



**The Longest Night:
A Service of Comfort and Hope**
December 18, 2019 7:00 p.m.

GATHERING MUSIC

Still, Still, Still
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly
Es Ist Ein Ros

arr. Daniel Burton
arr. Phyllis Avidan Louke
arr. John Purifoy

WORDS OF WELCOME AND INTENT

Rev. Melissa Anne Rogers

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Creator God, hover over this space —

People: For grief is like an ocean, pulling us back in, and we need you in the midst of the waves.

Leader: Creator God, hold us in your arms —

People: For our hands are already full, carrying memories and heartache, and we need you to carry us.

Leader: Creator God, in times of joy and in times of sorrow, we turn to you.

**People: Thank you for staying through the longest nights.
We worship you. Let it be so.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

The candles will be lighted by Stephen Ministers Rosemarie Rowney, Don Deatricks, Mark Fisher, and Peggy Fisher.

One: We light this first candle in memory of those persons we have lost through death.

All: We remember them by name in our hearts. We give thanks for them and for their lives. We treasure their memories in this difficult season.

One: We light this second candle to ask for deliverance from the pain of loss — the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, the loss of financial security.

All: We ask that God bring us comfort. We know the pain of loss is brought near at this time of year and we ask for peace and renewal.

One: We light this third candle for each of us. We offer up to God our pasts, the times of regret and sorrow, the times of mourning, and of loneliness and pain.

All: We ask that God take away the darkness.

One: We light this fourth candle as a symbol of hope and promise.

All: We invite and celebrate the coming of the One who promises us no more suffering . . . the One who promises us light. Come Lord Jesus.

* HYMN 103

Come Now, O Prince of Peace

OSOSO

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Catherine Kendall

Leader: God of connection and love, I confess —

People: There are people singing tonight, but my heart is too heavy for singing.

Leader: God of connection and love, I confess —

People: I know that I need you, but it's hard to let you in. Grief builds walls where love had once been.

Leader: God of the here and now, I confess —

People: There is guilt that I carry, and memories to bury, but forgiving myself seems unnecessary.

Leader: God of my prayers and dreams, I confess —

People: This path of grief is miserably hard, bringing out the worst in me. Forgive me when I get it wrong. Love me back to grace and peace. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Andrew Frazier

* PASSING OF THE PEACE

* RESPONSE

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear (stanza 4)

**And you, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing:
O, rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing.**

A POEM

VOICES FROM SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40:1, 25–31

Psalms 121

Matthew 1:28–30

Nancy Pflasterer

Mary McKeever

Lori Pickard

MEDITATION

HYMN

Stay with Us



1. Stay with us, _____ till night has come; _____ our praise to
2. Walk with us, _____ our spir - its sigh; _____ hear when our
3. Walk with us, _____ the road will bend; _____ make all our
4. Talk with us, _____ till we be - hold _____ a joy - ful
5. Stay with us, _____ till day is done; _____ no tears nor



you this day be sung. Bless our bread, _____ o - pen our
 wea - ry spir - its cry, feel a - gain _____ our loss, our
 weep - ing, wail - ing end. Wipe our tears, _____ for - give our
 life you will un - fold; heal our eyes _____ to see the
 dark shall dim the sun. Cheer the heart, _____ your grace im -



eyes; Je - sus, be our great sur - prise.
 pain; Je - sus, take us to your side.
 fears; Je - sus, lift the heav - y cross.
 prize; Je - sus, take us to the light.
 part; Je - sus, bring e - ter - nal life.

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REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES

Music for Reflection and Remembrance

O Little Town of Bethlehem
Joseph Went A'Walking

arr. Lewis H. Redner
 arr. Ralph Lehman

Naming Our Grief

We invite you to take the stone you received at the beginning of the service and write a reminder of your grief on it. You may wish to write the name of a loved one, or you may name a loss or circumstance that causes you to grieve. Permanent markers may be found under your seats. You may hold your stone quietly in prayer when you finish.

Releasing Stones

We invite you to come forward and place your stone in one of the glass vases on the Table. Through this act, we symbolically release our grief, not to pretend that grief will ever fully disappear, particularly not on this evening alone, but to offer our grief before God, for grief is stifling and too great to carry alone.

Lighting Candles

As you leave your stone, light a candle of hope that one day grief will be no more.

