

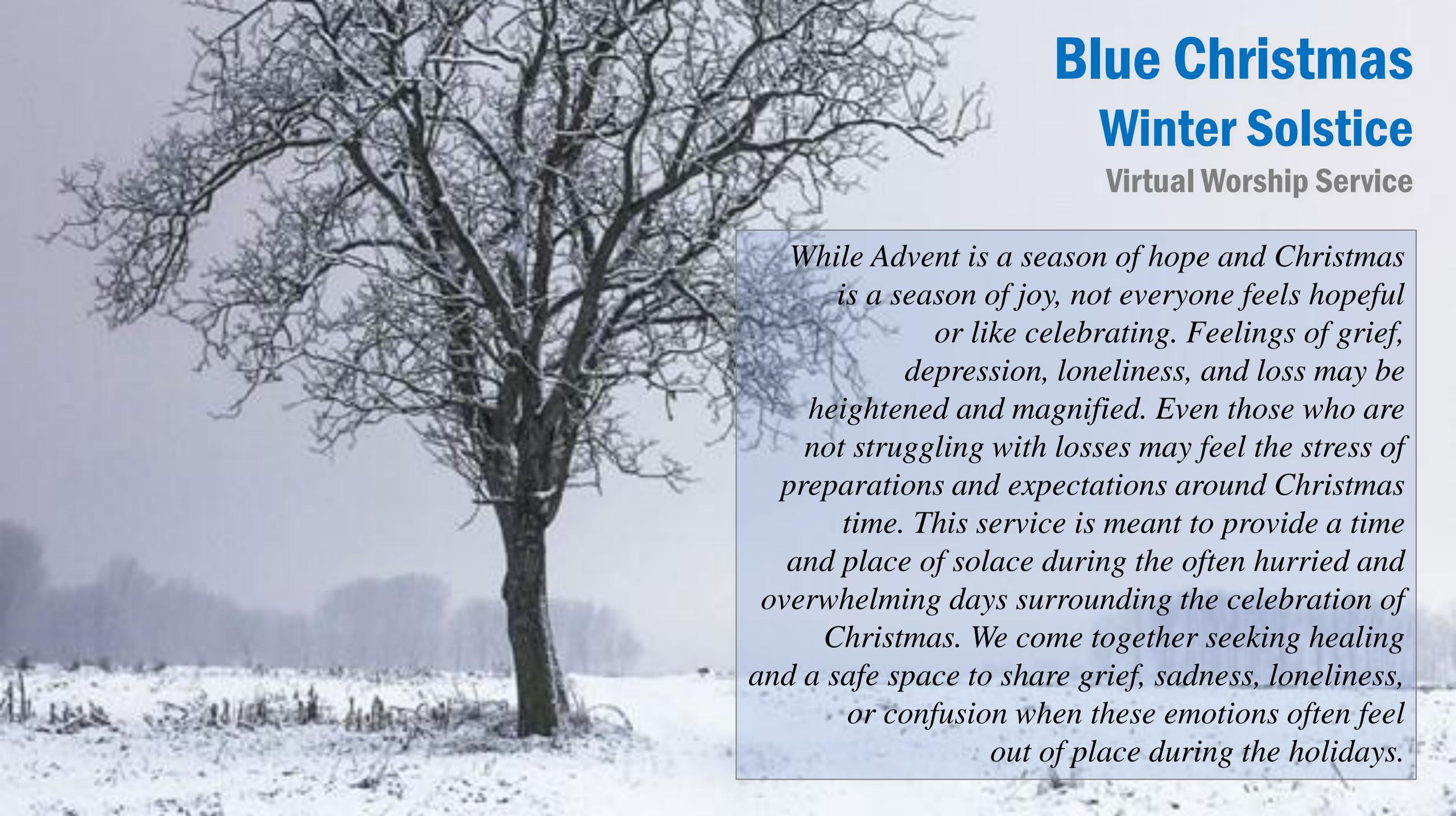
Welcome to
**Iao United Church
of Christ**

7 p.m., Mon., December 21, 2020

Blue Christmas Service will begin in:



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A large, leafless tree stands in a snowy field under a pale sky. The tree's branches are intricate and bare, reaching across the upper half of the frame. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, with some low-lying vegetation visible in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is quiet and wintry.

