

Welcome to Bethlehem United Church of Christ



*September 20, 2026
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost*



MISSION

To worship God, to learn and live the Word of God,
to engage in Christian fellowship and service, to invite others
to join us on our faith journey in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Welcome to Bethlehem!

We are so glad that you are joining your voice with ours in worship today!
Everyone, please sign our green friendship pads, found at the end of each pew.
If you like, a comfortable space for families is available under the balcony.

God put the wiggle in children, and we welcome them in worship!

Children are also welcome to participate in Sunday school, if they prefer.

All are invited to stand, as you are able, for sections marked with a cross (†);

Congregational responses are in bold text.

Prayer Requests

Fill out a prayer request card found in the pews.

You may give it to one of the pastors before the service
or to an usher during the Hymn of Response.



CHURCH LIFE

No Bethlehem members were known to be in the hospital as of Wednesday.

ATTENDANCE FOR LAST SUNDAY

Total:78 (In Person: 58, YouTube:17, Phone: 3)

Worship is available in the sanctuary, via Phone Streaming and Livestream to access the Livestream go to our website: <https://www.bethlehem-ucc.org>. To join the Phone Stream, call 855-669-8965 prior to the start of worship. You may sign up to be called by the Phone Stream by contacting the church office during regular business hours. (You will be called about 5 minutes before worship begins.)

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

RINGING OF THE BELLS

WELCOME AND SHARING CHURCH LIFE

CENTERING MUSIC

Hello God
Naki Kripfgans, piano

- Dolly Parton

*(a heartfelt prayer for healing, forgiveness, and guidance
written in the wake of the 9/11 attacks)*

OPENING WORSHIP

† CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Whether we have wandered far away or stood outside the celebration, God comes to meet us.

All: We are welcomed by a love that never gives up on us.

One: The lost are found, the weary are gathered, and the door remains open.

All: Let us enter the joy and worship the God whose grace has room for us all.

† OPENING HYMN

NCH #471

What a Covenant

† OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Welcoming God, you meet us when we wander and come near when resentment keeps us outside. Draw us into your presence and open our hearts to the joy of your grace. Help us receive your love without fear and extend that same welcome to others. Gather is as one family around your table, where every person is known, valued, and invited home. Amen.

† PASSING OF THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you!

All: And also with you!

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

MESSAGE IN MUSIC *Light of a Clear Blue Morning* - Dolly Parton
Bethlehem Chancel Choir; Abigail Eagan, soloist

It's been a long, dark night, and I've been waiting for the morning.
It's been a long, hard fight, but I see a brand-new day dawning.
I've been looking for the sunshine, 'cause I ain't seen it in so long.
Everything's gonna work out just fine.
Everything's gonna be all right; it's gonna be okay.

I can see the light of a clear blue morning.
I can see the light of a brand-new day.
I can see the light of a clear blue morning.
Everything's gonna be all right; it's gonna be okay.
Clear blue morn, clear blue morn, morning blue.

Children may leave for Sunday School

SCRIPTURE READING

From the Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord, for the people of God!

All: Thanks be to God! Amen.

MESSAGE *The Grumbling Twelve: An Imaginative Reflection based on Luke*
Judy Coucouvanis

The following reflection imagines Peter listening as Jesus tells the parable we often call "The Prodigal Son." The words are fictional, but they invite us to hear the story through the experience of a disciple who has left everything to follow Jesus.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

† HYMN OF REFLECTION

NCH #449

Softly and Tenderly

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Silent Prayer & Sung Petition *Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying*
Lord, listen to your children praying; Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying, send us love, send us pow'r,
send us grace.

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer (Unison)

God of compassion, we bring before you those who are grieving, sick, lonely, afraid, or uncertain of the way ahead. Be near to those who feel far from home and those separated from the people they love. Bring Healing to wounded bodies, peace to troubled hearts, and hope to weary spirits. Teach us to meet one another with mercy, celebrate every step toward wholeness. We pray this in the name of the one who taught us to pray by saying...

Please use these words or those most familiar to you.

Our God in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

OFFERING

Invitation to give

God's grace keeps the door open and makes room for every person at the table. Through our giving, we help extend that welcome by supporting ministries of compassion, connection and care. Let us offer our gifts with gratitude trusting God to use them so others may know they are seen and invited home.

Offertory*Improvisation on "The Seeker"*

- Dolly Parton

Naki Kripfgans, organ

(a song about a flawed human being in constant need of divine guidance, celebrating that God is always reaching out to offer strength, forgiveness, and unconditional love.)

† Hymn of Thanksgiving**NCH # 780*****Doxology*****Praise God from whom all blessings flow;****Praise God all creatures here below;****Praise God for all that love has done;****Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.****† Prayer of Dedication** (unison)

Holy One, receive these gifts and the labor, hope, and gratitude they represent. Bless the hands that shared them. Use this offering to sustain ministry, meet every human need, and build a community in which no one is overlooked or left without daily bread. May what we place before you become part of your generous work in this world. Amen.

GOING FORTH TO SERVE**† CLOSING HYMN****NCH #18*****Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer*****WORDS OF SENDING**

Go into the world knowing that God's door remains open and God's grace has room for us all. Welcome those who feel far away and seek those who are standing outside. Go in peace to love and serve. Amen.

POSTLUDE*He's Everything*

- Dolly Parton/arr. Keith Christopher

Bethlehem Chancel Choir; Teddy Borsodi, soloist

I see Him when the children are at play,
I hear Him when the church bells ring on wedding days.
I feel Him when the breezes blow, adore Him where the flowers grow,
We feel Him when the oceans roar, He's everything.

We're born, we live, we die, and life goes on.
We love, we laugh, we cry, so forth, so on.
And we're a part of His creation, every voice in every nation,
each and every situation, everything.

He's everything, let's lift Him up,
Through everything, He's loving us, it isn't asking all that much.
And we should do the same.
So, let us sing and raise our voice, let us make a joyful noise,
Let us praise His holy name, He's everything.

In everything, He plays a part, in everything, He leaves His mark,
Restores our lives, our broken hearts, the God of hope and change.
So let us sing and raise our voice, let us make a joyful noise,
Rejoice, and praise His name, rejoice, thank Him again.
Rejoice, His joy remains, He's everything.

OUR TEAM:

Senior Pastor: Rev. Matthew Hogue-Smith

Associate Pastor: Rev. Diane White

Lay Leader: Judy Coucouvanis

Ministers: All the people

Director of Music & Organist: Dr. Naki Sung Kripfgans

Director of Handbells: Jim Rowan

Ensemble: Bethlehem Chancel Choir

Liturgist: Jan Eadie

Sound Technician: Gary Rogers

Videographer: Dan Blakeney

Streaming Technician:

Security Volunteer: Volunteers needed, please contact church office

Community Time Host: Jacqueline Katz

Reach out to us:

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