



# *Community of Christ Lutheran Church*

*First Sunday in Lent*

*February 22, 2026, 9:00 a.m.*

*Pastor Stephen C. Bond*



## THE GATHERING

**Welcome**

Pastor Stephen Bond

**Musical Prelude**

“Children’s Songs” by R. Schumann

Eric Dickey

## CONFESSiON AND FORGIVENESS

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.*

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who first called us into being, whose relentless love went all the way to a cross, whose Spirit gathers us together into new life.

**Amen**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of one another. *Silence for reflection.*

Merciful God,

**We confess that we have turned away from you and gone astray from the way of Jesus. We have resisted the pull of your Spirit, and we have ignored the needs of neighbors around us, whom you have called us to love. We have allowed greed, fear, indifference, and self-centeredness to lead us into dead ends, and we have let ourselves become entangled in sin. We need you to set us free, to take us by the hand, and to bring us to life again. Forgive us, O God, and make us new creations.**

Beloved of God, you have been found by grace and claimed by Christ. In the name of Jesus, your sins are forgiven and you are no longer captive in the grip of death, for Christ has defeated its power in the cross. Through the Spirit that has been poured into your hearts, you have been brought into God’s family and are free to live anew. **Amen**

## Hymn

### “We Turn To You”

N.E. Downs

*The congregation will sing the refrain between spoken prayer petitions*

At the break of the dawn to the shade of night's de - scent, We turn to you, O  
Lord. On the jour - ney with Je - sus to the cross, we fix our eyes and hearts on  
you, O Lord. Your life - giv - ing Word shapes the path for us, Change our hearts once a - gain.

## Greeting

P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. C **And also with you.**

### “With All Our Hearts”

*The choir will sing the cantor lines, and the congregation will sing the refrain*

(Violin) 7 (Congregation) With all our hearts, we turn to You, O God of love and mer - cy, So  
13 (Cantor/Choir) tune our hearts to your sweet song, and lead us on the jour - ney. O Lord, our God, Cre - a - tor of all, you  
19 (Congregation) know the sin of the world, You sent your Son, Je - sus Christ, to set us free. With  
25 all our hearts, we turn to You, O God of love and mer - cy, So tune our hearts to your sweet song, and

36

Congregation

time And by the Spirit's work in us, we are made new. With all our hearts, we turn to You, O God of love and mercy, So tune our hearts to your sweet song, and lead us on the journey. To day give thanks, sing out for joy, Christ is among us, in water and word, bread and wine, The gifts of God for you! With all our hearts, we turn to You, O God of love and mercy, So tune our hearts to your sweet song, and lead us on the journey.

42

48 Cantor/Choir

54 Congregation

60 rit.

## Prayer of the Day

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## Childrens Sermon

**Anthem**

“God of All Unwanted”

Choir

## THE READINGS

### **The First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

<sup>3:1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, <sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

**L The Word of the Lord C Thanks be to God!**

## **The Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19**

<sup>12</sup> Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned <sup>13</sup> for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. <sup>16</sup> And the gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup> If, because of the one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore, just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. <sup>19</sup> For just as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

**L The Word of the Lord C Thanks be to God!**

“Return to the Lord”

Re - turn to the Lord, who is gra - cious mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a -

5  
bounds instead fast love Re - turn to the Lord, who is gra-cious, mer-ci-ful, slow to  
9  
anger and a - bounds in stead - fast love.

## The Holy Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

P The Holy Gospel according to....C Glory to you, O Lord!

<sup>1</sup> Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’ ”

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

P The Gospel of the Lord! C Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

“Knowing the Right Path”

Pastor Stephen Bond

Hymn

“Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song”

ELW 808

## The Apostles' Creed

C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

## WE DEDICATE OUR HEARTS IN PRAYER

P Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs.

