

WELCOME - Kris

Welcome, and thank you for coming to this service of celebration and remembrance. There is a bulletin in the red binder in the back. This service, as always, will be in voice and text, music will be on the media viewer, We will begin with some gathering music.

GATHERING MUSIC

"Circle Me" (Jeff Johnson)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGNJlyyo280>

GREETING - Kris

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.
My good friends --
We gather here in the protective shelter of God's healing love
To celebrate the life of Jerold Garber,
Known to friends as Jerry,
and to those in this virtual world of Second Life
as Jerome Newstart, Pastor Jer, or simply Jer.
Father, son, brother, uncle, friend, pastor, and beloved child of God.
As we gather here,
Family and friends also are gathering simultaneously near his home in California,
In a service led by Conference Minister Rev. Rachel Pryor.
Pastor Jer would want us to remind everyone, as we do every service,
That this church, First UCC Second Life,
is a church with full real life standing
In the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.
and anyone you see here with a Minister tag
is an ordained UCC minister in real life.
As we come together today,
We are free to pour out our grief,
To release our anger,
To face our emptiness,
To remember our joy,
And know that God cares.
Friends and family,
We come to comfort and support
One another in our common loss,
To hear God's words of hope,
And to seek the peace
That only God's grace can provide.
Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you,
My own peace I give to you, a peace
The world cannot give, this is my gift to you.
Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
As we gather in the sight of God,
In this place of peace,
Let us let that peace enfold us with this next song.

“My Life Flows On in Endless Song” – performed by Judy Collins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxi4SDc48og>

INTRODUCTION - Yadi

Hear the promises of God:

“I am the resurrection and the life;
all who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live,
and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

OPENING PRAYER - Jamie

Let us pray.

Holy God,

Whose ways are not our ways

And whose thoughts are not our thoughts,

grant that your Holy Spirit

may intercede for us

with sighs too deep for human words.

Heal our wounded hearts

Made heavy by our sorrow.

Through the veil of our tears

And the silence of our emptiness

Assure us again

That ear has not heard,

Nor eye seen,

Nor human imagination envisioned

What you have prepared

For those who love you.

Ease our emptiness with your presence,

renew our inner strength,

and help us to hear your words of grace,

that we may be comforted by the wonder of your love,

and our hope renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING Psalm 23 (gender neutral) - Yadi

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

They make me lie down in green pastures;

They lead me beside still waters;

They restore my soul.

They lead me in right paths for their name's sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil; for you are with me;

your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE - Jamie

Pastor Jer liked stories.
He liked to tell them;
he liked to collect them.
Now we're going to open the floor to share stories of Jerry.
You can come up to the front and unmute your mic.
Or you can type your story in Nearby Chat.
As the Spirit moves, you are invited to share a brief story or memory that is in
your heart.

EULOGY - Kris

How to begin?

I'm not sure I can say all that is my heart about Jer,
We'd be here all afternoon.
But I think perhaps, I would like to begin with a prayer.

It's one of my favorites,
based on the words of medieval mystic Julian of Norwich:
"All shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well."

I like to do it as a breath prayer, in and out.
Please join me.

I'll say the words, you just close your eyes and pay attention to your breath.
And when you get the rhythm,
You can say the words to yourself.

Ready?

Inhale: All shall be well.

Exhale: And all shall be well.

Inhale: And all manner of thing

Exhale: Shall be well.

Again, All shall be well. And all shall be well.
And all manner of thing - shall be well.

Amen.

It's a prayer that reminds me that God is as close as our own breath.
Whether breathing comes easily to us,
or with great difficulty, as it does for those in their last days,
with each breath the prayer centers us,
reconnects us to our Source.

After all, it was God who breathed life into being -
And who helps give us strength and peace.

It is as the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi:

"In good times or hard times, I have learned the secret.

I can do all things through God who strengthens me."

Jer felt that very strongly.

Knew that God was close.

As close as his breath.

As close as the dogs that brought him such joy in recent years.

And, I believe, that sense of God being close
allowed him to live each moment as fully as he could.

We all feel uncertain as we step out into the unknown,
but in our last conversation, just a week before he passed beyond the veil,
Jer said to me:

“I cannot know what is ahead, but I am confident it is a manifestation of Absolute Love.”

There were capital letters in his voice as he said that, Absolute Love, and as he said that, his voice did not waver.

Then he went on to tell me that he had that confidence,

That bone-deep knowledge,

because he had been surrounded by love over the last weeks of his life in myriad ways that he could not possibly have imagined.

His son Tim and daughter-in-law Angela putting their business life on hold, Angela coming to stay and take care of him through his last day.

“Wow,” he said, “just Wow.”

Friends old and new had been showing up for him in ways that were incredibly meaningful for him:

Sally, the members of his spiritual direction cohort from Stillpoint spiritual direction program.

He was so grateful for people just sharing their memories with him, reminding him of connections that were, in his words, “beyond important now.”

In the 7 years I knew him, Jer spoke to me often of connections and of community.

I met him through this church he founded and loved.

I was at a time when I needed a community,

And was led to this home.

Jer, and this community, held me through the death of my mother.

This is a remarkable place,

And Jer’s fingerprints are all over it,

from the landscaping,

where his was the unseen hand changing the seasons on this sim,

and the flowers on the altar,

to the sense of openness and welcome.

