



Friends Church

An Open & Affirming Congregation



December 21, 2023

6:30pm

Longest Night Service

WELCOME TO FRIENDS CHURCH!

We are honored that you have chosen to spend your Wednesday night with us. Friends Congregational Church is an **Open & Affirming** congregation of the United Church of Christ. We welcome all people into the full life and ministry of our church—people of all ages, races, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities. No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

FIRST TIME AT FRIENDS? If you are a guest with us tonight, please let us know. Welcome cards are located in the chair backs to fill out and leave in the offering plate when we depart from tonight's service. If you are joining us online, you will find an Online Visitor Card at <https://www.friends-ucc.org/your-first-visit>. We are so glad you are here, so please let us know if there is anything we can do for you.

CHILDCARE: We invite children to participate fully in our community and worship life. Children of all ages are welcome in worship or you may choose childcare, offered for ages 1-5 in the nursery down the hall through the piano side double doors. We currently have Covid Protocols in place, which you can find posted outside the nursery door.

WiFi: To access church WiFi, please use this login information,
WiFi – The Promised LAN Password: stillspeaking

RESTROOMS are located through the double doors on the piano side of the sanctuary. Gender assigned restrooms are straight down at the end of the hall, and a gender neutral restroom is to the immediate right.

LEADING IN TODAY'S SERVICE:

Lay Leaders: Becky Burks, JP Harvey, Charity Stokes, Grace Jackson
Greeters: Peggy Vitek

The Longest Night: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). The Christmas season tends to be marked by happiness and expressions of good cheer. It is a time for family and friends to gather, and for congregations to worship in a spirit of joy. However, this time of joy-filled expectation often overshadows the pain and loneliness many experience during this season. Longest Night or Blue Christmas services are held on or close to the Winter Solstice, December 21. Retired United Methodist Church minister Daniel Benedict writes, “There is an interesting convergence for this day as it is also the traditional feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle. This linkage invites making some connections between Thomas’ struggle to believe the tale of Jesus’ resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss.”

WORDS OF WELCOME

Dan De Leon

CALL TO WORSHIP

Trent Williams

One: In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.
What came to be through God was life,
and this life was the light of the world.
All: **The Light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.**

OPENING SONG FROM TAIZÉ: Within our darkest night

**Within our darkest night,
You kindle the fire that never dies away,
Never dies away.**

INVOCATION

Brooke Dooley

Silence

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Brooke Dooley

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11, NRSV

Becky Burks

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

One: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**All: God makes me lie down in green pastures;
They lead me beside still waters;
They restore my soul.**

One: God leads me in right paths for Their name's sake.

**All: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.**

One: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**All: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.**

SONG FROM TAIZÉ: Bless the Lord

**Bless the Lord, my soul,
and bless God's holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul,
who leads me into life.**

Silence

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 40:1-5, NRSV

JP Harvey

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

GOSPEL READING: Luke 1:46-56, NRSV

Grace Jackson

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has

brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**SONG FROM TAIZÉ: Lord of all goodness
Lord of all goodness, Son of the Father,
may your peace surround us.**

Silence

LITANY FOR LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES (RESPONSIVE)

One: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God’s love, we claim God’s gift of truth.
There is no need to hide or deny. God welcomes us as we are.

All: Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and in need.
(Psalm 86:1)

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Child of God appear;
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

One: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God’s love, we claim God’s gift of lament.
We recognize our wounds and cry out to God.
We accept God’s invitation to express every feeling and question.

**All: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.**
(Psalm 22:1-2)

**O come, O shoot of Jesse, free your own from Satan’s tyranny,
From depths of hell your people save, and give them victory o’er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!**

One: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of courage.
Courage to be honest, to seek help, to comfort one another.
Courage to dare to love and dream again.

**All: The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.**
(Psalm 28:7)

**O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here;
Love stir within the womb of night, and death's own shadow's put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!**

One: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of hope.
God is good. God is strong. God is near,
leading us to a day without tears and pain, without sin and death.
Healing and deliverance are coming; if not now, then on that day.

**All: By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.**
(Psalm 65:5)

**O come, Desire of Nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
Make envy, strife, and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!**

Silence

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Trent Williams

One: Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIGHTING CANDLES TO SHARE OUR PRAYERS Brooke Dooley

SONG FROM TAIZÉ: O Lord, hear my prayer

**O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer.
When I call answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer.
Come and listen to me.**

**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 sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

ADVENT CREDO (ALLEN BOESAK)

Brooke Dooley

One: It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

All: This is true: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

One: It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

All: This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

One: It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

All: This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of Peace.

One: It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

All: This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

One: It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

All: This is true: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young ones shall see visions and your old ones shall have dreams.

One: It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity, of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

All: This is true: the hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

One: So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

***CLOSING SONG FROM TAIZÉ: Live in Charity**

**Live in charity and steadfast love,
live in charity; God will dwell with you.**

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

Dan De Leon

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