

As we gather together there is some technical information that most of you already know, but just in case someone doesn't:

The service will be in voice and text.

There is a copy of the service in the red book by the door to the sanctuary. You'll want to grab one of those if you need the YouTube links or want the lyrics for today's worship music.

Speaking of which, worship music will be in the media player.

Frequently in my worship service, folk end up dancing right here in the aisles or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you—I say go for it!

GATHERING:

Every once in a while, I like to leave you guessing a little bit.

So, before I play today's opening video, I'm going to give you a quote.

Now, I recognize that you could Google this, but I invite you not to—I invite you to see if you can guess by the end of the service today, who said this:

"I don't resent working long hours.

I shouldn't—I'm the one who set up my life this way.

I love to work.

It's the thing that I get the most satisfaction out of—and probably what I do best.

Not that I don't enjoy days off.

I love vacations and loafing around.

But I think much of the world has the wrong idea of working.

It's one of the good things in life.

The feeling of accomplishment is more real and satisfying than finishing a good meal—or looking at one's accumulated wealth."

<https://youtu.be/dsgBpsNPQ50>, "Working For The Weekend" ~Loveboy

Everyone's watching, to see what you will do

Everyone's looking at you, oh

Everyone's wondering, will you come out tonight

Everyone's trying to get it right, get it right

Everybody's working for the weekend

Everybody wants a new romance

Everybody's goin' off the deep end

Everybody needs a second chance, oh

You want a piece of my heart

You better start from the start

You wanna be in the show

Come on baby let's go

Everyone's looking to see if it was you

Everyone wants you to come through

Everyone's hoping it'll all work out

Everyone's waiting they're holding out

Everybody's working for the weekend

Everybody wants a new romance

Hey, hey

Everybody's goin' off the deep end

Everybody needs a second chance, oh

You want a piece of my heart

You better start from the start

You wanna be in the show

Come on baby let's go
Hey
You want a piece of my heart
You better start from the start
You wanna be in the show
Come on baby let's go
You want a piece of my heart
You better start from the start
You wanna be in the show
Come on baby let's go

WELCOME

Welcome to First United Church of Christ and Conference Center, Second Life.
We have official standing with the Eastern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ as a Real Life church located in Second Life.

And I still think that's pretty cool, because I have sat in South Central Pennsylvania—I have sat in Northern Maine—
and I am currently sitting in Central Connecticut—
and I still think it's pretty cool that we can partner with my brothers and sisters and non-binary siblings all across the country
and all of you wherever you are!

Speaking of wherever you are:

"No matter who you are,
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here."

Most churches have a time of offering.

Making an offering, sharing what you can in God's name, is a spiritual practice.

You can find out more about how you can engage in that practice below:

That offering can be one of prayer or of presence,

of work on behalf of the church doing things like reading scripture or serving on the board of directors,

of helping with any of the many things that are needed for the church to function, and/or, that offering can be one of money.

As a UCC church, we support the work of the wider church both with prayer and with donations.

And it's true that we don't have a physical building, but there are monetary costs for this ministry to function.

So if you would like to make an offering by participating in leading worship or social events,

or if you would like to become a member of this church,

let any clergy or staff member know.

If you would like to make a financial offering to support this ministry there is a donation bowl by the door to the sanctuary,

or if you prefer you can make a donation in RL currency on our website:

www.firstuccsl.org

And since we are a 501(c)(3) public charity, monetary donations are tax deductible in the U.S.

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your offering of support.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

SERMON "The Phoenix Affirmations (Affirmation 12)"

This is the eleventh sermon in a series about what it means when I say that I am a Progressive Christian. Specifically, it is about one piece of what it means to be a Progressive Christian as it is described in the _Phoenix Affirmations_.

The _Phoenix Affirmations_ are twelve principles "...originally penned by a group of clergy and laypeople from Phoenix, Arizona..."

But it didn't stop there:

"Word spread, and soon pastors, theologians, and biblical scholars from every mainline denomination, with degrees from seminaries and divinity schools... added input.

They were joined by laypeople and progressive Christian leaders from around the country." (Elnes)

The first four affirmations were about how Progressive Christians love God.

The next four affirmations are about how we love our neighbor.

And now we are into the final four affirmations, which are about how we love ourselves.

Affirmation 12

Acting on the faith that we are born with a meaning and purpose; a vocation and ministry that serves to strengthen and extend God's realm of love.

(Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 5:15-16; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31)

As Christians, we practice prayer as a daily discipline, seeking in prayer both to enjoy God's presence and to discern God's will for our lives and our faith communities.

We accept it as one of our highest responsibilities and privileges to help those in our communities of faith discern God's direction for their lives, and to celebrate and value their discernment in the worship and missional life of the church.

In every available way, we seek to help people develop and use their diverse callings as an expression of their faith.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where all of Christ's followers are understood to be called into a ministry.

