



MESH 10-16-19



www.parkwayucc.org
Sunday, October 17, 2021

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Limitless Love | Courageous Action | Spirited Inquiry

Purpose Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ strives to be an inclusive community embracing: spiritual nourishment, open—minded inquiry, courageous action, and interfaith partnerships to fulfill God’s calling to create a just world for all.

Congregational Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ, with God’s grace, seeks to be a congregation that includes all persons, regardless of race, ethnic, or socio—economic background while respecting differences of gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability. We aspire to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We invite all to share in the life and leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of participation in our open and affirming congregation.

PARKWAY UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

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John Nourse, *Pastor Emeritus*

Welcome to Parkway

Thank you for joining us this morning. Please let us know you are here by commenting in the chat.

Today's flowers are given in celebration of Brad Lyons and Courtney Richards, married yesterday in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Lyons children: Blake, Summer, and Zoe.

Welcome Children. We invite children to full participation in worship.

Bell Rung During Lord's Prayer. A tradition begun when farmers working in surrounding fields would stop their work and join in prayer.

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Cover Art: Mona Herberg

Communications Requests: Please use the form at www.parkwayucc.org/communications for all announcements for the bulletin/eNews/website/social media/etc. Bulletin and eNews communications request deadline is noon Monday.

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Anniversaries

10/19 KLEINE, Kim & Steve (36)

Birthdays

10/17 MOHL, Mike

10/20 OSBORNE, Brandi

10/18 STOLZE, Matthew

10/22 HASLER, Cathy

10/19 OSBORNE, John

10/23 BROWN, Elizabeth

10/19 YANG, Jae

21st Sunday *after* Pentecost

Sunday, October 17, 2021 | 10:00am | Sanctuary & Facebook Live

Meditation *We aren't called to be like other Christians. We are called to be like Christ. ~Unknown*

Welcome Let us know you are here!

Passing the Peace of Christ

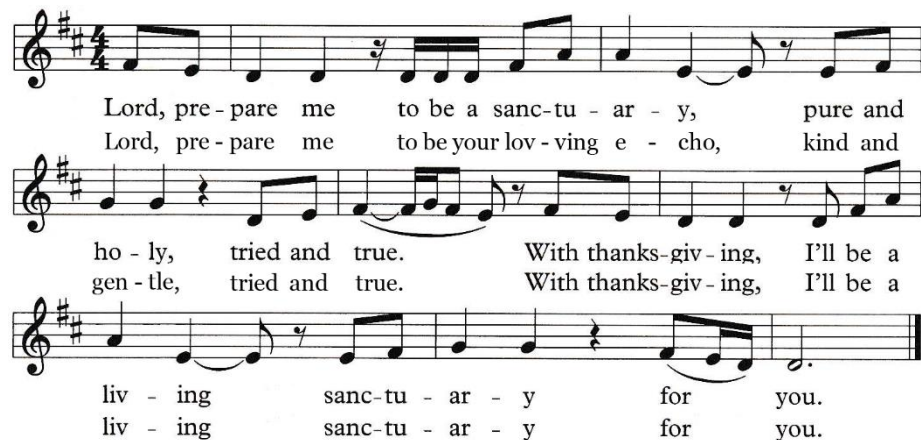
"May the peace of Christ be with you."

(We are intentional about bringing more peace into the world.)

Prelude

Lighting of the Candles & Ringing of the Bell

Welcome Song *Sanctuary*



Lord, pre - pare me to be a sanc - tu - ar - y, pure and
Lord, pre - pare me to be your lov - ing e - cho, kind and
ho - ly, tried and true. With thanks - giv - ing, I'll be a
gen - tle, tried and true. With thanks - giv - ing, I'll be a
liv - ing sanc - tu - ar - y for you.
liv - ing sanc - tu - ar - y for you.