*A brief silence.*

**AM** God of all grace, grant faith to your church. Give to all the baptized the will to resist temptation and to worship and serve you alone. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**AM** God of all creation, tend this earth. When human greed and disobedience threaten this planet and the life it contains, lead us by your Spirit into ways of reverence, awe, and gentleness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**AM** God of all nations, preserve us from trouble. Surround all living in places of violence with your steadfast love and give resilience to all who work for peace. Grant courage to those who challenge, especially around issues of racism and systemic oppression. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**AM** God of all healing, mend our wounds. Bring wholeness to all who are sick, give peace to all who groan in grief, and send companions to all who are lonely or isolated, especially; **Tom Jennings, Larry Battles, Sue & Jim Enk, Christal & Chad Pritchard, Frank O'Konski, Luke Holtz, Ron Hetherwick, Jake Cope, Virginia Dillon, Staci, Laura Reimer, Greg Urbanski, Matt Jurrus, Sally, Tom Druschel, Cindy Hartbarger, Phyllis Sturgeon, Jeff Bucher, Albert Preston, David Reimer, Pastor Ray Gottschling, Jim Gebhart, Jim Dorton, Don Schroeder, Bryan Lauer, Wyatt Dunn, Amy Meagher, Ann Reisner, Kathryn Whitacre, Ricky Webb & family, Morgan Fodor & unborn baby, Greg Ganalli, Carol Tomlin, Mya Chapp, Richard Schroeder, Kim Mack, Connie Baker, Deb**

**Mullens, Drew Trotter, Marci, Larry Hudson...** and all others whom we remember in silence. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**AM** God of all people, provide for our community. For any among us who hunger for bread, bring nourishment. For any among us who hunger for truth, speak your life-giving word. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**AM** God of all life, bring us to you. We thank you for your free and abounding grace, and for those who, by that same grace, now rest eternally in you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

**P** Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation. **Amen.**

### **THE MEAL**

*All Christians are welcome to commune at our Altar. You do not have to be a member of this congregation to receive Communion. Grape juice is available in the inner ring of glasses for those desiring it.*

#### **Sharing of the Peace**

**P** The Peace of the Lord be with you all! **C And also with you!**

*Share an expression of peace with your neighbor, please.*

**Our Tithes and Offering** *Bring your gifts to the Altar, or you may offer gifts in the tray located at the rear of the sanctuary. Thank you.*

#### **Offering Prayer**

**AM** O God, maker of heaven and earth, your steadfast love embraces all creation. You send rain and sunshine to nourish the earth and bring forth its bounty. Through these gifts of bread and wine, draw us into the death and life of your Son, who calls us to bear witness to his saving work. We ask this in Jesus' name. . **Amen.**

#### **The Great Thanksgiving**

**P** The Lord be with you.

**C And also with you.**

**P** Lift up your hearts.

**C We lift them to the Lord.**

**P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**C It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**

## \*\*Eucharistic Prayer Continues

*Holy, Holy, Holy*

**Piano intro:**

**Congregation:**

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord, God of po-wer and

7

might — Hea-ven and earth are fullof your glo - ry Ho - san - na in — the high - est

14

Ho - san - na, Ho - san - na, Ho - san - na in — the high - est Ho - san - na, Ho -

21

- san — na, Ho - san - na in — the high - est!

### The Words of Institution

*In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Jesus said, Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*“Mystery of Faith and Amen”*

**Piano Intro:**

**Leader/Cantor:**

Christ has died, Christ is ri-sen

7

**Congregation:**

rit. — — —

Christ will come a - gain Christ has died, Christ is ri-sen Christ will come a - gain

## Prayer Continues

“Amen”

Piano intro: Leader/Cantor:  
A men, A men,  
A men. A men, A men, A men.

## The Lord's Prayer

P Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray... C 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass 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 and ever. Amen.

## Communion Hymns

“Lamb of God”  
Strings, Voice, Piano

2  
Lamb of God, You take a - way the sin of the world, Have mer - cy on us.  
7  
Lamb of God, You take a - way the sin of the world, Have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, You  
12  
take a - way the sin of the world. Grant us peace.

## Hymn

“You Satisfy the Hungry Heart”  
“Eat the Bread, Drink this Cup”

ELW 484  
ELW 472

## Post Communion Blessing

## **Prayer after Communion**

**AM** God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Through the body and blood of your Son, may we become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## **SERVICE OF SENDING/BLESSING AT END OF INTERNSHIP**

*Vicar Natalie, on August 25, 2024, your internship began, and we of Community of Christ, welcomed you to be a vicar in this place: to observe, participate in, and lead in the full stretch of Gospel ministry among us. With the Gospel, you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you and your family have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.*

*The leader addresses the assembly with these or similar words.*

People of God, members and friends of *Community of Christ*, do you release *Vicar Natalie* from service as your vicar?

