

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of the Holy-One-of-All!  
Thank you for coming! We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

It gives me great joy to tell you that  
First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is  
a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;  
Southern California Nevada Conference of the  
United Church of Christ (UCC).

Our service will be in voice and text.  
Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have your voice and media  
turned on.

If you don't know how to do that, let someone know and we'll try to help.  
There will be a link in Nearby Chat so you can watch it in your browser if the  
viewer isn't working for you.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder  
in the back along with a donation bowl.

And as a real UCC church, we'd like you to know that  
"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,  
You are welcome here.

One of the blessings and responsibilities that come with  
our being a real church with real standing is that we, like all UCC churches,  
support the work of the national church not only with prayer  
but financially.

So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry.  
If you prefer, donations can be made on our website, [firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org).

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.  
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

Today we have a guest in real life their name is Salgu Wissmath a Korean  
American nonbinary photojournalist working at the San Antonio Express-News, and at  
the San Francisco Chronicle.  
I'm hoping to help Salgu get their own avatar to join us later.  
After the service feel free to stick around and speak with Salgu.

On this day of December 1st, is the annual observance of World AIDS day.  
The body of Christ, the church plays an important part in bringing awareness and  
ending the stigma of those who live and are affected by HIV/AIDS.  
Or as the UCC says "seeing the marginalized within the marginalized of those living  
with HIV."

We will also be partaking holy communion today. Today is also our first day of the month so we will be partaking in holy communion.

I invite you to gather the elements for after the Message of Hope to share together in our sacred time of remembering Christ in the breaking of bread.

Gather something to eat, such as bread, a cracker, or a cookie.

As well as a cup of grape juice or wine to drink after we pray over the elements remembering our savior Jesus Christ with the ritual of Holy Communion.

As we enter this season of advent we will light a candle every Sunday. Advent is the season when we prepare and awaken to the signs of God's love and justice unfolding in our midst.

We await the birth of the Christ-child and will light the candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Would you pray with me?

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.

As we gather on this day may your bless our lives.

We pray for those here today and those who are not here but are part of our community, our family, your church, your children.

May all honor and glory be yours now and forever.

Amen

And now for our gathering music.

If there are any announcements about the life of the church please share with us while our gathering music plays.

#### GATHERING MUSIC

O come, O come, Emmanuel - (Piano/Cello) - The Piano Guys

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i07ySn-Swwc&list=RDQMGskI5b\\_VF9A&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i07ySn-Swwc&list=RDQMGskI5b_VF9A&start_radio=1)

#### SCRIPTURES

Today's scriptures comes from the book of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NIV)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace"  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). NIV

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON

Today is World AIDS Day, a day founded in 1988 when the first ever international day for global health was created.

It was a day where United Nations agencies, governments, and civil society came together to campaign around specific themes related to HIV and to bring global awareness and attention to this epidemic.

This day is more than a celebration of what has been achieved and more of a call to action to support communities, remember those who have died, and support those living with HIV.

This year of 2024 WORLD AIDS theme is Collective Action: Sustain and Accelerate HIV Progress.

This is a call to action to enable and support communities in their leadership roles and to highlight the potential of community leadership to enable the end of AIDS.

We have read together the words of a wise man from the Hebrew Bible read among Christian communities.

This text talks about seasons, time, the beginning and the end.

When it comes to HIV and AIDS prevention, detection, education, and stigma have surely gone through seasons.

When it comes to our own awareness and efforts, it has gone through its seasons.

When it comes to living with HIV, it is a never -ending season of change, compromise and new realities.

When it comes to moving from HIV to AIDS because of life's complications and an affected and weakened immune system, it comes into a new season, one that changes until its end.

When it comes to Hope, it goes through its seasons as well.

WHO - The World Health Organization says that by 2025, 95% of all people living with HIV should have a diagnosis, 95% of those should be taking lifesaving anti-retroviral treatment (ART) and 95% on treatment should achieve a suppressed viral load.

This means that the person's health improves and there is a reduction onward HIV transmission.

In addition to this WHO says that it is aligned with UNAIDS to have a global HIV strategy in place to target the ending of the HIV epidemic by 2030.

Certainly, a season of hope. May it be so.

But the facts as known by WHO says different.

A season opposite of hope is despair. But unlike such in this community this season is declining hope, a season of fear.

But it is when such a season arrives that we remember season change.

If you are able and willing, how many here know of someone who has been affected by HIV/AIDS in your lifetime? (Just hold their names in your heart.)

There is a time of being born and a time to die says the wisdom of Ecclesiastes but who wants to think about dying?

In the 80's when AIDS was first perceived as a white gay man disease the season of misinformation led to many more in ethnic minorities dying unaware that AIDS did not discriminate.

This mystery illness in the 80's and early 90s' took many lives who died alone, stigmatized and with no idea how to live with this epidemic.

It was certainly a time to break down.

Through the decades we have learned that it does not affect only white gay men, it affects anyone who might be infected through body fluids of an infected person.

Not by hugs, sharing food or drinks.

But by un-sanitized medical tools, shared needles, unprotected sexual relations and spread from a mother to her baby if the HIV virus was present.

A time to seek information and be educated finally arrived.

Although there are still communities with no funding for testing places, low commitment to education campaigns.

In the 80's teens with HIV were kicked out of schools for fear that fellow classmates might be infected.

A time to an end of misinformation finally arrived.

And yet, many who live with HIV keep their status quiet for fear of stigma, of employment loss, or promotions.