Scripture Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c (CEB—Common English Bible)

Let my whole being bless the Lord! Lord my God, how fantastic you are!
You are clothed in glory and grandeur! You wear light like a robe; you open the skies like a curtain. You build your lofty house on the waters; you make the clouds your chariot, going around on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers; you make fire and flame your ministers. You established the earth on its foundations so that it will never ever fall. You covered it with the watery deep like a piece of clothing; the waters were higher than the mountains! But at your rebuke they ran away; they fled in fear at the sound of your thunder. They flowed over the mountains, streaming down the valleys to the place you established for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross so they'll never again cover the earth. Lord, you have done so many things! You made them all so wisely! The earth is full of your creations! Let my whole being bless the Lord! Praise the Lord!

*Call to Worship *Be Thou My Vision*

One:	Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart Naught be all else to me, save that thou art
Many:	Thou my best thought, by day or by night Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light
One:	Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord
Many:	Thou my great Creator, and I thy true child Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one
One:	Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise Thou mine inheritance, now and always
All:	Let us worship our God together—Creator, Christ and Spirit.

*Song *For the Beauty of the Earth*



1. For the beau-ty of the earth, For the glo-ry of the skies,
2. For the won-der of each hour Of the day and of the night,
3. For the joy of ear and eye, For the heart and mind's de-light,
4. For the joy of hu-man love, Broth-er, sis-ter, par-ent, child,
5. For Thy church that ev-er-more Lift-eth ho-ly hands a-bove,



For the love which from our birth O-ver and a-round us lies,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower, Sun and moon, and stars of light,
For the mys-tic har-mo-ny Link-ing sense to-sound and sight,
Friends on earth, and friends a-bove. For all gen-tle thoughts and mild,
Of-fering up on e-very shore Her pure sac-ri-fice of love,

Refrain



Lord of all, to Thee we raise This our hymn of grate-ful praise.

*Opening Prayer *Faith is Patience in the Night*

Faith is patience in the night, waiting for the morning light, never giving up the fight. Spirit God, give us faith.

Faith is laughter in our pain, joy in pleasures that remain, trust in one we can't explain. Spirit God, give us faith.

Faith is steadfast will to live, standing firm and positive, being ready still to give. Spirit God, give us faith.

Faith is courage under stress, confidence in hopelessness, greatest gift we can possess. Spirit God, give us faith. Amen.

***Response** *Spirit of the Living God*

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me;

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me!

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.

Children's Time Children are invited to Room 12 (Lower Level) and Youth to Room 15 (Lower Level) following this Children's Time. We will also be on Zoom for those at home. We continue to require masks for all.

Blessing the Children *Weave*

Weave, weave, weave us together

Weave us together in unity and love,

Weave, weave, weave us together

Weave us together, together in love.

Scripture Mark 10:35-44 (NRSV—New Revised Standard Version)

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Moment of Silent Reflection

Sermon

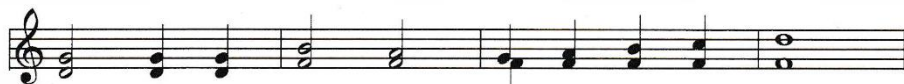
A Time of Prayer *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart, v3*



1. Spir - it of God, de - scend up - on my heart;
2. Hast Thou not bid us love Thee, God and King;
3. Teach me to feel that Thou art al - ways nigh;
4. Teach me to love Thee as Thine an - gels love,



Wean it from earth, through all its puls - es move;
All, all Thine own: soul, heart, and strength, and mind?
Teach me the strug - gles of the soul to bear,
One ho - ly pas - sion fill - ing all my frame;



Stoop to my weak - ness, might - y as Thou art,
I see Thy cross, there teach my heart to cling.
To check the ris - ing doubt, the reb - el sigh;
The bap - tism of the heav - en - de - scend - ed Dove,



And make me love Thee as I ought to love.
O let me seek Thee, and O let me find!
Teach me the pa - tience of un - an - swered prayer.
My heart an al - tar, and Thy love the flame.

Pastoral Prayer & Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer

Our [Creator/Mother/Father/Holy One] 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.

[A variety of names for God are welcome here – including in the Lord's Prayer.]

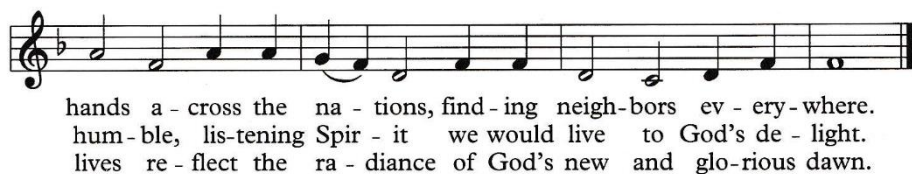
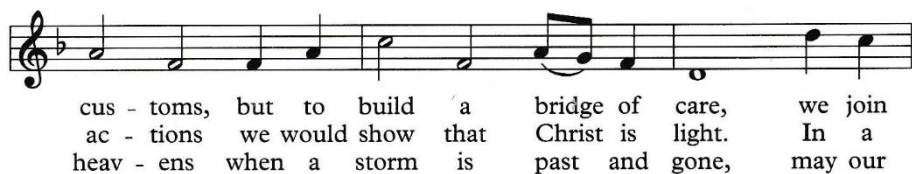
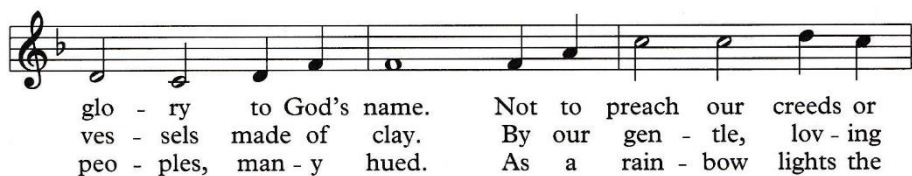
Song *As a Fire is Meant for Burning*



1. As a fire is meant for burn - ing with a bright and warm-ing
2. We are learn - ers; we are teach - ers; we are pil - grims on the
3. As a green bud in the spring-time is a sign of life re -



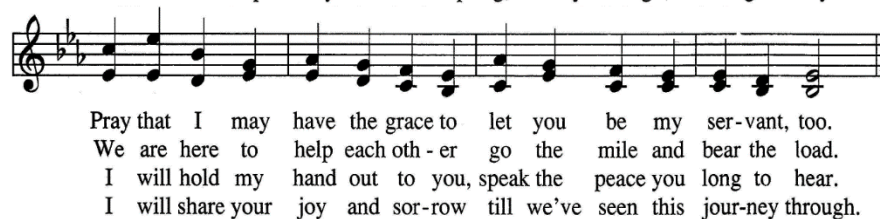
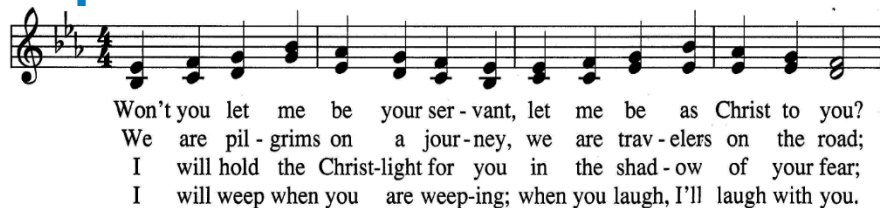
flame, so the church is meant for mis - sion, giv - ing
way. We are seek - ers; we are giv - ers; we are
newed, so may we be signs of one - ness 'mid earth's



Offering Our Gifts to God

Offering Interlude

*Response *Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant? v.1*



*Prayer of Dedication

God of new life, out of the abundance of our lives we offer these gifts to you. Through your blessing and our willingness to share, may these offerings become a source of hope and love in this church family, and in the community beyond us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Song of Parting



1. Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Chris-tian love:
2. Be - fore our Ma - ker's throne We pour our ar - dent prayers;
3. We share our mu - tual woes, Our mu - tual bur - dens bear,
4. From sor - row, toil, and pain, And sin we shall be free;



The fel - low - ship of kin - dred minds Is like to that a - bove.
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, Our com-forts and our cares.
And of - ten for each oth - er flows The sym - pa - thiz-ing tear.
And per - fect love and friend-ship reign Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

*Benediction

*God's Light Goes Forth

*Music for Going Forth

Announcements

Tuesday Afternoon Dialogue October 19

1st & 3rd Tuesdays | 1:45 Fellowship | 2:00pm book discussion | via ZOOM
Please join us as we begin a new book, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, a novel by Christy Lefteri. It is a story about the refugee experience, full of hope and very timely as we welcome immigrants into our city and nation. We will meet and discuss on October 5th, 19th, and November 2nd. Each meeting will cover about 100 pages, first through page 100, next pages 101-206, and lastly page 207 until the end. Fellowship starts at 1:45, and book discussion starts at 2.

