





www.parkwayucc.org
Sunday, January 9, 2022

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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. If you are with us virtually, please let us know you are here by commenting in the chat.

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.

Subscribe to our email lists: Text your email address to 22828 or sign up at www.parkwayucc.org

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

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Anniversaries

1/10 NOLTE, Bill & Karen (35)

Birthdays

1/11 BRUEGGEMANN, Kacey 1/13 ADKINS, Mary

1/11 TARR, Kathleen 1/14 PEEK, Marsha

1/12 TOOMBS, Lynn 1/14 PILLAI, Janie

Baptism of Christ Sunday

Sunday, January 9, 2022 | 10:00am | Sanctuary & Facebook Live

Meditation *Love, like a river, will cut a new path whenever it meets an obstacle.* ~Crystal Middlemas

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

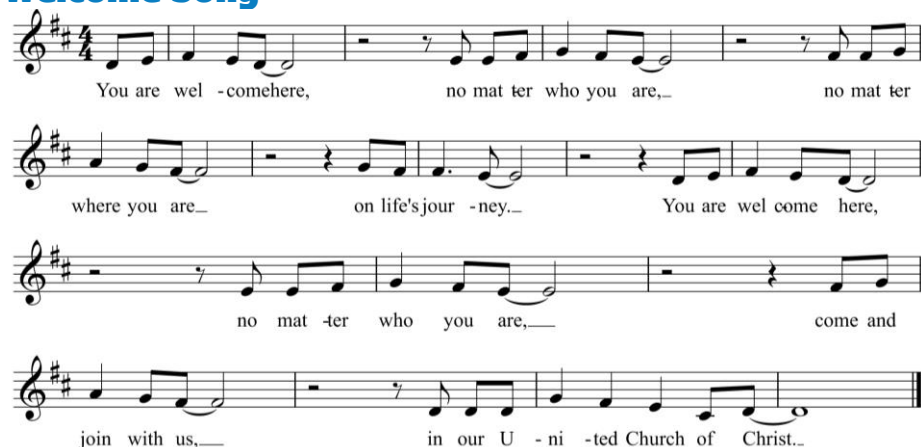
Scripture Isaiah 43:1-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

But now thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Welcome Song



You are wel - come here, no mat - ter who you are, no mat - ter
where you are on life's jour - ney. You are wel come here,
no mat - ter who you are, come and
join with us, in our U - ni - ted Church of Christ.

***Call to Worship** Sylvia Dunstan

One:	Crashing waters at creation, ordered by the spirit's breath, first to witness day's beginning from the brightness of night's death.
Many:	Parting water stood and trembled as the captives passed on through, washing off the chains of bondage—channel to a life made new.
One:	Cleansing water once at Jordan closed around the one love-told, opened to reveal the glory ever new and ever old.
Many:	Living water, never ending, quench the thirst and flood the soul. Well-spring, Source of life eternal, drench our dryness, make us whole.
All:	Let us worship our God together—Creator, Christ and Spirit.

***Song** *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

**Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, mount of Thy enfolding love.
This my glad commemoration that till now I've safely come;
And I know, by Thy good pleasure, safely I'll arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God.
He to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious love.
O to grace I'm very grateful, daily I live hopefully!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love:
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.**

***Opening Prayer** UCC Book of Worship, adapted

We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In the time of Noah you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning. In the time of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. In the fullness of time you sent Jesus Christ who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb. Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all nations by water and the Holy Spirit.

Bless this water, Gracious God, that by it we may enliven us for living and loving. 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 Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (New Revised Standard Version)

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Song *I Was There to Hear Your Born-ing Cry*