That fear of losing a friend, a church community, a volunteer gig, a teaching position, a future.

The stigma of fear, misinformation and bullying that has gone through a season but has not been eradicated.

Many with HIV have learned to live with this diagnosis and thanks to the arrival of medication like ART many live full lives.

Many with the medication of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) reduce the risk of

contracting HIV.

Although the time for ever changing life saving treatments have arrived, the best form of defense is to learn about prevention and be aware of how to stay safe, be safe and educate a younger generation.

The dance has arrived for many who can live full lives in their own capacity with resources and the help of medication.

I once heard a young man tell me that he did not care much about AIDS because there were medicines now anyways.

But the season of living with HIV friends is very much a season of constant change.

It comes with winter and facing the reality of mortality on an epidemic with no cure.

It comes with the medicine cabinet with medications you will take for the rest of your life.

It comes with the fear that a cold, COVID, an accident or something major health wise can move your numbers and that Human immunodeficiency virus attacks your body's immune system and leads to full blown AIDS the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

That then takes your life.

AIDS in its most advanced stage of the illness takes you down and death occurs.

This is like a season of winter like no other if you're not prepared.

A time to seek the knowledge of its reality has passed. It is time to sow that knowledge to my young friends and make wise choices.

Through the seasons of someone living with HIV and someone living with AIDS two things come to mind.

1. Community and support are crucial to wholeness and survival.

Today as we sit together in this place to commemorate the lives lost, to acknowledge the work before us and the work ahead we become a living testament to a community of faith.

For no matter what seasons as a person facing this illness either in their bodies or of those of a loved one, this is a testament of love.

To show up and stand up for those who might not be able to.

To show up and speak up for those who no longer can.

Wholeness comes from learning to live in a new reality that does not define a person living with HIV/AIDS.

The illness does not define them.

Wholeness is learning to care for one's body with extra caution, loving each day with reverence and embracing each other with tenderness.

So, to my young friends who might say it's not a big deal, I invite you to stand back and see its history, its challenges and its reality.

For there is no need to risk your immune system if you can honor that you now live in the season of knowing and learning its at your fingertips.

2. A commitment to hold on to hope.  
Hope does not disappoint. Like the seasons that change one prepares for them.  
There is no cure but prevention.

There is no cure but early detection.  
But like the seasons of winter, one shall not be cold and alone.  
Like the fall what we knew will be like the leaves in the tree change but spring after winter is coming.

A new life will emerge and a new way of existing in an able or different able body will arise.  
A summer will arrive, and the breeze of the Holy Spirit that sustains and embraces the reality of never again being alone.

HIV/AIDS has to go.

We learned as a society not to drink dirty or contaminated water and slowly cholera and other illnesses were preventable.

This is the season of educating, celebrating and supporting community lead individuals willing, able, and committed to creating change.

We honor those who have died in the epidemic of AIDS, according to WHO in 2004: 2.1 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses.

AIDS-related deaths have decreased by 69% since the peak in 2004. This is primarily due to the scale up in antiretroviral treatment. However, the number of people living with HIV continues to increase globally because the decline in mortality has been steeper than the decline in new infections.

This is where the church comes in.

We commit to community building efforts providing more than empty promises and prayers.

To be in community and offer respect to in our geographical area, those in our families or circle of friends, those still unknown.

We do this by continuing to learn about prevention, detection and supporting measures such as testing among others.

We commit to the younglings out there and the generation coming up behind us to be aware that the season of AIDS being a silent killer is over. Be diligent my young friends and be the generation that adds this season to its history books.

So, friends, community, church there was a time of silence when fear of what they might say send us away.

A time of silence when we fear what people might think of us.  
And spaces like this.

All of us gathered like this, praying, committing, supporting, empowering and uplifting those affected up by this epidemic was not possible.  
Now is the time to speak, to lead, to empower, and to testify as the body of Christ.  
For Hope and Love are verbs a walking testament of what the Holy-One-of-those-with-AIDS-and-HIV has call upon you and me to give.

May it be so.

Amen

#### PRAYER PREPARATION:

We have come to the time where we come together in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gift of this day  
and pray for the life of the world.

If you have a prayer of joy or concern that you wish to lift to God, and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, we invite you to share.

As this song plays, in the silence of our hearts or type your request in the nearby chat.

for KING + COUNTRY - Little Drummer Boy (Official Music Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzEX3QMuVPM>

#### 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.

#### FIRST ADVENT CANDLE/PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Today is the First Sunday in Advent  
the beginning of the church year.  
It is a sacred time of waiting and preparation  
for the birth of our Lord.  
So today, we will light the first Advent Candle  
In honor of sacred time.

The busyness of the holiday season can overrun the sense of the sacred.  
The irony is that setting apart time to connect with God often gets put aside in this holy season.

Church, friends, may we make time this year to prepare for the Christmas holiday, to make room for the holy one to be born in us.

[the first blue candle is lit]

Let us pray.

Thank you God, for the sacred gifts of this holy Advent season.

In all the upcoming "nows" of it, grant that we may wisely order and inhabit your sacred gift of time -

with each other, our families and friends, and with all the many needs that cross our paths.

In the silence of our hearts or in words typed in Nearby Chat  
let us give thanks for the gift of this day  
and pray for the life of the world ...

Amen.

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over  
our ministry to the world is just beginning.

The world is waiting.

Go in peace, come again in hope.

Amen.

Let's dance with Crowder and the Elf Song.

#### MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Crowder - The Elf Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r01hVc8RVE>

Go in Peace!