Video: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83670617428?pwd=bUxPZEdDMlU4ay9oNndtWW4yZUYwUT09>

Join by phone: 312 626 6799 | **Meeting ID:** 836 7061 7428 | **Passcode:** 480007

Tuesday Evening Dialogue October 26

2nd & 4th Tuesdays | 6:45pm social time | 7:00pm Book discussion | via Zoom
We will be finishing up the book *Jesus and John Wayne* by Kristin Du Mez. Please read from Chapter 12 Pilgrim's Progress in Camo through to the end of the book. This book has been described as a sweeping revisionist history of the last 75 years of white evangelicalism, revealing how evangelicals have worked to replace the Jesus of the Gospels with an idol of rugged masculinity and Christian nationalism.

Video: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86172300024?pwd=bFdGQ0xKRHFGTnZXM0kyRC9FdDZGQT09;>

Meeting ID: 861 7230 0024 | (312) 626 6799 US | **Passcode:** BookClub

Loving our Neighbors at Thanksgiving

We look forward to sharing Thanksgiving with loved ones near and far. We will provide 200 1-pound bags/boxes of sugar for **Isaiah 58** families. Please consider donating one or two or more bags/boxes through 7 November. Place your sugar in the marked box in the church entryway.

Circle of Concern is also gearing up for their big Thanksgiving Basket Program for 700 families. Just like last year, we are committing to supplying 150 boxes of food items that will go alongside a turkey, frozen pie, fresh fruit, vegetables and a gift card from Aldi's. It would be helpful if your donation contained all eight items for the box, but all donations are appreciated. Items in each box: canned pumpkin, cranberry sauce, canned fruit, chicken broth, boxed stuffing mix, jar of turkey or chicken gravy, cornbread muffin mix, boxed mashed potatoes.

Many thanks for your kindness and generosity!

Candy! Candy! Help us send Halloween treats to our college students! We like to let them know we are thinking about them. There is a container marked Halloween Candy inside the front door of the church!

Also, we are planning an event in place of our Annual Trunk or Treat this year. It will be a community Outside Halloween Adventure.

Families will move with social distance and masks on around the church grounds. They will meet superheroes that will tell the children what their powers are and how they help people. We are asking for candy for this event as well. With all the uncertainty for kids again this year, we thought it was important to offer something for them at Halloween.

This event will be held next Sunday, October 24 from 5-6pm.

Thanks! Questions? Contact barbk@parkwayucc.org (314-872-9330)

The Parkway Speakers Series Presentations for Fall

Sundays | 11:15am | Heritage Room and ZOOM

October 17 | Heritage Room and YouTube: <https://youtu.be/-LxnC8fZvHI>

The Twists and Turns of the Law of Divorce in Missouri by Judge Tom Frawley. Divorce is the death of a dream you thought was going to last. If you have some insights into the law and the process, you may be more helpful and effective in offering care and empathy.

November 14 and 21

Critical Race Theory by David Spener, Professor of Sociology at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas and an adjunct professor in the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin. He teaches Critical Race Theory, a body of scholarship and an academic movement that seeks to critically examine the intersection of race and US law. (Youth are encouraged to attend too).

December 5

The Fall of County Executive Steve Stenger by Winston Calvert. Winston is a senior member of the current St. Louis County Executive's office. He observed the downfall of Stenger as it unfolded, and will share his views and observations, some of which may not generally be known by the public.

These presentations are currently scheduled in the Heritage Room following worship, as well as on Zoom. Some are live, others are prerecorded.

Prerecorded presentations will be televised in the Heritage Room and on Parkway's YouTube channel. Watch for changes as our season moves along.

Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84691476997?pwd=aEM2ZURYWURLNmkwD0EzV0VHVllyQT09> **Meeting ID:** 846 9147 6997 | **Passcode:** 181565 | **Dial** (312) 626-6799

Welcoming Afghans to St. Louis

The International Institute is grateful for the contributions from communities around St. Louis. They are overwhelmed by this generosity and currently need volunteers to help sort recent gifts from everyone. The Institute asks that future donations of goods not be dropped off at their location until September 9 to allow for sorting, organizing, and assessing future items most needed.

You can help by:

1. Signing up to volunteer for sorting current items. Shift times are listed on a link at www.iistl.org. Click on the Afghan SIVs banner for further information. The volunteer slots can be found at <https://iistl.volunteerlocal.com/volunteer/>

2. Donating: Visa gift cards, gas cards, gift cards for Aldi's, Target, Schnucks, Walmart, Jay's International, and monetary gifts to the International Institute.
3. Continue saving household items as International Institute gears up for current and arriving Afghans. Items can be placed in the church lobby and marked for later delivery to the Institute.

Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Crop Walk 2021

Sunday, October 24 | 4:30 check in | | 5:00pm walk | Eden Seminary: 475 E Lockwood Ave, Webster Groves MO 63119

The 2021 CROP HUNGER WALK will be a hybrid event. For those who feel safe gathering in person to walk together, we shall gather at Eden - check in 4:30PM and Walk at 5:00PM. However, participants may also register for the Walk, and they may choose to walk wherever and whenever they want or in small groups. For more details and to register, raise funds, and/or donate:

<https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/event/saintlouismo>

Type in Parkway UCC where you may join the team or make a donation

The CROP CONCERT will follow the CROP Walk at 7:00PM in the Wehrli Chapel at Eden Seminary Covid Precautions will be in place.

Contact Sue Moellering: susieqslp@sbcglobal.net

Walk to End Alzheimer's

Saturday, October 23 | 9:00am | The Enterprise Center

The Walk to End Alzheimer's is scheduled for Sat. Oct. 23, 2021. The Greater Missouri Chapter is moving forward with plans to host the walk in-person downtown outside the Enterprise Center. (Everything is outside.) The "Parkway Team" decided to meet at church at 10:00AM Saturday Oct. 23rd to walk on sidewalks to about Principia and back for our "Walk To End Alzheimer's." If you haven't already, please let Joyce Ruiz know you plan to walk with us, so we know who to expect here at church at 10:00AM.

The Parkway team page:

https://act.alz.org/site/Donation2?df_id=47035&PROXY_ID=667857&PROXY_TYPE=22&FR_ID=14598

Learn more by going to www.alz.org/help-support/resources or the Alzheimer's Helpline which is accessible 24/7 via 800-272-3900 and staffed by master's level clinicians to assist with crisis situations, decision making, and disease information. You can find virtual dementia caregiver resources online at alz.org/covid19help. Tools and support are also available in Spanish. Want to learn more about the Alzheimer's Association and what they do here in St. Louis? Visit alz.org and/or contact PUCC's Faith Outreach Ambassador with the Alzheimer's Association, Joyce Ruiz at joyceruiz7@gmail.com.

Outdoor Halloween Adventure

Sunday, October 24, 5:00-6:00pm

Travel around Parkway United Church grounds to meet masked Superheroes that will tell you their stories. Families stay together, physically distanced and

also wearing masks. Candy will be dropped into the children's bags with tongs. Costumes are welcome! Come and enjoy a Halloween Outside Adventure!

Halloween Yoga Sunday, October 31 | 11:15am

Angela Lamb is a certified Yoga instructor. She has been teaching yoga to children since 2017. She recently published a yoga lesson plan book so families could do her lessons at home to bond, relax and have fun. Her new book is called *Bonding with My Bunnies: Yoga Lesson Plans for Families & Children*. Here is the Barnes & Noble link for the book:

<https://m.barnesandnoble.com/w/bonding-with-my-bunnies-angela-lamb/1140007338>

On Halloween after service, she will be leading children in the Halloween Yoga lesson in her book which includes: a share circle, a kid friendly yoga practice and breathing exercise, yoga games and a final relaxation mindfulness exercise.