1. I was there to hear your born - ing cry, I'll be

3. When you heard the won - der of the Word, I was

5. In the mid - dle ag - es of your life, not too

7. I was there to hear your born - ing cry, I'll be



there when you are old. I re - joiced the day you

there to cheer you on. You were raised to praise the

old, no long - er young, I'll be there to guide you

there when you are old, I re - joiced the day you

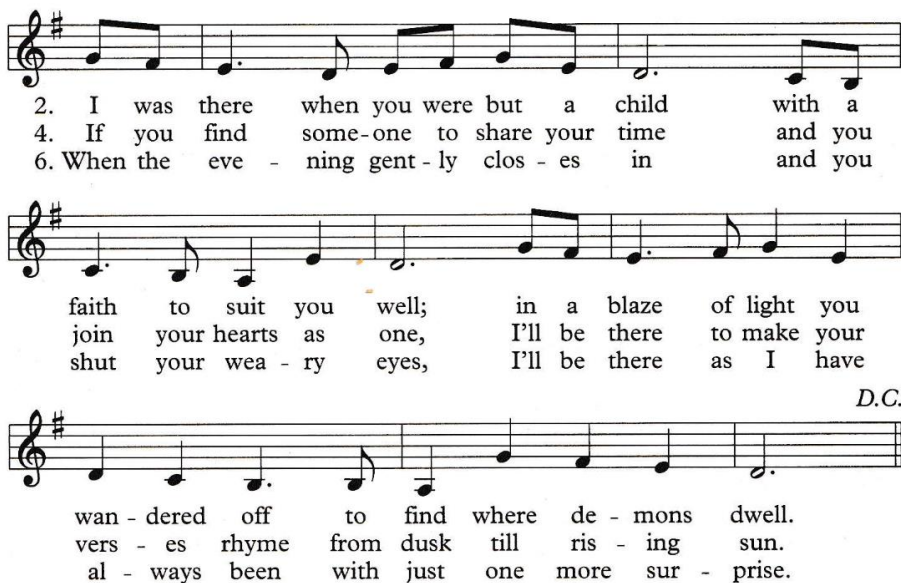


were bap - tized to see your life un - fold.

liv - ing Lord to whom you now be - long.

through the night, com - plete what I've be - gun.

were bap - tized to see your life un - fold.



2. I was there when you were but a child with a
 4. If you find some-one to share your time and you
 6. When the eve - ning gent - ly clos - es in and you

faith to suit you well; in a blaze of light you
 join your hearts as one, I'll be there to make your
 shut your wea - ry eyes, I'll be there as I have

D.C.

wan - dered off to find where de - mons dwell.
 vers - es rhyme from dusk till ris - ing sun.
 al - ways been with just one more sur - prise.

Moment of Silent Reflection

Sermon

Affirmation of Baptism James Burklo

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Mother,
source of life, from whom water flows, to whom water returns,

In the name of the Son, in the name of the Daughter,
flesh and blood in whom we meet the Divine,
born of the physical water of childbirth and the subtle water of Spirit,

In the name of the Spirit, the Word, holy Mother Wisdom,
ideal formless form, wind that moves water,
unseen energy, bliss of creativity, rapturous beauty,

We baptize you with this water,
and wash away all that obscures God from your soul,
so that you may become a clear, clean mirror reflecting the presence of the divine.

With this water we awaken you to your divine nature,
ordain you to works of service and compassion,
and confirm your intention to grow in love for God and all beings.

Amen.

A Time of Prayer *As the Deer*



As the deer pants for the wa-ter, so my soul longs af - ter
you. You a - lone are my heart's de - sire, and I
long to wor - ship you. You a - lone are my
strength, my shield; to you a - lone may my spir - it
yield. You a - lone are my heart's de -
sire, and I long to wor - ship you.

Pastoral Prayer & Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer *Sung to the tune by Nate Stout*

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.]

Invitation to Generosity

Offering Our Gifts to God

Offering Interlude

*Response

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures high and low;
Give thanks to God in love made known;
Creator, Word and Spirit, One. Amen.**

***Prayer of Dedication** Rosemary McCombs Maxey

O God, we rejoice in your grace, given and received.

We thank you that you claim us,

that you wash us, strengthen us, and guide us,

that you empower us to live a life worthy of our calling.

In the way of Jesus, make us as water in a dry and thirsty world.

Establish us to be places of refreshment.

Root us and nurture us in love,

that with all your people, that we may rightly and justly serve you.

Fill us with your fullness

that our lives may overflow in service and in love. Amen.

***Song of Parting** *Down by the Jordan*

LOBE DEN HERREN 14.14.4.7.8 (Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty)

Down by the Jordan, a prophet named John was baptizing,

Preaching a message the people found bold and surprising:

“God will forgive! Show that you’ll change how you live!

Surely God’s new day is rising!”

There by the river, the crowd came with great expectation:

“Are you God’s Chosen One, sent here to rescue our nation?”

“No!” John replied. “He who is mightier than I

Judges and offers salvation.”

Jesus, you went to be baptized along with the others,

Taking your place among sinners, God’s lost sons and daughters.

Then with great love, God’s Spirit came as a dove!

Your work began in those waters.