### **C We do, and we give thanks to God for our ministry together.**

*The leader addresses the person whose term is concluding.*

*Vicar Natalie, do you recognize and accept the completion of your ministry with Community of Christ?*

I do, and I give thanks to God for your ministry together.

## **Prayer of forgiveness, thanksgiving, and sending**

*The presiding minister leads the assembly in prayer in these or similar words*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ, you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. You equip your people with abilities that differ according to the grace given to them, and you call them to various avenues of service. We give you thanks for the ministry of name among the people of God in this place. You watch over our going out and our coming in: Bless this time of ending and beginning. You surround your people in every time and place: Keep us close in your love. You accompany your people in times of joy and times of trial: Prosper all that

has been done to your glory in this time together, Heal and forgive all that has fallen short of your will for us. Help *Vicar Natalie* and her family, and all of us to live with courage and gladness in the future you have given to us. As they have been a blessing to us, so now send them forth to be a blessing to others, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.

### **THE SENDING**

#### ***Milestones & Announcements:***

#### **The Blessing**

**P** Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity: God, who calls all things into existence, Jesus Christ, who redeems us, and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation, + bless you now and always. **Amen.**

Dedicated to Community of Christ Lutheran Church, Whitehouse, OH

**Sending Hymn**

“Lord, Send Us Now”

N.E. Downs

A musical score for a hymn. The top staff is for the Voice, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure consists of a single note followed by a rest. The subsequent measures are all rests. The bottom staff is for the Piano, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part begins with a dynamic of forte (f). It features a bass line with eighth-note patterns and a treble line with eighth-note chords. The piano part continues with a dynamic of piano (p) and concludes with a dynamic of forte (f).

5

Vo. Pno.

1. Lord, send us now to  
when the world's fear-ful  
jour-neys prove to be  
glo-ry be to the

8

Vo. Pno.

serve the world you love, to be your hands and your  
news in-vades our peace, Re-mind us of your  
hard and daunt-ing tasks, Re-vive in us your  
God who runs to us, and loves e'en when we

10

Vo. Pno.

feet And when our eyes meet, with a  
pres- - - ence. You are ev'- ry - where, in the  
call - - - ing. Speak to us a - gain, that your  
fal - - - ter. Je-sus sets us free, to go

12

Vo. stran - ger or a friend, stir in us your love and deep com -  
si - lence and the prayer, You speak words of life a -  
with us to the end, Turn our hearts a - gain to trust your  
love and serve the need, to share in word and deed the

Pno.

14 1, 2, 3 4 rit.

Vo. -pas - sion.  
-round us.  
pro - mise.  
gos - pel.

Pno.

## Dismissal

AM Go in peace. Believe the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

AM And next week, **C Bring a friend!**

## Postlude

# Making Jesus Known”

**Welcome to Community of Christ!** We welcome YOU to worship with us at one of our TWO worship services. Join us at **8:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m.** in person or on Facebook Live. We look forward to seeing you, and as always, BRING A FRIEND!!!!

**Worship Whys—Sunday Adult Forum.** In our weekly Sunday Adult Forum, we will explore our patterns of worship as Lutheran Christians and with our own traditions here at Community of Christ. Have you ever wondered why we do certain things in worship, or wondered where they come from? How about the differences in traditions between different Christian denominations, or the ways our practices here are different from other Lutheran congregations in other places? And how have Christian worship patterns changed over time? All of these questions are a part of our new series, “Worship Whys,” which starts today, between the 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. services in the Bible study/Council room. Everyone is welcome, and we invite you to bring your thoughts, questions, and curiosity!