The whole family can join us for this fun, mindful, relaxing time. Please bring your yoga mat if you have one (or a beach towel works too).

Habitat for Humanity Volunteers Wanted

Sat, Nov 20 | 8:00am | 3400 Park Ave

The PUCC workday is scheduled. HFH is asking for 4 volunteers from our church. RSVP Tom McKenzie: mckenzie1947@att.net or 314-567-0429. The work site is the 3400 block of Park Ave, just East of Cardinal Glennon Hospital. Please make any financial contributions to: Habitat for Humanity Saint Louis | 3830 South Grand Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63118

PUCC Mental Health Training – Bridges to Care

In honor and memory of Tyler Wessel and Gloria Wandless, we have been accepted to participate in mental health training with other churches in St Louis. The program is called *Bridges to Care and Recovery* hosted by The Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis. The goals of the training are to reduce the stigma of mental illness in faith-based communities by equipping congregations to talk about behavioral health issues and increasing congregation participants' understanding and acceptance of behavioral health through training and education; establish partnerships between area mental health professionals that enable congregations to better access care and treatment; and equip congregations with tools needed to develop wellness ministries and volunteer companions for long-term sustainability.

We are looking for 5-7 PUCCers who would commit to this free training. This training is all virtual and runs from October - May... most months it is from 6-8pm on the third Thursday of the month beginning on October 21. If you would like to know more about this important opportunity/responsibility, please reach out to kevin@parkwayucc.org

The Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis is a collaborative effort of providers, advocacy organizations, government leaders and community members dedicated to developing an accessible and coordinated system of behavioral healthcare throughout the eastern region of Missouri.

<http://bhnstl.org/bridges-to-care-and-recovery>

Prayer List

as of Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Celebrations

All the acts of kindness, justice and equity near and far!

New Members yesterday: Barb Harris; Kari & Keith Borgmann; Doris McCarter and Jim & Linda Schwarz. WELCOME!

Indigenous Peoples Day - <https://apple.news/A2ATE7RBfSc-VM6J8IQf-GQ>

National Coming Out Day - <https://people.com/human-interest/national-coming-out-day-everything-you-need-to-know/>

Concerns

Sally Boughman - hospitalized after back injury; found heart concerns.

Family and friends of Carol Aston - grieving and giving thanks.

Marsha and David Peek – celebrating her mother Norma Pepmeier on Saturday, October 23 at 11am St Paul UCC, Waterloo IL

Mike and Lisa Mason - as they celebrate the life of Mike's father.

Jo Grove and family - grieving her niece in AR and aunt here in STL

Andrea and Steve Barnes - giving thanks for his Aunt Nan - she and her husband were directors of Heifer International.

Jim and Polly Winkelmann - healing for her spinal stress fracture and his shoulder after surgery.... Jim is at Ascension Living Sherbrooke Village for now – in the Lodge #310... 4005 Ripa Ave, St. Louis, MO 63125.

Dan & Kim, Ben/Henry/Davis Weas - Dan's cancer treatment.

Mona Herberg -kidney stone/stent removal, surgery to treat cancer.

Pat & Janet - his radiation/chemo treatment (Skip Larson's son-in-law)

John Pavlovitz - recovering from surgery to remove a brain tumor.

All impacted by Covid-19 - individuals, families, healthcare workers; If anyone needs support or if anyone vaccinated would like to be on the Care Team, please reach out to kevin@parkwayucc.org

Continuing

Cindy & Ralf and Andrew Wessel - grieving Tyler.

Skip Larson, Karen Nolte, Janet Prendergast - remembering Ellie.

Ruth Murray Memorial Service - <https://youtu.be/aZli-n7Omno>

Joan and Larry Brannigan - continuing health concerns for Larry.

Sr. Mary Kay McKenzie - living with stage 4 cancer (Tom's sis).

Val - healing of fractures in her back (Jim Winkelmann's mom).

Bob - continues to struggle with Parkinson's.

Christopher, Gail & Bill Haack - chronic health challenges.

Cherie & Mike Stolze - her health; her father's kidney disease.