Here in the Church, we are baptized and filled with God’s Spirit.

Freed and forgiven, we’re welcomed with joy! Can you hear it?

This is God’s sign! This is how God says, “You’re mine!”

Let’s take the good news and share it!

***Benediction**

***God’s Light Goes Forth**

***Music for Going Forth**

Announcements

TODAY: What to do to Promote a Just Solution in Israel and Palestine by Paul Roesler

Select Sundays | 11:15am | Heritage Room and Zoom

Paul is a member of Parkway UCC and a Professor of Political Science at St. Charles Community College. He will briefly discuss the history of the seemingly endless and unsolvable Israel/Palestine conflict. He'll also discuss the UCC's recent positions regarding the conflict to address the question of how what response would be helpful to encourage a just solution.

Paul will be with us in person in the Heritage Room following worship. Or you can catch the presentation on Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84691476997?pwd=aEM2ZURYWURLNmkwD0EzV0VHV1lyQT09>

Meeting ID: 846 9147 6997 | **Passcode:** 181565 | **Dial** (312) 626-6799

More info? Contact Richard Scherrer: 90fivetpr@gmail.com | (314) 591-6803

Next Sunday (1/16): "Mom and Dad, I'm Gay."

Select Sundays | 11:15am | Heritage Room and Zoom

"OMG, what do we do now?" Turn to PFLAG, a Parkway Tenant, *Fighting for a Diverse and Inclusive World*, featuring Beth Gasparovic and a Panel of Parents of LGBTQ+ Children.

For many LGBTQ youth, breaking the news to Mom and Dad is the scariest part of coming out. "Once my parents were behind me, I knew that I could handle anything else." Ever wonder how parents of gay and lesbian children face their unique parenting challenges? Many find help in PFLAG, a community of individuals who are committed to creating a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

An important aspect of PFLAG is educating the community about LGBTQ+ issues. Please join us for a panel of PFLAG parents who will share their personal stories and answer your questions. Want to support a coworker, friend, or loved one but are not sure how? Or, do you consider yourself an LGBTQ+ ally but are confused by how quickly language and understanding of LGBTQ+ identities seem to change? Please join us on and get some answers.

(Please note that if you have questions and prefer to ask them without identifying yourself, consider submitting them to Kevin Cameron before the program.)

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84691476997?pwd=aEM2ZURYWURLNmkwD0EzV0VHV1lyQT09>

Meeting ID: 846 9147 6997 | **Passcode:** 181565 | **Dial** (312) 626-6799

More info? Contact Richard Scherrer: 90fivetpr@gmail.com | (314) 591-6803

See our winter-spring Speaker Series schedule here:

<https://parkwayucc.org/2021/parkway-speaker-series-2022/>

If God is Love, Don't Be a Jerk

Join us this winter as we invite ALL PUCCers to engage with our friend John Pavlovitz and others who find him to be challenging and inspiring.

Secure a copy of his newest book, *If God is Love*, through your favorite book distributor or pick one up from church for \$15 (checks to PUCC with JPav Book in the memo).

We will give you access to 6 pre-recorded videos from John, one each week, beginning the week of January 9. You can watch it whenever you can.

We will come together in-person at church for Live Zooms with John and others for six **Wednesdays at 7:00pm CT beginning on January 19** and ending on February 23. (Links and recordings will be available if needed.)

We'll come together again for a special live closing message on Saturday, February 26, 8:00pm CT in the Heritage Room—or you can do it from home.

Questions? Please contact kevin@parkwayucc.org; 314-872-9330

More about the book....

Imagine for a moment what the world might look like if we as people of faith, morality, and conscience actually aspired to this mantra.

What if we worked to create a world that was more loving and equitable than when we arrived?

What if we invited one another to share in wide-open, fearless, spiritual communities truly marked by compassion and interdependence?

What if we daily challenged ourselves to live a faith that simply made us better humans?

John Pavlovitz explores how we can embody this kinder kind of spirituality where we humbly examine our belief system to understand how it might compel us to act in less-than-loving ways toward others.

This simple phrase, “Thou Shalt Not Be Horrible,” could help us practice what we preach by creating a world where:

- spiritual community provides a sense of belonging where all people are received as we are;
- the most important question we ask of a religious belief is not Is it true? but rather, is it helpful?
- it is morally impossible to pledge complete allegiance to both Jesus and America simultaneously;
- the way we treat others is the most tangible and meaningful expression of our belief system.