HYMN 294

Within Our Darkest Night

DANS NOS OBCURITÉS

GIVING OUR GIFTS

Offering Music

Veni Emmanuel

arr. John Purifoy

PASTORAL PRAYER, UNISON PRAYER, AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

After the minister prays, please join in this unison prayer.

God of creation, You gave us love. Thus tonight, as our hearts hurt due to love lost, we ask that you give us comfort. Flood our minds with memories of love and with gratitude for all of those moments. And as we wade through this Christmas season, help us to catch glimpses of you in the midst of our heartache. God of light and hope, give us peace instead of resentment. Give us You instead of the mere thought of You. And if you can, give it to us sooner rather than later. Gratefully we pray, using your words, Our Father... Amen.

* HYMN 252

Day of Arising

RABBE

* SENDING

Karen Al-Saadi

Leader: Family of God, tonight we gathered together in God's presence to make space for grief. We have remembered our loss. We have acknowledged it, named it, and placed it before God. And now we carry in our hearts memories of this night.

People: For we trust that one day we will all be reunited in God's promised land and there will be no more tears. We trust that God is present even in the darkest of times. We trust that neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Leader: Go now in peace, trusting that you are loved, you are known, and you are not alone. Amen.

* **POSTLUDE**

Noël Nouvelet
O Come, O Come Emmanuel

* Please rise in body or spirit.

Those parts of the service of worship in which the congregation participates in word or song are noted in bold type.

Prayer is available at the communion table after the service. **Prayer team members** are Martha Kershaw and Marolin Bellefleur.

Greeters are Heidi Hess-Willis and Cyndy Colton (and Gracie). **Readers** are Nancy Pflasterer, Lori Pickard, Mary McKeever, Karen Al-Saadi, and Catherine Kendall. **Candlelighters** are Rosemarie Rowney, Don Deatrick, Mark Fisher, and Peggy Fisher. **Ushers** are Linda Lampman and Marita Servais.

Please stay and join us in the vestibule of Monteith Hall for hot cider and cookies provided by Stephen Ministers Susan Sweet Scott, Nancy Fox, Sue Dempsey, and Kathy Wirstrom.

Musical leadership is provided by Deborah Gabrion, harp; Deborah Rebeck Ash, flute; and Dr. Paul Haebig, organ and piano.

***A Prayer to Take With You
on This Longest Night***

O God of all seasons and senses,
grant us the sense of your timing
to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

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.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.
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.
O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

— written by Ted Loder, in *Guerrillas of Grace*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Christmas Eve Worship, December 24:

Nativity Worship Service, 3:00 p.m.

Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols, 5:00 p.m. (Prelude begins at 4:30.)

Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols, 7:00 p.m. (Prelude begins at 6:30.)

Candlelight Communion Service, 11:00 p.m.

Childcare will be provided at the 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve services by reservation only. If you need childcare for either of these services, please contact the Church Office. If you are able to give the young families of this church the wonderful gift of providing childcare during one of these services, please contact Beca Torres-Davenport.

Christmas Eve Parking:

Please be considerate in parking choices as many visitors join us for worship on Christmas Eve.

Overflow parking is available in the Forest Street parking structure, a short walk down Forest Court.

Parking is not available this year at nearby sorority houses.

The 2019 Christmas Eve offering will support two living communities for special needs adults: Intentional Communities of Washtenaw and His Eye Is on the Sparrow. First Pres is blessed to have six young adults with special needs who have grown up in our church and are active members of our *Promises* group. Many of them either live in one of these two communities or are supported by them in other ways.

This year's Christmas Eve Nativity Service special offering is for Peace Neighborhood Center. All are invited to bring a gift of new hats and gloves as their offering. During the 3:00 p.m. worship service the body of Christ will be invited to bring their humble gifts to the manger.

The church building will be closed Wednesday, December 25, and Wednesday, January 1. The building will close at 4:00 p.m. on December 26–29 and 31.

Year-End Finance Information: Please support the ministries of First Presbyterian Church with your year-end gifts. The IRS requires that books for 2019 be closed on December 31. Make sure your donation is postmarked by December 31 for your contribution to be applied to your 2019 financial statement. When paying your financial commitment with a credit/debit card, the commitment is for one calendar year. A new authorization form, available on our website and in the Finance Office, must be filled out annually. **2020 Contribution Envelopes**, for those who requested them, are available outside the Finance Office.