God's intention for us can be found and followed, however haltingly and imperfectly, in obedience to the guidance and insights, which come in prayer.

We hold this conviction to be true of the Church as well as of each of its members.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have claimed that one form of ministry is any higher or more sacred than any other, in or outside a church

Further,

we have moved from the Path when we have failed to concretely value meaningful input and participation by both laypeople and clergy in the worship and mission of our communities.

This last Affirmation is about nothing less than God's role in our lives.

What role is the Divine holding in your life right now?

Rev. Elnes points out that:

“Most of us are all too happy to leave God out the equation.

We’re accustomed to being made to feel guilty by well-meaning church people who want us to do or not to do certain things.

We suspect that if we truly perceived a calling from God it would be to join a monastery or work on the streets of Calcutta like Mother Teresa.

To be sure, some people are called to such vocations.

When they sense the call, they feel bliss, not guilt.

The vast majority of us are not called to such vocations.

Whatever it is we are truly called to do resonates with deep chords inside us that have likely excited us for as long as we can remember.

When God strums those chords, we feel joy, not guilt.

So unless you consistently feel joy when considering becoming a monk or Mother Teresa, their path is probably not yours.”

Could it really be that simple?

Could it really be that what God wants you to do with your life can be discerned by the amount of joy it brings you?

Is that really the Christian way?

It really is just that simple.

And it really is the Christian way:

“Saint Teresa of Avila once advised, ‘Do whatever arouses you most to love.’

This is what God wants of us.

The Hebrew scriptures affirm that we are created in the very image and likeness of God.

Why trust someone else’s conception of what you should be ‘doing for God’ if it doesn’t light up and bring joy to that piece of your soul that God created?

God isn’t such an imbecile as to call you into doing something that has nothing to do with what brings you alive in the world.

It may not fit into ‘churchy’ categories, but that’s the church’s problem, not yours.” (Elnes)

Ever expect a pastor to say that to you?

Ever expect a pastor to quote another pastor in order to say that to you? xD

It’s true, though! The path that God has laid out for you isn’t necessarily “churchy.”

It’s not even frequently “churchy” in my experience.

It’s much more frequently like this example that Rev. Elnes talks about.

Where he grew up, “...on Mercery Island, Washington, there was a service station owned by devout Muslims who had a great reputation for fixing cars.

You knew that whatever was ailing your automobile would be fixed correctly, at a fair price, with impeccable honesty.

You could trust that they’d never fix anything that didn’t need fixing.

When asked about their motivation for working so hard and being so honest, they would reply that they were called by Allah into their profession.

To them, this meant that they needed to fix cars as if Muhammad himself were riding in them.

These mechanics demonstrate the beauty of what happens when people discover what brings them alive in this world and use it to serve God.

The mechanics had not the slightest sense that theirs was a profession any lower

than that of a prophet, priest, or king.” (Elnes)

It really is just that simple.

Of course, I will freely admit that “simple” and “easy” are not the same thing. Believe me, I know how difficult it can be to discern exactly what it is that God is calling you to do.

Some of you have been with me in this ministry pretty much from the beginning—you’ve seen me live through some tremendous ups and downs throughout my Real Life career as Youth Minister, and then as a solo pastor of small churches—some of you might remember my brief stint in Guest Services as Mystic Aquarium!—but in the end, I struggled in each of those positions.

There were aspects of each that simply did not bring me anything resembling joy. I for sure hit the point where I threw up my hands and said, “Ok, God, what do you want from me?”

As I was getting ready to leave the church in Maine, my spouse, Emmi, suggested that I should look into being a chaplain at a college or university.

I even went to a local college and sat down with their Chaplain to find out what it was like and—while having deep conversations with college students really appeals to me, the rest of it just sounded...

Well, it didn’t give me joy.

So when Emmi came back to me with the idea of chaplaincy, I was hesitant.

But when I looked into it, I realized that my next step would be to do more Clinical Pastoral Education—CPE.

And that whole process is perfect for exactly the kind of discernment that we’re talking about.

Honestly, most of what we learn in CPE about how to be aware of our feelings and how to be non-judgmental and how to listen to other people are skills that I wish we were teaching in the public school system!

So—what did God want for me?

Well, it would be over-simplistic to say that God brought me to Hospital Chaplaincy. What God did, was bring me to a vocation that absolutely requires me to be a whole and wholly integrated and healthy human being in order to do it right.

Now, don’t get me wrong, God wants everyone to be whole and wholly integrated and healthy!

But the process of becoming a Chaplain makes it impossible for you to make it if you aren’t those things.

What I’m trying to say is that God didn’t just call me to Chaplaincy—God called me out of The Closet.

I’m not sure I even have the words to express how happy I am to be out, how much the work of Chaplaincy feeds me—in short, how much joy my life is bringing me.