In *If God Is Love, Don't Be a Jerk*, John Pavlovitz examines the bedrock ideas of our religion: the existence of hell, the utility of prayer, the way we treat LGBTQ people, the value of anger, and other doctrines to help all of us take a good, honest look at how the beliefs we hold can shape our relationships with God and our fellow humans—and to make sure that love has the last, loudest word.

Tuesday Afternoon Dialogue - January 19

1st & 3rd Tuesdays | 1:45 Fellowship | 2:00pm book discussion | via ZOOM
Join TAD continue discussing the book, *The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times*, by Jane Goodall, Douglas Abrams, and Gail Hudson. The Book of Hope touches on vital questions, including: How do we stay hopeful when everything seems hopeless? How do we cultivate hope in our children? What is the relationship between hope and action? Everyone is welcome.

Contact Jackie Eiffert: jeiffert2@gmail.com

Video:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83670617428?pwd=bUxPZEdDMiU4ay9oNndTWw4yZUYwUT09>

Phone: 312 626 6799 | **Meeting ID:** 836 7061 7428 | **Passcode:** 480007

Intertwine Interfaith Welcome Circle (IIWC)

WE NEED YOUR HELP - to welcome an Afghan family as new Americans!

Nearly 40,000 Afghanis are currently being housed on American Army bases. The Army can only house these families until mid-February. Consequently, the US Department of State issued a call to action to expand the United States' capacity to welcome these families and help them begin their new lives as Americans.

Congregation Shaare Emeth (CSE), Parkway United Church of Christ (PUCC) and Turkish American Society of Missouri (TASOM) have committed to answer this call.

Intertwine Interfaith is launching an emergency initiative through the Welcome Circle program with the *Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society* (HIAS) which was founded in 1881 and has settled more than 4.5 million refugees over the years. Our Welcome Circle has committed to supporting the resettlement of an Afghan family in St Louis. Together, Intertwine Interfaith Welcome Circle (IIWC) must raise a total of \$27,750 which will cover essential needs such as housing, clothing, food, utilities, etc. for the first six months in St. Louis.

The IIWC Core Team is made up of reps from each faith community. The Core Team will have direct contact with the Afghan family and will help enroll kids in school and help the parents learn the fundamentals of food shopping, transportation, language skills, banking in St Louis and more. We will also need the participation of everyone in our communities for indirect support, furniture donations, apartment set-up, resource identification, and other activities.

Contributions are needed no later than January 17, 2022 –

MLK Jr. Day. All contributions are tax deductible and 100% of your donation will go toward the needs of the family. Please make your contribution online via our GoFundMe account

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/welcome-an-afghan-family-arriving-in-st-louis>
or by check made payable to *We Believe Inc* at 16535 Baxter Forest Ridge Drive; Chesterfield, MO 63005.

We are grateful to *We Believe Inc*, a 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation, for their help collecting the funding for IIWC. *We Believe* was created by Stan Shanker (CSE), one of our IIWC founders, a few years ago in an effort to spread kindness, hope, and positivity while raising money to support social justice issues. Two other IIWC Founders, Lisa Mason (PUCC) and Engin Blackstone (TASOM), serve on the *We Believe* Board.

Thank you for considering being a part of this important work.

Your Interfaith Intertwine Team: Kevin Cameron, Lisa Mason, Paige Penico, Ali Durhan, Engin Blackstone, Stan Shanker and Debbie Bram

January 2022 Alzheimer's News

Walking Toward a Dementia Diagnosis

Looking at different patterns in the way older adults walk could help doctors to more accurately diagnose Alzheimer's Disease as well as different types of dementia. In a recent study of 500 participants, four independent gait patterns—rhythm, pace, variability and postural control were studied. The participants were older adults across the cognitive spectrum, including cognitive healthy people as well as those with cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Lewy body dementia and frontotemporal dementia. High gait variability, which means stride-to-stride changes in distance and timing as a person walks, identified Alzheimer's disease with 70% accuracy, and was the only pattern consistently associated with lower cognitive performance. "We see gait variability being similar to an arrhythmia. Healthcare providers could measure it with patients in the clinic, similar to how we assess heart rhythm with electrocardiograms" said Dr. Manuel Montero-Odasso, a geriatrician at St. Joseph's Health Care, London. The study's findings were published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*.