**Thursday Bible Study** Every Thursday at 1:00 p.m., we host a Bible study (in the Council/Bible study room) that is open to all! We will continue to explore the Scriptures on 26 -Encountering the Book of Acts. We'll be doing a longer deep dive into the New Testament book of Acts to learn the story of the early church and how the band of rag-tag fishermen and tax collectors from Galilee grew into a movement that reached outward to the very heart of the Roman Empire and became a “found family” of Jewish and Gentile people, rich and poor, enslaved and free, women and men, and lived through the growing pains of that outreach to change the world. Remember, too, that we'll continue to share video catch-up sessions on our social media each week, so that you can know what we'll be looking at each week in case you miss a week or want to join in!

## ***Women’s Bible Study: The Way of Wisdom: A Study of the Book of Proverbs***

When: 8 Weeks, March 3-April 21, 2026 - 8:30-10:00 a.m.

Where: Community of Christ Adult Sunday School/Church Council Room

Six women Bible Study Leaders will be helping us understand the true meaning of Wisdom as illustrated in Proverbs. The format is to read a chapter in the workbook, do any homework and then come to Bible Study to discuss and ask questions. We will then watch the teaching on the DVD and, if there is time, discuss it! A full morning of learning! The leaders on the DVD are Jen Wilken, Ruth Chou Simons, Kelly Mintor, Adrienne Camp, Elizabeth Woodson, and Courtney Doctor.

Please sign up at the kiosk, or text me, Kathryn Whitacre, with your contact information at 567-393-9444. Please purchase the workbook *The Way of Wisdom*, Lifeway Press. You can get it directly from Lifeway or (usually cheaper if you have PRIME) from Amazon. Invite a friend to attend; you don't have to be a member of Community of Christ to take part in this learning opportunity.

**Conversations and More!!** Are you getting tired of being inside? Are you ready to get out for a couple of hours? Have fun? Visit with friends, new and old? Play some euchre or sequence? Share some snacks? The "Conversation and More" session on **Tuesday, February 24<sup>th</sup>** is the perfect answer! Come from **1:00-3:00 p.m.** and be ready for a good time! (An additional Conversations and More AND follow-up drawing session will be held on **Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup>** for all who can make it.)

**Special Note:** Going forward, if AW Schools are closed, *Conversations and More* will also be cancelled.

### **Worship Volunteer Orientation and Update - Sat, Feb 28, 10-11 am**

Whether you are new to worship volunteering or have been helping out, you are cordially invited to attend the Worship Volunteer Orientation and Update Workshop on Sat, Feb 28. Pastor Steve will be describing all roles and the hows and whys of what each role does. Did you ever wonder what order we process in and why? Or if you should say "Good Morning" before offering the readings, or why we carry the light to the back of the church at the end of service? Answers to all of your questions will be provided, along with answers to any of your other burning questions about worship roles. We look forward to seeing many faces at the Workshop!

**CoC Welcomes Tapestry Harp-and-Guitar Duo in Concert, March 15 at 3:00 p.m.** After having a great time in January with our Storytellers Coffeehouse event (and enjoying the tales of seven storytellers along with live music from Eric Dickey and Sarah Magoun), our Concert Committee is excited to welcome *Tapestry* to Community of Christ on the afternoon of Sunday, March 15 at 3:00 p.m. Tapestry is comprised of harpist, Denise Grupp-Verbon and acoustic guitarist/multi-instrumentalist, Michael Grupp-Verbon and is based in Toledo Ohio. Performing and recording together for more than 11 years, Denise and Michael have created a truly distinctive sound, with their unique arranging and composing, and by the intertwining of different instruments. Playing many different styles of music from Celtic & Folk to Pop, Classical, and more, Tapestry is sure to have something for everyone. We'll be blessed to have Denise Grupp-Verbon playing her harp on that Sunday morning in worship to give us a preview of the music later that afternoon, so plan to join us on both Sunday morning and afternoon that day! As always, we'll invite your free will

offerings to help support future concerts and the ministry and mission of both Community of Christ and mission partners beyond our doors.