Lori Connors - for strength, stamina through health challenges.

Ruth Peace & Pinky Wilcoxon - PUCC sisters with health challenges.

Bill Darland - ongoing health issues.

Anthony - multiple challenges as he lives his post-incarceration life.

Gary - risky behaviors; seeking balance and stability.

Grateful Tran - half-way house, new skills, schizophrenia (Buretta).

Home/Care Facility/Rehab Center

Millicent Guerri - living with cancer... 14300 Conway Meadows Ct E, Chesterfield, MO 63017 [birthdate: December 5]

Marv Herpel - *Brookdale West County*; 785 Henry Ave, #217; Ballwin, MO 63021; 636-227-5838 [birthdate: March 3]

Sue Houser - *Bethany Ctr for Rehab & Healing*; 421 Ocala Dr - #209B; Nashville, TN 37211; 615-577-2049. [birthdate: July 8]

Pat Klein - *Anthology Senior Living of Wildwood*; 251 Plaza Dr, #325; Wildwood, MO 63040 [birthdate: September 21]

Bill Klein - *Anthology Senior Living of Wildwood*; 251 Plaza Dr, #104; Wildwood, MO 63040 [birthdate: March 8]

Ruth Peace - 10379-D Forest Brooke Ln; StL MO 63146; 314-983-0253; meadletter222@gmail.com [birthdate: August 8]

Pearl Sellenriek - *Friendship Village Memory Care Division* #1001; 15250 Olive Blvd, Chesterfield, MO 63017 [birthdate: March 31]

Pinky Wilcoxon - 10379-D Forest Brooke Ln; StL MO 63146; 314-983-0253; meadletter222@gmail.com [birthdate: April 7]

Other

Pres Biden, VP Harris, Congress, all local, national, world leaders.

The “me too” Movement - shining a light on sexual abuse.

All people who live with mental illness.

Caregivers of all shapes and sizes.

Individuals in all levels of leadership as they make decisions today.

PUCC Family (and others) struggling with healthcare costs and limits.

Our Missouri Mid-South Conference and St Louis Assn UCC

Variety of Parkway members/friends - employment issues.

Gun violence and other violence across the US and other lands.

Conversations about the Death Penalty in the United States.

Victims of Natural and Created Disasters around the world.

Peace and Justice near and far.

Healing of relationships between the public and the police.

US Military around the globe.

The people of politically unstable countries across the globe.

Peace in the Mid-East.

St Louis Assn UCC Covenant Partner

Week ending October 17 - **Emmaus Homes**; emmaushomes.org

Week ending October 24 - **St Paul UCC Oakville**; dp4u.org

21st Sunday *after* Pentecost

Sunday, October 17, 2021

Mark 10:35-45

Great Service

Children's Sabbath/Laity Sunday

Dear Brother Jesus,

We follow you as closely as we can. We listen as carefully as we are able. We believe that we understand what you are asking of us.

But here's what's still hard, Jesus. Even though we pay attention, even though we pray, we still want to know who is first and who is last, we still want to know who is in and who is out, we still want to know who is important and who is unimportant.

We follow. We listen. We believe.

It's funny because, of course we'd like it to be we who are first. And in. And important. But more even than being the exalted ones, we want to know who the exalted ones are. We want to follow you, but we are both excited and comforted by the world's hierarchy. It's a relief to know, even if we cannot be the best, that somewhere there is a best.

But then, we follow. We listen. We believe.

Jesus, all the ways you speak in parable and mystery, of all the water-into-wine and walk-on-water miracles you perform, of all the healing, of all the times that people sat down with you and got up with their hunger fed, their thirst quenched, this is the hardest to understand.

But this is the truth of what you proclaim. There is no in or out. There is no first or last. There is no worthy or unworthy. There is just a big circle of love and abundance, in which all are welcome, and all are equal. All are beloved and all are accepted. All are needed and all are held.

Jesus, we follow. We listen. We believe. Help us, as we honor children today, as we celebrate the gifts of all of your ministers, ordained or not. Help us to live as we see, as we hear, as we believe.

In your many strong names we pray, Amen.