You can 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

Questions? Want to know more about the Alzheimer's Association here in St Louis? Please contact PUCC's Faith Outreach Ambassador, Joyce Ruiz: joyceruiz7@gmail.com

Prayer List

as of Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Celebrations

Transitioning from 2021-2022 - body, mind, spirit, relationships.

Lilly Dwyer and parents Lea and Jeff - her Baptism here December 26!

Blake Lyons - starting EMT training this week!

Courtney Richards - just started new job with Week of Compassion, the disaster response ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

You may want to financially support their work with storm recovery or the same work being done by <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/wider-church-ministries/global-hope/disaster/>

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

Concerns

Greiwe Family - grieving and giving thanks for mom/grandma Betty.

Conrad Damsgaard - back at Mason Pointe rehab after Covid.

Don Luedloff - healing after emergency hip surgery (Barry's Dad).

Mark McKenzie - hospitalized; various tests this week (Tom's brother).

Steve and Andrea Barnes - preparing for surgery later this month on his elbows and wrists due to nerve damage from sarcoidosis and as his mother undergoes treatment for cancer and had toe amputated on December 23.

Grieving families into New Year - including Albers, Greiwe, Larson, Nolte, Nourse, Peek, Smith, Sperry, Stappenbeck, Wandless, Wessel.

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

Dale Barnes - vaxed/boosted but hospitalized with serious Covid.

All affected by the wildfires in Colorado.

Continuing

Sally Boughman, George Lestina, Jim and Polly Winkelmann - healing and strengthening at home.

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

Pat & Janet - he is post-radiation/chemo (Skip Larson's son-in-law)

Joan and Larry Brannigan - continuing health concerns for Larry.

Christopher, Gail & Bill Haack - chronic health challenges... Bill has begun the lengthy prep process for extensive back surgery.

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.

Lizzie - awaiting liver transplant (niece of Barb Kuhlmann).

Scott Schmidt - paralysis after serious fall while hiking; some progress.

Mike Guthrie and Mary Guthrie - as Mike is ill (Stifel).

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

Gary - risky behaviors; seeking balance and stability.

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]

John Nourse *The Village at Cape Albeon*; 3300 Lake Bend Dr, #103; Valley Park, MO 63088 [birthdate: October 26]

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]

Dick Witte - Meramec Bluffs Assisted Living; 40 Meramec Trails Dr; Apt #104; Ballwin, MO 63021; 636-368-7324 [birthdate: March 25]

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.

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... Peace and Justice near and far.

St Louis Association UCC Covenant Partner

Week ending Jan 2 - Bethany-Peace UCC, St Louis; see Facebook page

Week ending Jan 9 - recently closed Brentwood Congregational UCC

**THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**

January 9, 2022

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Affirmed by Love

When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, a voice came from heaven introducing and announcing him as “beloved.” Since that holy day, belovedness has marked every baptized person as known, named and cherished by God.

Yet too often the church has been a place of condemnation and judgment for those who seek healing and solace. Especially bereft are the many at the mercy of our nation’s prison industry. But here and there, voices within the United Church of Christ call for healing and hope for these often-forgotten beloved ones.

*Rev. Phillip Reller of Arizona writes, “We are called to embody Jesus’ heart and show forth his compassion to prisoners.

It is a very practical ministry of – Incarnation – love made visible in the flesh. Being there. Ours are a new set of ears listening to immensely consequential stories which have worn thin in the retelling to familiar cell and pod mates. Ours are new conversations and new perspectives.

It is a ministry of advocacy. Being there. The men I visit are cut off by thousands of miles from their families, communities, and support systems in private for-profit prisons. They are treated as strange enemies and are forced into culturally and religiously molded programs of “rehabilitation” which strip them of their cultural identity and dignity. Visiting allows us to witness their struggle and speak as allies for rehabilitation and respectful treatment.

It is a ministry of reconciliation. Being there. I have been allowed to share first-hand reports of the condition of their sons, husbands, and daddies with families who have been estranged or ashamed or in the confusion of unresolved anger and grief. Appropriate sharing can build bridges towards forgiveness and new relationships. It can calm deep anxieties. It can pave the way for connections that create positive re-entry.”

On this celebration of baptism day, be in prayer about how you can “be there” along with Rev. Reller with God’s imprisoned beloved ones.

**Reller, Phillip. “Prison Ministry.” United Church of Christ,
www.ucc.org/domestic-policy/justice_criminal-justice_prison-ministry/.*