Break out the Turtle-Wax and your craft supplies; the Outreach Committee is organizing the inaugural Community of Christ Car & Craft Fest on Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, from 12-4 p.m. Do you have a sweet ride you love showing off? We'd LOVE for you to show it off to the community here in our parking lot. Crafters – we're looking for YOU as well! Do you knit or crochet beautiful blankets

or articles of clothing? Create floral arrangements displaying God's beauty? Maybe you paint, do woodworking, make jewelry, or decorate tumblers? We'd love for you to set up shop at our craft fair in Fellowship Hall that afternoon. You may be asking yourself, "How can I get involved in this fun experience?" The answer is simple – reach out to a member of the Outreach Committee so we can get you on our participation list to ensure we have enough space allocated both inside & out. Additional details on all of the events of that day will follow in the coming months. Thank you – The Outreach Committee – Cammie Abraham, Rose Ackerman, Robin Fritz, Shelly Hays, Tammy & Greg Myers, Cindy Smigelski, Kari Swagler, and Pastor Steve.

**Save the date for the evening of March 8th.** Fellowship invites you to Dinners for 8! A fun way to spend time sharing food and fellowship. Sign up with your name and number by **March 1<sup>st</sup>** at the kiosk.



**Altar Flowers given by Laurie & Vince Mauro  
to the Glory of God** ❤️ †

† Lenten Services 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 25 - Wednesday, March 25

🍝 **Soup Suppers 6:00 p.m.**

Wednesday, February 18 – Wednesday, March 25



<i><b>Event</b></i>	<i><b>Day and Time</b></i>
Natalie's Farewell Breakfast 	Sunday, February 22, after worship service
Youth Group @ CoC	Today, Sunday, February 22, 7:00 p.m.
Conversations and More	Tuesday, February 24, 1:00 p.m.
Soup Supper	Wednesday, February 25, 6:00 p.m.
Lenten Service	Wednesday, February 25, 7:00 p.m.
Choir Practice	Wednesday, February 25, 7:45 p.m.
Casserole Making	Thursday, February 26, 9:00 a.m.
Thursday Bible Study	Thursday, February 26, 1:00 p.m.
Bell Choir	Thursday, February 26, 7:00 p.m.
Conversations and More	Friday, February 27, 1:00 p.m.
Worship Volunteer Workshop	Saturday, February 28, 10:00 a.m.



**Blood Drive**  
**Community of Christ Lutheran**  
**Church**

Community Center  
 6517 Finzel  
 Whitehouse, OH 43571

**Friday, March 6, 2026**  
**12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

To schedule an appointment, please visit [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org) and enter sponsor code:  
**COMMUNITYCHRIST** or call 1-800-RED CROSS.



Give in March for a \$15 Gift Card by email & successful donations get a \$1C testing! [rcblood.org/March](http://rcblood.org/March)



### **About this Piece**

On August 25th, 2024, I began my pastoral internship at Community of Christ Lutheran Church under the supervision of the Rev. Stephen Bond. One of the first services that I served alongside him in a leadership role was Sunday, September 8th, 2024 at the annual Blue Jean Sunday service, held outdoors. In the sermon for that day, Steve preached on Mark 7, about the deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus' healing included a sigh to heaven, and speaking the word "Ephphata," meaning to be opened. Steve opened his sermon by sharing his love of dandelions and how he did not think of them as a weed, but an important part of God's creation, which tied nicely to the sermon text.

On May 6th, 2025 (which happened to be my birthday), I noticed that Steve posted this poem, "God of All Unwanted" on his Facebook page, and it reminded me of the Blue Jean Sunday sermon reflection on dandelions. It is a poem that stuck with me, and I read over and over on my own, dwelling in the beauty of God's love that never lets us go. Slowly over the summer, some music began to come to mind with the text, and I started writing the scratch notes on manuscript paper, originally thinking I would write it as a solo. After sitting with it a bit, I felt that the poem deserved to be highlighted through an SATB setting, that would provide more emotional depth and color to uplift the text. My hope is that the depths of Steve's poems and theological reflection are lifted and fully realized within the musical interpretation of the text. A reminder to us all that the things that we may think as insignificant and not important are not so in God's eyes, and that we are invited to see with open eyes God's grace for all creation. That we are invited to a life that allows us through God's grace to see others as loved by God.

