



*An Open and Affirming Congregation
of The United Church of Christ*



Order of Service for
December 18, 2025 7:00 pm

**Hartford's Ecumenical Longest Night &
Unhoused Persons Memorial Service**

A SERVICE OF LIGHT AND REMEMBRANCE ON THE LONGEST NIGHT

**Please rise in body or spirit.*

ORGAN PRELUDE Carols of the Season

WELCOME

Rev. Liza Arulampalam

A LITANY OF WELCOME

From Cathedral in the Night, an outdoor church in Northampton, MA

One: Welcome to you if you walked here.

All: We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you drove.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you sleep in an apartment,
in a home, in a shelter,
in a tent or on a bench.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you have new shoes, and
welcome to you if you have no shoes.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you are struggling, and
welcome to you if you are hurting.

Welcome to you if you are full of grief or sorrow.

Welcome to you if you are lonely,
for here you find community and a safe place without threats.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome if this is your first time at Center Church, and
welcome to you if you have been here a hundred times.

Welcome to you no matter whom you love.

Welcome to you no matter where you are from.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you are Christian, strong in faith and beliefs.

Welcome to you if you are searching, unsure or unsettled about the idea of religion.

We gather together for worship.

Welcome to you if you are an ardent nonbeliever,
for we all have a place in this sanctuary.

We gather together for worship.

OPENING CANDLE LIGHTING

Sarah Pavone

One: Even through the longest nights,

All: we keep vigil.

When days are long and we grow weary,

we keep vigil.

When we're running out of hope,

we keep vigil.

When peace feels like a pipe dream,

we keep vigil.

When joy seems like a luxury we can't afford,

we keep vigil.

When the world is more full of hate than love,

we keep vigil.

When we're desperate for Christ, Emmanuel, God-With-Us,

we keep vigil.

Let us keep vigil, for God is surely with us.

*CAROL NCH 133 O Little Town of Bethlehem (vs. 1)

ST. LOUIS

O little town of Bethlehem,

how still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

the silent stars go by.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

the everlasting light;

the hopes and fears of all the years

are met in thee tonight.

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name
or attempts to take hold of you,
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.
Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
Our holy and beautiful house,
where our ancestors praised you,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.
After all this, will you restrain yourself, O Lord?
Will you keep silent and punish us so severely?*

SILENT REFLECTION

Rev. Mark Olsen

*CAROL NCH 128 In the Bleak Midwinter (vs. 1, 3 & 4)

CRANHAM

*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*

*Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the midnight air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshiped the beloved with a kiss.*

*What can I bring him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
But what can I offer: bring my heart.*

SECOND READING In the Time of Herod
 by Sarah A. Speed

Rev. Dr. Eric J. Hearst

I didn't live during Herod's time – that brutal, murderous king,
 God save his soul.

But even hundreds of years later, I know the prayers of his people.
 I know the prayers of the mothers and the children under his rule.

 I know the prayers of the young men under his angry arm.
I know their prayers, because anyone who has ever lived in this
Soft world for more than two days knows how to pray for a miracle.

We rub our hands together.

We fold weary shoulders in,
a cage of bone to protect our bleeding hearts.

We sing, *we shall overcome and bind my wandering heart to thee.*

We walk across bridges and in front of powerful buildings.

We cover our cars in stickers that scream, *we will not give up!*

We allow a hungry cry to slip from our lips,
giving our lament a life of its own (with room to dance!).

And when all of that is said and done, we whisper to our creator,
*God, break through the yelling and the fear. Break through the
 violence and the oppression.*

Get past the Herods of this world, and come be here.

Like every bleeding heart before, we pray for a miracle.

*CAROL NCH 124 Away in a Manger (vs. 1 & 3) AWAY IN A MANGER

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Rev. Cleo Graham

- Leader: Holy God with many names and no name at all, in the midst of winter, in difficult economic times, we come to you in prayer.
- People: **We pray for all people of all ages who are homeless this day; for those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways, or bus stations.**
- Leader: For those who can only find shelter for the night, but must wander in the daytime; for families broken because they could not afford to pay the rent.
- People: **For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in; for those who have no place to keep possessions that remind them of who they are; for those who are afraid and hopeless.**
- Leader: We grieve this day for all those who have died experiencing homelessness. No one should die without a home. We ask for your forgiveness.
- People: **Be a source of comfort for those of us who struggle. Be a source of inspiration to those of us who are comfortable. We seek a world where homelessness and poverty are ended.**
- Leader: Help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet, so that we may be empowered through word and deed, and through the political means we have, to bring justice and peace to those who are homeless. Amen.

READING OF THE NAMES

Stephanie Boyce

MUSICAL OFFERING I Need You to Survive

David Frazier

Music Moves Hartford

THIRD READING

A Step Toward Home

Rev. Ben Dubow

by Sarah A. Speed

I will not tell you to buck up,
to tough it out, to ignore the fear
rattling around in your chest.
I will not tell you that *all shall be well*
or that morning will come quickly.
I will not ask you to march into danger
without first repeating your name in my prayers.
But if fear stops you in your tracks,
if fear makes it hard to breathe,
hard to move,
hard to think,
then I will remind you
that even one step with shaking knees
is a step toward home.