Blue Christmas

Winter Solstice

Virtual Worship Service

While Advent is a season of hope and Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or like celebrating. Feelings of grief, depression, loneliness, and loss may be heightened and magnified. Even those who are not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas time. This service is meant to provide a time and place of solace during the often hurried and overwhelming days surrounding the celebration of Christmas. We come together seeking healing and a safe space to share grief, sadness, loneliness, or confusion when these emotions often feel out of place during the holidays.

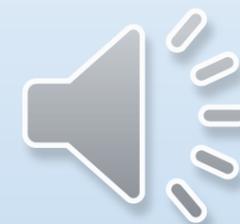
+ GATHERING +

*God's Spirit calls us together, though scattered and diverse,
as God's own beloved children.*

Prelude

“Be Still and Know”

Original composition, Played and Sung by Karyn Sarring, ©2020



Words of Welcome

A brief period of silence is kept to center ourselves for worship.

Call to Worship

One: The holiday season confronts many of our emotions. Sometimes we are terrified and overwhelmed with fear.

People of God: Sometimes we are confused, unsure of what is happening in our lives.

One: Sometimes we doubt and have difficulty trusting in God.

People of God: Sometimes we are curious and anxious about what the future holds.

One: O God, we stumble as those lost in the night.

People of God: Will not day come soon?

One: We live burdened by the sorrows and cares of this world.

People of God: Will you help us soon?

One: We hear the promise of your Word made flesh.

People of God: Christ is coming soon!

One: We long for the light of your salvation.

ALL: Come and save us soon!

Pastor Tino: Please join us in singing our Gathering Hymn, *“You Are Mine”*

Opening Hymn: “You Are Mine”



Text: David Haas, b. 1958 Music: YOU ARE MINE, David Haas Text and Music © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638. www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. used by permission

1 I will come to you in the silence, I will lift you from all fear. You will hear my voice, I claim you as my choice. Be still and know I am here.

2 I am hope for all who are hopeless, I am eyes for all who long to see. In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. Come and rest in me.

Refrain: Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name.

Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you and you are mine.

3 I am strength for all the despairing, healing for the ones who dwell in shame. All the blind will see, the lame will run free, and all will know my name. (Refrain)

4 I am the Word that leads to all freedom, I am the peace the world cannot give. I will call your name, embracing all your pain. Stand up, now walk and live! (Refrain)

Prayer for the Night

One: In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of endings: children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying, grieving over, grudges over, blaming over, excuses over.

People of God: O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

One: In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of beginnings: that such waitings and endings may be the starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born – something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love – in the fullness of your time.

People of God: Be with us and comfort us, give us strength and hope in times of death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

+ WORD +

God speaks words of promise to us in scripture and in song.

Responsive Psalm (*Psalm 121*)

One: I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?

People of God: My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

One: The Lord will not let our foot be moved nor will the one who watches over us fall asleep.

People of God: Behold, the keeper of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep;

One: The Lord watches over us; the Lord is our shade at our right hand;

People of God: The sun will not strike us by day, nor the moon by night.

One: The Lord will preserve us from all evil and will keep our life.

**ALL: The Lord will watch over our going out and our coming in,
from this time forth forevermore.**

Reading: *Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

One: 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.

(A brief silence is kept.)

Lighting the Advent Wreath *(The first candle is lit.)*

We light the first candle to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.

People of God: May God's eternal love surround them.

Reading: *Isaiah 40:1, 3-8*

One: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 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.” A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

(A brief silence is kept.)

Lighting the Advent Wreath *(The second candle is lit.)*

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.

People of God: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Reading: *Matthew 11:28-30*

One: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(A brief silence is kept.)

Lighting the Advent Wreath *(The third candle is lit.)*

We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

People of God: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Reading: *John 1:1-5, 14*

One: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a creator's only son, full of grace and truth.

(A brief silence is kept.)

Lighting the Advent Wreath *(The fourth candle is lit.)*

We light the fourth candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, also promises us a place and time where pain and suffering will be no more.

People of God: Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

Hymn for the Night:

“In the Bleak Midwinter”

Text: Christian Georgina Rossetti, 1830-1894 Music: CRANHAM, Gustav Holst, 1874-1934



1. In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.
2. Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; heav'n and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign; in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.
3. What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb; if I were a wiseman I would do my part; yet what I can I give him, give my heart.

A large, leafless tree stands in a snowy field under a grey, overcast sky. The tree is the central focus, with its intricate branches reaching out. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, and the background shows a line of trees in the distance.

