

Mission Moment

Rejoice in God's Vision

Is the realm of God a place? Or is it a vision?

A holy place can easily become a fortress, from which many are forcibly excluded. But a holy vision is large enough to include all who would embrace it.

Our mission in the United Church of Christ is to lift high a holy vision, so that everyone can see it—and, seeing it, rejoice in their hearts.

That is the purpose and the meaning United Church of Christ Statement of Mission:

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called and commit ourselves...

To praise God, confess our sin, and joyfully accept God's forgiveness;

To proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our suffering world;

To embody God's love for all people;

To hear and give voice to Creation's cry for justice and peace;

To name and confront the powers of evil within and among us;

To repent our silence and complicity with the forces of chaos and death;

To preach and teach with the power of the Living Word;

To join oppressed and troubled people in the struggle for liberation;

To work for justice, healing, and wholeness of life;

To embrace the unity of Christ's church;

To discern and celebrate the present and coming reign of God.

March 2009

God is still speaking,

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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One Great Hour of Sharing

The Ikengo Agriculture and Training Center, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of many programs supported by our gifts to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering.

Participants in the training are taught how to raise and care for pigs and chickens. At the end of the training, they are given the animals to raise and breed and eventually sell to others in their community. More families in the community are thus able to earn a living and feed their children.

In addition to working with animals, Ikengo Agriculture Center provides direction on growing vegetables and fruits. A special growing project is offered just for women, who plant, tend, and harvest crops, all the while learning new skills and techniques that will help them in their own gardens. Upon completion of the training program, the women are given small hand tools for gardening, along with seeds and cuttings from the very plants that they cared for while at the Training Center.

One Great Hour of Sharing invests your gifts in hands-on, practical training and assistance. With One Great Hour of Sharing, a little goes a long way. Please be as generous as you are able, but know that gifts of any amount are needed and welcomed.

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Is God Still Speaking?

- Ask the Bible study group gathered in the church lounge.
- Ask the seminary students enrolled in Clinical Pastoral Education.
- Ask the pastor as she ponders the lectionary readings in preparation for Sunday's sermon.
- Ask anyone who ever sang hymns around a campfire.
- Ask the single mother who is warmly welcomed at the church pantry.
- Ask the United States Senator who just finished meeting with a delegation of UCC laypersons.
- Ask the bereaved family after the funeral service—or, better, just give them a hug.
- Ask the participants in the annual CROP Walk.
- Ask the volunteers who spent two weeks repairing a Protestant chapel in Honduras.
- Ask the unchurched gay man who presented himself for baptism—and ask the pastor who baptized him in the name of the Trinity.
- Ask anyone who has ever been visited by their parish nurse.
- Ask the couple who prayerfully decided to double their annual pledge.
- Ask the refugee family who were met at the airport—and ask the church delegation that met them there.
- Ask the shyest member of the church youth group after their weekend retreat.
- Ask anyone who ever attended an Easter sunrise service.

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One Great Hour of Sharing

“To be a refugee is the most horrible feeling, because you lose your family, you lose your home, and you’re also without an identity. Suddenly you’re a nothing. You’re just reliant on other people’s good natures and help and understanding.”

Inge Sadan, one of the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, speaks for many of the twenty-five million people in the world today who have been forced to flee from their homes and communities because of persecution, war, and famine. What can we as American Christians do in response?

First, we can ask God to open our hearts to these hurting men, women, and children. Let us never forget that Jesus calls each of them by name, and loves every one of them. Then we can resolve to help them.

With our gifts, Church World Service can help provide for the immediate needs of refugee families: waterproof tents and ground cloths; blankets; food and water; and life-saving medicine. Relief supplies like those are indispensable. But they are not enough.

With our gifts through Our Church’s Wider Mission, we can also provide something else that people cannot live without: hope.

Hope comes to people only when they know they won’t be forgotten. Let us not stop giving until all of the world’s refugees have returned to their homes or resettled in safe new communities.

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Making Room for God

Lent is a good time to reflect on the deep meaning of the word “sacrifice.” The root words for sacrifice are “to make sacred,” and that’s exactly what we do with our lives when we choose to give up, or to offer, one thing for the sake of another. When we share our time and our love generously, our families grow stronger. When we share our talents and our wisdom generously, our churches and our communities grow stronger. When we share our treasure and God’s gifts generously, the relationships we have even with strangers grow stronger, and the world is transformed.

The words “self denial” have a negative connotation in a consuming society, but the irony rests in the truth that we are most human when we choose to offer, rather than to cling to, our blessings. The generous outpouring of gifts during a time of natural disaster illuminates the human capacity to share those blessings, just as the quiet, faithful support of our churches, week in and week out, turns on the lights, warms the sanctuary, and strengthens the ministry and witness of our United Church of Christ congregations. Real hospitality makes room for each new person, and in that sharing of blessings and space, we make room for God’s own hand at work in the life of the church. Perhaps the “sacrifice” and “emptiness” of Lent are ways of making room for God in our lives.

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