Jer was good at seeing the possible,

And making happen what others thought was impossible.

Like when he drove out in his RV to my home during the pandemic

To perform the wedding of my daughter, Jen,

In my living room.

In the midst of a shutdown,

He made a way to make the day special.

Like when he started this church,

Something some folks still don’t believe is possible.

Jer had a huge voice, and a huge presence,

So his leaving leaves a large hole.

When someone passes from this life,

it leaves an emptiness that doesn’t go away.

In the aftermath of her husband’s death,

minister and author Jan Richardson wrote of this

as an almost “physical sensation: in the center of [her] chest,

an emptying nearly tangible,

a hollowing out of the heart and of the life [she] had known.”

And yet, in the weeks that followed,

she began to experience “one of the mysteries of grief” –

that the emptiness can become a space that left her more and more open to the receiving of joy.”

Death is not separate from life, it is part of it.
As Jan writes,
“The hollowing happens. Life will empty us out,”
whether we want it to or not.
Yet “Paul [in Philippians] reminds us that we belong to the Christ who freely chose
to empty himself:
who gave himself completely in a way that,
paradoxically,
didn’t diminish him but helped to reveal the fullness of who he was, and is.”
Reveal that “love is Lord of heaven and earth,” hymn we heard earlier.
In the emptying that naturally happens in life,
we are faced with the question of how we will respond?
What choices will we make?
How can we, in Paul’s words, make Pastor Jer’s joy complete.
How will love live on in us, both as individuals and as a community?
Because if “love is Lord of heaven and earth”
How can we keep from singing in joy?
That’s what it comes down to, isn’t it: Joy and love?
In the week before his death, Jer told me one last story:
I had the sense he wanted me to share it with you.
It was the story of a friend and colleague that he spoke with soon after his
friend’s father passed away.
His friend said to Jer:
“I have been preaching God’s presence and love all of my life.
I’m anxious to see if I was right.”
Jer loved that thought, and finished this story by saying:
“I’m in a place where I’m okay.
No one need worry about me.
It is okay and it will be okay.”
“And all shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.”
One of gifts Jer had was a sense of adventure.
He loved visiting new places, driving all over in an RV,
Particularly in the last few years since he went on leave of absence.
This church has been an adventure from day one,
And that is part of his gift to us.
But I am also remembering the words from the Gospel of John,
Pastor Jer’s favorite gospel,
Words that Jesus spoke to his followers when he knew he was to leave them,
“Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God; believe also in me.
In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.
If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, there you may be also.”
I picture Jerry just up the road ahead of us.
Still taking care of things behind the scenes,
and through his love that lives in us,

still taking care of us,
and calling us to take care of others,
as a community,
to keep on singing in joy and sharing the love,
because
"all shall be well,
]and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well."
Jerry Garber, beloved child of God,
you are remembered, and you will be missed.
Godspeed on the road, my friend.
Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER - Jamie

Let us pray.

O God of mercy and compassion,
We thank you for the gift of Jerry Garber.
We thank you for all that he was
for those who loved him
and for his faithfulness to the church of Jesus Christ.
We thank you that for Jer,
all sickness and sorrow are ended,
death itself is past,
and has entered the home where all your people gather in peace.
Jesus said:

"Come to me all you that are weary
and carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest."

Precious Lord,

Help us to share the heavy burden of our loss, with you and with one another,
That we may find rest and peace for our spirits,
and our relationships may grow stronger,
In this community of those who have known and loved Jer.
Lead us step by step to your light and
Hope that shine before us,
A light no darkness can overcome,
And let that light warm and nourish
The memory of Jer within us,
A seed of love that will grow to strengthen and nourish us
In the years ahead.
Amen.

MUSIC

"Amazing Grace" (Andrea Bocelli)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k421o8CKSac>

COMMENDATION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER - Yadi

It is written:

"Fear not, for I am with you,
be not dismayed,

for I am your God;
I will strengthen you.
I will help you.
I will uphold you
With my victorious hand.”
Holy God,
You gave us life,
And in your love,
You have given us new life,
In Jesus Christ.
So it is with confidence
In your abundant grace and love,
That we entrust Jerry Garber,
Our beloved Pastor Jer,
To your eternal care.
We take comfort in knowing that
He rests safe in your arms,
And that he will also live forever
In that piece of our hearts
That belonged to him.
We lift up all that is in our hearts to you,
In the name of Jesus Christ, who showed us your abundant love, and taught us to pray
together, saying . . .
Our Father . . .

BENEDICTION - Kris

Thank you all for coming and sharing this time.
After the service, we will hang out in the Rainbow Room for a while,
If you would like to dance, and chat and remember.
There will be a Taize service tonight at our usual 5pm SLT,
Led by Pastor Yadi.

May God bless you and keep you.
May God's face shine upon you
And be gracious to you.
May God look upon you with kindness
And give you peace.
Amen.

We close with this well-known hymn was specifically requested by Jer for this
service,
One of his favorites,
And, I think, a last message to us from our dear founding pastor.

CLOSING HYMN

“They’ll Know We are Christians By Our Love” (Justin Unger)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo4ij0Is6as>

Go in Peace.