FOURTH READING *Isaiah 54: 10-14*

Rev. Dr. Jay Terbush

*For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.
O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted,
I am about to set your stones in antimony
and lay your foundations with sapphires.
I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
your gates of jewels,
and all your wall of precious stones.
All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the prosperity of your children.
In righteousness, you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression; indeed, you shall not fear;
and from terror; indeed, it shall not come near you.*

WORDS OF COMFORT

Fr. Timothy J. Shreenan, O.F.M.

One: Time after time, the angels break in with a greeting:

All: **“Do not fear.”**

So when our days are heavy and our sleep grows restless,
we believe that God is near.

When fear feels greater than hope,
we’ll look for signs of new life;
we’ll take a step toward God with shaking knees;
we’ll stand together,
and we won’t let fear stop us.

When we’re desperate for Christ, Emmanuel, God-With-Us, we’ll remember:
we are the hands and feet of Christ,
made in God’s own image,
called to be light-bearers in a fearful world.

For we know that, no matter how it may seem,
God is here, among us, even now. Amen.

*PASSING THE PEACE & PASSING THE LIGHT

Rev. Liza Arulampalam

One: Let us now pass the peace of Christ to one another as we pass the candlelight,
remembering that each of us carries the Christ-light within. May the peace of Christ
be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

***CLOSING CAROL NCH 134 Silent Night**

STILLE NACHT

As we share the Light of Hope from one person to another, be careful as you tilt the unlit candle towards a lit candle.

***Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.***

***Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!***

***Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.***

***BENEDICTION**

Rev. Liza Arulampalam

*This benediction is by the Rev. Sara Speed from the
What do You Fear? series words for worship.*

In a fearful world,
may you look for God's spirit.
May you reach for each other's hands.
May you choose courage whenever you can.
And in all things, may you remember
that good news is louder than fear.
In the name of the one who calls,
 the one who sends,
 and the one who journeys with —
Go in peace and
Be not afraid.
Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE In the Bleak Midwinter

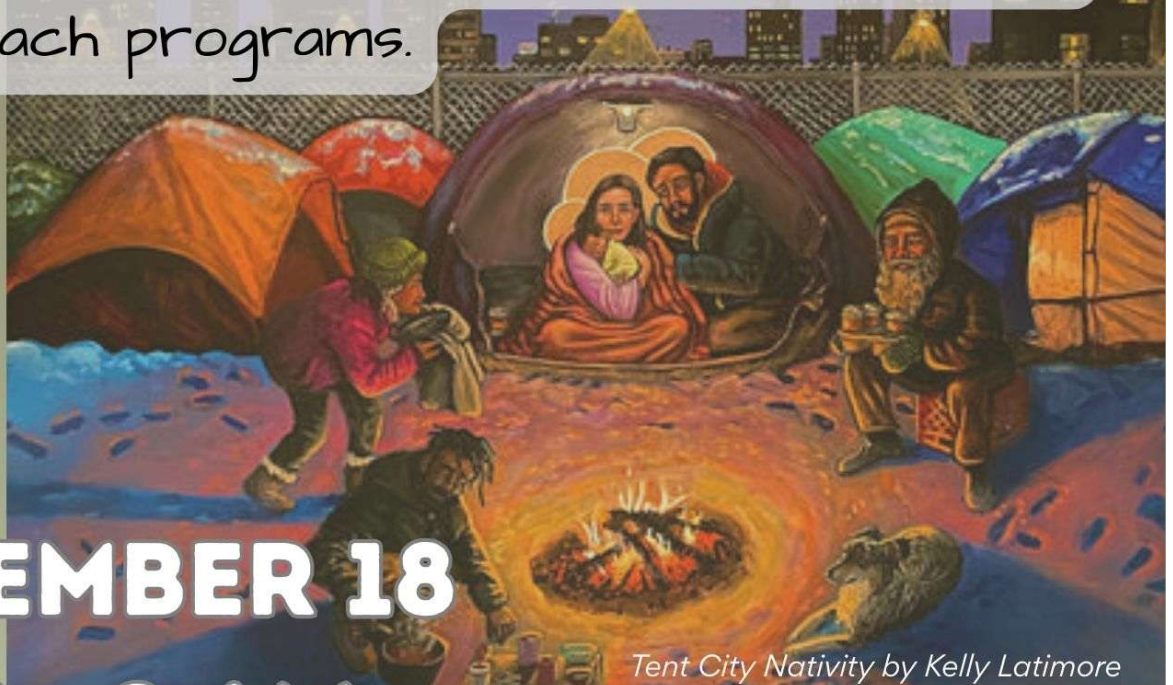
CRANHAM

Thank you to everyone who participated in this evening's service.

*As you go out into the night, please do so in silent contemplation, remembering those who will
sleep outdoors, in tents, on benches, and without the warmth of shelter this evening.*

LONGEST NIGHT SLEEPOUT & FUNDRAISER

Join us on Dec. 18 as we raise awareness and raise funds for our shelter ministry & outreach programs.



Tent City Nativity by Kelly Latimore

DECEMBER 18
9 PM - 8 AM

If you can't Join us, consider making a monetary donation, or an in-kind contribution of gently used warm clothes and blankets.

contact Carrie Howe for more information:
chowe@cchartford.org



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
CONNECTICUT'S CATHEDRAL



IN THE CITY FOR GOOD



First Presbyterian
Church of Hartford



ST. PATRICK - ST. ANTHONY CHURCH
The Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry



Southern New England Conference
United Church of Christ
Living the Love & Justice of Jesus



EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN CONNECTICUT
PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION