA+ can help increase the visibility of people who have faced marginalization and discrimination, it is important to remember that the most important labels or definitions are the ones that people give to themselves.

If you are seeking support for issues with coming out, relationships, bullying, self-harm, and more, contact the [LGBT National Hotline](#) at **1-888-843-4564** for one-to-one peer support.

For more mental health resources, see our [National Helpline Database](#).

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our [editorial process](#) to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

1. Intersex Society of North America. [What Is Intersex?](#)
2. Gold M. [The ABCs of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+](#). *The New York Times*.
3. GLAAD. [Media reference guide](#).
4. Clayton JA, Tannenbaum C. [Reporting sex, gender, or both in clinical research?](#) *JAMA*. 2016;316(18):1863–1864. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.16405
5. Hadland SE, Yehia BR, Makadon HJ. [Caring for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth in inclusive and affirmative environments](#). *Pediatr Clin North Am*. 2016;63(6):955-969. doi:10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.001
6. Higa D, Hoppe MJ, Lindhorst T, et al. [Negative and positive factors associated with the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning \(LGBTQ\) youth](#). *Youth Soc*. 2014;46(5):663-687. doi:10.1177/0044118X12449630
7. GLAAD. [Where are we on TV report - 2019](#).
8. OECD. [The LGBT challenge: How to better include sexual and gender minorities?](#) *Society at a Glance 2019: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. 2019. doi:10.1787/c64c3d3f-en
9. Stotzer RL. [Data sources hinder our understanding of transgender murders](#). *Am J Public Health*. 2017;107(9):1362-1363. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2017.303973

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# News in the Pews

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**“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies ... are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23, NRSV). Let us worship our ever-faithful God. We welcome you to Pastor Richard Lanford’s last service at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ.**

**Welcome to our guest pianist this morning, Katrina Sudman!** We are glad to have you, as Ben Westphal is leaving today with Charlie for their delayed honeymoon. Katrina will also sub next Sunday, July 7th. Thank you!

**We also welcome Associate Conference Minister the Rev. Harriet Dart** to this morning’s service! She represents the Illinois Conference for the Service of Farewell and Release and we are grateful she is able to be here today! Thank you!

**About Communion:** All Christians and seekers after God are invited in to partake of the Lord’s Supper here regardless of denominational background. We practice open Communion. We do, however, ask our own St. Peter’s U.C.C. young folk to first go through the Communicants Class (6th grade). The servers will bring the bread to you in the pews (there are gluten free wafers in protective plastic) and we will partake at the Pastor’s prompting. Then the servers will bring the fruit of the vine; grape juice is in one half of the tray; wine is in the other designated half. Again we partake at the Pastor’s prompting, and the cups go into the cup racks connected to the pews.

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**Rummage Sorting begins in July!** Gym set up will begin July 8<sup>th</sup> starting at 10AM. Sorting times will be Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:30PM and Friday from 10AM to 2PM. More details in the upcoming August Announcer.

**Keep Our Sunday School Mission Project Going!** On the last Sunday of every month our Sunday school families have been donating food items for St. Peter's mini food pantry. Please help us to continue our collection during the summer months by making the last Sunday of the month a focus for your mini pantry donations. We will have bins conveniently placed to receive your donations. Thank you for your generous support!

**Lanford Celebration Fund** – we have not yet met our goal of covering the full cost of the banquet and gift, please donate if you can! You can drop-off, mail or put in the offering a check with a note on your check or envelope that the funds should be directed to the “Lanford Fund.”

**Pastor and Beth Lanford want to extend their sincere and heartfelt thanks** for all the cards, well-wishes, and gifts they've received at, and after, the Spaghetti Dinner! Thank you to everyone, as both the Lanfords and Saint Peter's part company upon his retirement.

**Pastor's new editions to the podcast will come to a close this week** with this Sunday's entry being the last, but the service will remain open through November, when our membership subscription expires. After that only the last six hours will be freely maintained and available.

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# Our People

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**Jane Abramchik remains at the McGaw Care Center / Frank Murdough Pavilion, 3200 Grant Street, Room 333, Evanston, IL, 60201. Dorene Schurman remains in hospice care in Ohio. Please keep them in your prayers.**

**Thanks to all who donated money to, and served yesterday at, the Community Kitchen of A Just Harvest! Our next turn to serve is Saturday, August 31st.**

**Having birthdays or anniversaries this week are** Kristine Hoellerich, Randy Altmayer, Ann Aler, Mandy (Taheny) McDonald, Mike Taheny, Judy Paige's grandson Danny Mahoney, Nancy Lindroth and Sandy Piper. Linda and Bruce Mau celebrate their wedding anniversary! We wish God's blessings on all of them.

**According to the schedule, barring any switches, next Sunday's Lector will be David Iannotti the Nursery Attendant will be Laurie M.**

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## CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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PRESIDENT	Peggy Reins
VICE-PRESIDENT	Ann Herren
TREASURER	Chad McCoy
SECRETARY	Annie Noorts
FINANCIAL SECRETARY	Maria Altmayer

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## Regular Reminders!

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**Let us know you were here!** Please sign the attendance sheet in the black pew pads and when you think your pew is ready, please pass the pad towards the center aisle of the church.

**Pantry Donations** – our Jewel Foods donations are starting to dwindle - we can always use more donations! They can be left on the shelves near the staircase by the office doors on Laramie Ave.

**We are always grateful for any and all offerings to the church.** No amount is too small! So many thanks to everyone who's been keeping us going with your donations! See inside the bulletin's front cover for details on how to donate.

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## **MISSION MOMENTS**

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**June 30, 2024**

**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**“Healing Powers”**

**Mark 5:21–43**

Today we celebrate the United Church of Christ’s commitment to growing into a fully Open and Affirming (ONA) fellowship, as we read a story of Jesus healing those who have been marginalized and outcast. Following Christ, the UCC has been a beacon for healing and hope for those pushed to the edges because of their sexual or gender identity.

“Beginning in 1969, the United Church of Christ has advocated for the LGBT community. From the campaign to decriminalize same-sex relationships to support for marriage equality, the UCC has made a difference in the lives of LGBT citizens and their families. The issues have changed over the decades, but the basic commitment to full inclusion and human rights remains the same...

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The ONA National Gathering this coming September is the family reunion of the Open and Affirming movement in the United Church of Christ! Members of any church—ONA or not-yet ONA—are welcome to attend. Expect a celebration with exuberant music, inspiring preaching, and workshops that will feed your mind and soul.

While the Religious Right and their allies in federal and state governments are renewing their attack on the basic civil liberties of LGBTQ Americans, and our international queer siblings are experiencing attacks and unconscionable laws, our growing community of churches needs to respond with confidence, commitment and faith.

This September's National Gathering will focus on how ONA churches can act faithfully in our current social and political climate. We'll learn best practices from vital and growing ONA churches. And, as is always true at our Gatherings, we'll explore the intersections of our movement with other movements for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.”

Find out more about how to register and at [openandaffirming.org](http://openandaffirming.org)

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**Genesis 1:26-28, 31**

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**Philippians 4:10-14**

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.

Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

**Matthew 22:34-40; 25:31-46**

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered

together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

**Matthew 25:31-46**

"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. 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, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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, 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.'

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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no

food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."