

## Mission Moment

### *Let All Praise with Joy the World's Creator*

Ah, Spring! Fresh breezes, a new palette of colors, the earth changing daily before our eyes—a time so full of promise it's easy to “Praise with Joy the World's Creator,” as the hymn goes. And a time to remember we are entrusted with God's marvelous handiwork. We hold it in common so that all may enjoy and praise in this generation and in years to come.

As communities across the U.S. celebrate Earth Day on April 22, we can look back in history and discover yet another UCC first. Twenty years ago, on the eve of Earth Day 1987, the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice published a landmark report, “Toxic Waste and Race.” For the first time in history, the disproportionate burden borne by African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American communities as the “dumping grounds” for our nation's waste and pollution was documented.

Funded by Our Church's Wider Mission, the study looked at every zip code in the United States and identified where toxic waste sites were located. It found that race was the most significant factor, even more significant than poverty. “Toxic Waste and Race” led to the coining of the term “environmental racism” and helped to jump start the environmental justice movement.

*April 2009*

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What is our calling as the church? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it eloquently: “We who are members of the church are the lighthouse of the world. We are responsible for one task above all others – to keep the light of the gospel burning. All else must be secondary...”

In that 1957 sermon, Dr. King described the church as saying to us, “I don’t care who you are, what your background is, what you have. You are a child of God, and as such I welcome you without reservation. I offer you all the privileges and blessings; and I shall belong to you and you to me now and forever.”

Every April, on the anniversary of his death, we remember the price that Dr. King paid for courageously proclaiming the gospel of justice, healing and peace. We also remember the bold witness of many people of faith who marched, spoke, and even died for the cause of racial justice. The same church that offers us a home, a haven, and a sanctuary also provides a prophetic voice in our public life, turning our attention - our hearts and minds – toward the needs of the most vulnerable, the marginalized, and those without a voice in our society.

“To keep the light of the gospel burning...” Our faithful and generous giving to the church keeps the light of the gospel burning brightly, offering a home and a witness to the world in which we live, that world that God loves so well.

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## *Growing Community*

At the core of our Christian faith is our joyful affirmation that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The sending and receiving of missionaries, of companions, is one of our responses to God's initiative in sending Jesus to be our friend and companion. The eloquence of the Word is in its being lived out in the flesh and shared with others.

Sharing life is giving and receiving the gifts offered by God through the Church. If we do not seek to understand one another's language, culture, and traditions, how can we share life? We recognize that the Gospel is "in each place," yet we seek to affirm the common bond we share as members of Christ's body.

In our ecumenical venture as members of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we witness to both our cherished traditions as churches long engaged in global ministries, and to the needs of a world caught up in rapid change.

We are learning that access to the contemporary tools of communication does not guarantee togetherness. Only in openness and sensitivity to the other can we understand one another at a deeper level. It is in the sharing of life, both here in North America and in other settings around the world, that we experience true communion.

We celebrate the shared life of churches united in Christ, and we support this growing community with gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission.

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Do you know what's been called "The Ultimate Immigration Handbook"? The Bible. It is a virtual compendium of stories about immigrants and refugees: Jesus, David, Moses, Paul.

In the Hebrew scriptures, Joseph was a victim of what we now call "human trafficking," when people are transported, against their will or unknowingly, to other countries to work in slavery-like conditions or as sex workers. Baby Moses, who today would be considered an "unaccompanied alien child" and sent to a juvenile detention center, was protected and loved by Pharaoh's daughter. He grew up to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt to escape unjust working conditions and terrible poverty. Centuries later, according to the New Testament, the holy family fled to Egypt to avoid living under a murderous tyrant.

The United Church of Christ, along with others in Church World Service and with support from the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing offering — has joined in resettling nearly 500,000 refugees in the United States during the past 50 years.

Sponsoring a refugee family can be a transformational, faith-deepening experience for a local church—a truth affirmed by Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

*Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, Wider Church Ministries, United Church of Christ*

*April 2009*

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