The Message

“When Things Seem Bleak”

Rev. Floren “Tino” Cordova, Pastor

Time for Reflection

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Played and Sung by Karyn Sarring, Pianist

Tune: ERIE 8.7.8.7.D Charles S. Converse, 1868; Text: Joseph Scriven, 1855.

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During this extended time of quiet meditation and reflection, please feel free to light a candle.

In this unhurried time, do what you need to do.

Feel free to roam about or simply remain in silence.

After some time, the liturgy will continue with the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

*(Join us in the words that Jesus taught his disciples in the words,
language or culture that feel most comfortable for you.)*

**Our (Father, Mother, Creator, Parent), which are in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.**

**Thy dominion (kingdom) come,
Thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day, our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For Thine is the dominion (kingdom), the power, and the glory –
forever and ever Amen,**

+ MEAL +

Christ feeds us with his own presence as a reminder of the unending covenant of God's love.

Great Thanksgiving

Pastor Tino: The Lord be with you.

People of God: And also with you.

Pastor Tino: Lift up your hearts.

People of God: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor Tino: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People of God: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Thanksgiving at the Table

We give you thanks, O God, for light
in spite of darkness:

In the beginning when the earth was
a murky, chaotic abyss, you brought forth light and life.

In the beginning was your Word,
who came to dwell among us as the light that shines
in the abyss, the light which no darkness
can ever overcome.

Words of Institution

On the last night Jesus gathered to share a meal with his closest friends and followers, the night that he would be betrayed and handed over to death, he took a loaf of bread, gave thanks to God despite it all, broke it, and gave it to all who were gathered, saying: Take and eat. This is my body, my very presence, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again after the meal was almost over, he took the cup, gave thanks yet again, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant, the new promise represented by my life, poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin and the manifestation of God's love for the whole world. Do this for the remembrance of me. Pour out your spirit, O God, on this meal, and on this weary people, your own beloved people, gathered in their homes. Enliven us with your presence, strengthen us at your table, and send us out to a world in need, to be light for each other, to carry one another's burdens.

Invitation to Communion

Pastor Tino: Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are accepted, you are found worthy and you are loved. Please take what you have brought with you for this meal in your own homes – crackers, bread, juice, coffee – and let us partake together of this Holy virtual meal.

Communion

Pastor Tino: Let us all receive the “bread of life.” (*consume*)

Pastor Tino: Let us all receive the “spiritual drink.” (*consume*)

Communion Meditation

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Played by Karyn Sarring, Pianist

Tune: ST. LOUIS 8.6.8.6.7.6.8.6. Lewis H. Redner, 1868; Text: Phillips Brooks, 1868.

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Prayer after Communion

One: Let us pray... (*a brief silence*)

We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life. In your mercy, strengthen us through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

+ SENDING +

*Renewed by God's word of promise and strengthened with Christ's very presence,
God blesses us and sends us to be light for a weary world.*

Blessing

“Blessing for the Longest Night” (in unison) by Jan Richardson

All throughout these months as the shadows have lengthened, this blessing has been gathering itself, making ready, preparing for this night. It has practiced walking in the dark, traveling with its eyes closed, feeling its way by memory by touch by the pull of the moon even as it wanes. So believe me when I tell you this blessing will reach you even if you have not light enough to read it; it will find you though you cannot see it coming.

You will know the moment of its arriving by your release of the breath you have held so long; a loosening of the clenching in your hands, of the clutch around your heart; a thinning of the darkness drawing itself around you. This blessing does not mean to take the night away but it knows its hidden roads, knows the resting spots along the path, knows what it means to travel in the company of a friend.

So when this blessing comes, take its hand. Get up. Set out on the road you cannot see. This is the night when you can trust that any direction you go, you will be walking toward the dawn.

Sending Hymn: “Christ, Be Our Light”



Text & Music: Bernadette Farrell, B. 1957 Music: CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT, © 1993 Bernadette Farrell.
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1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

Refrain: Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has pow’r to save us. Make us your living voice. (*Refrain*)

3 Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed. (*Refrain*)

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone. (*Refrain*)

5 Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another, signs of your kingdom come. (*Refrain*)

Going Forth

One: Go forth knowing that you are loved by God, that you do not walk alone in this world that can be lonely.

People of God: We go with God's blessings as God's children.

Postlude

“Shelter Me”



Sung & Played with Track by Karyn Sarring

Words & Music by Michael Joncas. Copyright ©2020 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

“Never place a period, where
God has placed a comma,”



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*We hope that you have had a wonderful virtual worship
experience with us. We look forward to being with you again soon,*

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