Looking backwards and reflecting on that Blue Jean Sunday to today, I can't help but notice the Holy Spirit's work in the midst of my own experience and internship. At a time when I felt that my own voice was closed off, at times feelings maybe I am unwanted in my own ministry experiences, Steve's proclamation in preaching and poetry was my own "ephphata" moment. His images, words, theological reflection worked over me these past 18 months of ministry, and I feel that my own voice and eyes have been opened. I am deeply grateful for the work of artists and pastors such as Steve who have a special gift to preach the good news and life-giving grace of Jesus Christ in creative ways.

The choir at Community of Christ was more than willing to perform this piece to share it with the congregation on my last Sunday, February 22nd in worship. It is my gift to Pastor Steve as I take my leave from the congregation. I pray that all who hear Steve's words along with the music are blessed by the message, and that the Holy

Spirit will continue to open our eyes to the world that God loves, and our voices to praise God and uplift our neighbor.

N.E. Downs

February 10th, 2026

### About this Liturgy

In the Spring semester of 2025, I took a Living Liturgies class with Dr. Jan Schnell at Wartburg Theological Seminary, one of the advanced worship requirement courses for my Master of Divinity Degree. For our final project, we were instructed to put together a liturgy for a season of our choosing, and I decided to do a midweek Lenten tangible worship experience. As I was working on this, music started to come to mind, and I decided to start writing it down. The final project included written liturgy along with the music in this setting.

The music inspiration has come from a variety of sources. First, I decided to dedicate the opening song, “We Turn To You (Teshuvah),” to my dear professors Drs. Winston and May Persaud. May was my Hebrew language instructor throughout my time at Wartburg, and I have learned much from her in translation and biblical interpretation. Much of my own interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures is influenced from her pedagogy and care over the scriptures. Winston was my Systematics professor, who helped to provide instruction on the church doctrine, and who also had a deep love of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification, a joint agreement between the Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation on resolved disputes over the topic of justification by grace through faith. Both of these teachers were influential to my overall seminary education, and I am deeply changed by their instruction and care. In this particular song, I have included the Hebrew word, Teshuvah, meaning repentance. The root of the word comes from the verb shuv (בָּשׁוּ), meaning turn, or turn back. Similar to the Lenten 40 days, Teshuvah is a Jewish celebration (also 40 days) about repentance, ending on Yom Kippur. Including the word “teshuvah” in the soprano descant is purposeful. Not only as a language geek, who will cram in biblical words when I can, but also to add to the expansiveness of the liturgical language, and our shared views on the value and renewal of turning back to God.

The sending hymn was composed with Community of Christ Lutheran Church in mind, my pastoral internship site. I have always loved folk music, especially of Irish and Scottish variety, so there is a flavor of that in this hymn, especially with the added strings. Community of Christ is a relatively younger church, just a little over 50 years old, and started as a mission development church site. And one of the traditions

that have carried on in this congregation at the sending is the reminder “Next week...Bring a Friend!” This hymn is a thank you to the congregation and their willingness to serve Christ and the church through various gifts and their warm hospitality. They have been a blessing to me in this time of internship, and I will always treasure the ministry we did together in my heart, remembering how it shaped and formed me as a leader today.

My prayer is that this liturgy be a source of comfort and inspiration on the journey of faith. Lent is all about journeys, and sometimes those journeys can be hard and troubling. We have a God, though, who goes with us on the journey. Who doesn’t abandon us along the road but is there every step of the way. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts as we once again walk the road to the cross with him and meet him also at the empty tomb.

Soli Deo Gloria

Natalie Emptage Downs  
January 2026

**God of All Unwanted**  
*a poem for May 6th, 2025 - Steve Bond*

O God of all unwanted, useless things,  
O Lover of the least and overlooked,  
Of broken hearts and birds with flightless wings,  
Of weary eyes that wept and knees that shook;  
O seeker of the lost and left behind,  
Of dandelion tuft and fallow ground:  
Awaken us again and call to mind  
How we, discarded once, were sought and found.  
Before I show contempt for your design  
Or disregard your clover as a weed  
Remind me it's your claim rather than mine  
That speaks the verdict "good" to every seed.  
So give us open eyes to see the place  
Where each and all belong within your grace.