And it makes all of the struggle and discernment that came beforehand worthwhile.

Because I know what God’s place in my life is.

I know who I am.

I know what gives me joy.

And it’s my hope and my prayer that you find that too.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

This song was clearly written by someone who loves their job:

“The life I love is making music with my friends...”

<https://youtu.be/dBN86y30Ufc>, "On The Road Again" ~Willie Nelson

One, two, a one, two, three, four
On the road again
Just can't wait to get on the road again
The life I love is making music with my friends
And I can't wait to get on the road again
On the road again
Goin' places that I've never been
Seein' things that I may never see again
And I can't wait to get on the road again
On the road again
Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway
We're the best of friends
Insisting that the world keep turning our way
And our way
Is on the road again
I just can't wait to get on the road again
The life I love is makin' music with my friends
And I can't wait to get on the road again
On the road again
Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway
We're the best of friends
Insisting that the world keep turning our way
And our way
Is on the road again
Just can't wait to get on the road again
The life I love is makin' music with my friends
And I can't wait to get on the road again
And I can't wait to get on the road again

We have come to our time in worship that I really do believe is the core of what we do here together, and that is where we uplift our joys and concerns with one another in prayer.

And so I would like to invite you to enter this time of prayer with a sense of reverence.

We're about to enter into a conversation with God, and that shouldn't be done lightly,
but rather "... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"
(Ephesians 4:2-3)

Please type your prayers into chat, or if you need to use voice simply emote raising your hand so everybody can have a voice.

And as we pray together, you may wish to respond to others with words like, "God hear our prayer," or with any other words the Spirit leads to you use.

COMMUNITY PRAYER

If there was a prayer inside of you that you couldn't quite get out, it's ok.
Because the Psalmist tells us that God knows what we are going to say before the

words can even form on our tongues.

And so we know.

We _ know _ that God has heard our prayers. Those spoken out loud, those typed into SL chat, and those spoken only in the silence of our hearts.

And that we pray them in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

LISTEN!

We have done a lot of talking. Let us take a moment of silence to listen to what God might be saying.

Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening...

PASTORAL PRAYER

This is the season, Ancient of Days, in which time can seem to drag on.

The holidays are complete, spring is still far off.

After an autumn and early winter of preparations and holidays and new beginnings, we are now in that lax time.

Protect us, O God, for those of us in winter's throes, in still dark evenings and mornings missing daylight.

Keep our hearts and minds healthy, O God, and help us to seek help when despair overtakes us.

May the spirit of Advent, of active watching and waiting, be with us in this season after Epiphany, and in all times when we are waiting for something to come.

May we be actively seeking to reveal You to the world, and take notice when You are revealed to us.

In You we have all our hope, and we pray in Your name.

Amen. (Rev-o-lution Resources by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell

<http://rev-o-lution.org>, (c) 2021. Used by permission.)

BENEDICTION:

And now it really is just this simple:

God loves you.

So, don't forget to love each other.

Go with God.

Go in Peace.

And Amen!

CLOSING:

When I think about loving what you do—when I think about someone who's sheer vocational joy shines through for everyone to enjoy, I think of the person I quoted at the beginning of the service.

And I think it's because that joy was so contagious—his art was so collaborative, and that joy spread through everyone who participated and spilled over into those of us who witnessed it.

His work was inspirational, celebrational—
Muppetational!

It was very difficult to pick just one piece that displayed the joy of living into the path God calls you to, but I think this one will do!

<https://youtu.be/UnLsyvuHs9U>, "Crocodile Rock" ~Elton John (featuring Muppets)

I remember when rock was young
Me and Susie had so much fun
Holding hands and skimming stones
Had an old gold Chevy and a place of my own
But the biggest kick I ever got
Was doing a thing called the Crocodile Rock
While the other kids were rocking 'round the clock
We were hopping and bopping to the Crocodile Rock
Well, Crocodile Rocking is something shocking
When your feet just can't keep still
I never knew me a better time, and I guess I never will
Oh, lawdy mama, those Friday nights
When Susie wore her dresses tight
And the Crocodile Rocking was out of sight
Laa, la-la-la-la-laa
La-la-la-la-laa
La-la-la-la-laa
But the years went by and the rock just died
Susie went and left us for some foreign guy
Long nights crying by the record machine
Dreaming of my Chevy and my old blue jeans
But they'll never kill the thrills we've got
Burning up to the Crocodile Rock
Learning fast as the weeks went past
We really thought the Crocodile Rock would last
Well, Crocodile Rocking is something shocking
When your feet just can't keep still
I never knew me a better time, and I guess I never will
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While the other kids were rocking 'round the clock
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La-la-la-la-laa
La-la-la-la-laa
Laa, la-la-la-la-laa
La-la-la-la-laa
La-la-la-la-laa

end