

God of mercy and compassion,
there are those among us
who are grieving over what might have been.
Death or loss or terrible hurt
has changed our experience of Christmas.
We remember that once it was a special day for us, too,
but someone or something precious
has gone away from us in this life.
We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream.
We find ourselves adrift and alone.
We are weary from the journey,
and we have found no room at the inn.
We come to you seeking rest, peace, and shelter from the storm.
Lord, hear our prayer.
And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of grace,
in the spirit of the season,
grant us all that we need to comfort us
as we journey through this Christmas season.
We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us,
both here and throughout the world,
who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden,
that we may be lifted up in courage
and journey on in Thy peace.
Lord, hear our prayer.
And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of love,
in this Christmas Season,
we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be
which is now lost to us and cannot be again.
With celebration all around us,
memories of what was and fears of what may be,
weigh heavy on our hearts.
Please hold us close in your embrace,
be near to us this night,
until the light returns and morning comes.
Lord, hear our prayer,
And in Your merciful love, answer.

Keep watch, dear Lord,
with those who work, or watch, or weep this night,
and give thine angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord;
give rest to the weary, bless the dying,
soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted,
shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

OFFERING 221 In The Bleak Midwinter

You are invited to place your Darkest Night concerns in the gift box as an offering of your heart. God loves and receives all of us, seeking to welcome us into the light of Christ's love.

*** BENEDICTION**

*** HYMN 242** Love Came Down at Christmas



Christ caring for people through people

STEPHEN MINISTRY

The joy of Christmas can turn into a time of painful loneliness and emptiness for those who have suffered a loss or who are going through a difficult time. But help is available. Our Stephen Ministers are ready to provide confidential, one-to-one Christian care. They will listen, care, encourage, pray with and for you, and support you through the holidays and as long as your need persists.

If you or someone you know is hurting, find out more about Stephen Ministry by emailing us at stephenministry@fumcaustin.org or talking with one of our Stephen Leaders: Scott Cook, Gary Diehl, Cheryl Etie, Marilyn Good, John Hathaway, Pete Meeker, and Rick Russell.

Our Stephen Ministers are there to care!



Blue Christmas
December 21, 2017
7:00 p.m.

WELCOME

Because we believe that every human being is a beloved child of God, on a journey to God, with God, we welcome ALL persons, *without exception*, to attend, join, and participate fully in the life of this church. For a description of our worship services at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. on Sundays and at 6:30 a.m. on Thursdays, visit our website at fumcaustin.org.

Making Disciples...Making a Difference
www.fumcaustin.org

Asterisks () indicate an invitation to stand as you are able.*

GREETING

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Remember the messengers of faith you have known,
rejoice, and give thanks for their witness.

**We, too, will prepare the way of Christ;
we will help to level the hills and valleys of life.**

Hold one another in your hearts this day;
pray that love may rule all your relationships.

**We will weep with those who weep;
we will rejoice with those who rejoice.**

God will be with you wherever you go. Amen.

* HYMN 218 It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

OPENING PRAYER

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

This first candle we light
is to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember their name,
their face,
their voice,
the memory that binds them to us in this season.

(Pause while the first candle is lit.)

May God's eternal love surround them.

211 O Come, O Come Emmanuel Stanza 1

**O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.**

This second candle we light
is to redeem the pain of loss;
the loss of relationships,
the loss of jobs,
the loss of health.

(Pause while the second candle is lit.)

We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God,
asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God,
and lead us into your future.**

211 O Come, O Come Emmanuel Stanza 5

**O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home.
The captives from their prison free,
and conquer death's deep misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

This third candle we light
is to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
We pause and remember these past weeks and month;
the disbelief,
the anger,
the down times,
the poignancy of reminiscing,
the hugs and handshakes of family and friends,
all those who stood with us.

(Pause while the third candle is lit.)

We give thanks for all the support we have known.

Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

211 O Come, O Come Emmanuel Stanza 6

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thy justice here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

This fourth candle we light
is to remember our faith and the gift of hope
which the Christmas story offers to us.

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit.)

We remember that God who shares our life
and promises us a place and time
of no more pain and suffering.

**Let us remember the one who shows the way,
who brings the truth and who bears the light.**

211 O Come, O Come Emmanuel Stanza 7

**O come, Desire of nations bind
all peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life;
deliver us from earthly strife.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

NAMING OUR DARKEST NIGHTS

*You are invited to prayerfully consider your concerns for yourself
or for others and write them on the paper provided while listening to
the musical selection. Feel free to join in, if you feel so led.*

Within our darkest night,
you kindle the fire that never dies away,
never dies away.

Within our darkest night,
you kindle the fire that never dies away,
never dies away.

READING

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly
to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that
her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

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.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good
tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here
is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his
arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense
before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather
the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently
lead the mother sheep.

230 O Little Town of Bethlehem

READING

Matthew 11:28-29

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.

REFLECTION

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of wisdom,
we come to you this Christmas Season
tired, in turmoil, and in pain.
As the nights have grown longer,
so has darkness grown
and wrapped itself around our hearts.
In this season of longest night,
we ask your healing blessings
upon all that we carry in our hearts,
sorrow we fear may never end,
wounds we cannot even put into words.
Lord, hear our prayer,
And in Your merciful love, answer.