

July 13, 2012

A Pastoral Letter from Leaders of the United Church of Christ

Dear sisters and brothers of the United Church of Christ:

Greetings in the name of Jesus, the wise, young teacher who taught the elders of the temple!

MK Asante, the opening worship speaker at this year's National Youth Event (July 10-13 at Purdue University), said, "If you make an observation, you have an obligation." It is with that persistent spirit of holy engagement, that we – the five national officers of the church and 21 Conference Ministers in attendance – feel compelled to write this letter of profound gratitude and urgent response.

First, we wish to begin with gratitude. Thank you to the more than 2,500 youth of this church who gave of yourselves – so generously and sacrificially – to be here and to open your hearts, your lives, to this faith-filled moment. You – our sisters, our brothers – are amazing; every single one of you. This was your event and you helped us all feel extravagantly welcomed into it.

Our gratitude extends to national staff and organizers who spent years planning, orchestrating and executing this empowering event; to many regional organizers who coordinated travel plans and helped care for those entrusted to you; to chaperones who offered loving guidance, presence and patience; and to churches, agencies, Associations and Conferences of the UCC that prayerfully and financially encouraged and supported the attendance of our youth. Thank you, also, to parents and guardians who gave encouragement to this event as a priority in your child's life. And thanks to every UCC person who encourages ongoing all-church support for Our Church's Wider Mission – our common ministry fund – which provided the critical financial resources necessary to make NYE possible.

Second, beyond gratitude, National Youth Event leaves us with important lessons about the church, its present and its future, and our response to this critical moment. There are days when it seems as though all we hear are voices of concern about the church's status, its relevance and its future. You, the youth of NYE, helped teach us about the sacred responsibility of claiming *this* time and *this* place as God's moment to change lives. There are days when it seems as though all we hear are voices lamenting a disconnect between youth and the church. You reminded us of the importance of celebrating and supporting the youth that are faithfully encountering God's presence in, through and even beyond the church. There are days when we hear resistance to change in traditional worship. You taught us that the deep beats of God's activity live in hip hop rhyme, flow easy in laughter, and rattle in roars of sustained ovation and praise. All, we passionately believe, are sounds of a new Pentecost opening the church to new realities, new days of vitality, inclusivity and engagement. Thank you, wise and wonderful teachers.



God is still speaking,



In the preamble to our constitution, the United Church of Christ “affirms the responsibility of the Church *in each generation* to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.” We believe we must seize and build upon this powerful NYE moment – in response and gratitude to UCC youth – to realize the significance of what has happened here and how we are leaving this event infused with expanding hopefulness for the United Church of Christ, our distinctive message and impact, and the need for an inter-generational movement of hope.

Let this be the moment where the church truly imagines its new reality and its hopeful future, under God’s watchful love and tender mercy.

Imagine, God is still speaking,

The Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ

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General Minister and President

W. Mark Clark
Associate General Minister

The Rev. J. Bennett Guess
Executive Minister, Local Church Ministries

The Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister, Justice and Witness Ministries

The Rev. James Moos
Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries

The Council of Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ

The Rev. Phil Hart
Northern California Nevada

The Rev. Kent Siladi
Florida Conference

The Rev. Felix Villanueva
Southern California Nevada

The Rev. Charles Buck
Hawaii Conference

The Rt. Rev. Béla Posnán
Calvin Synod

The Rev. Jorge Morales
Illinois Conference

The Rev. John R. Deckenback
Central Atlantic Conference

The Rev. Sheldon Culver
Illinois South Conference

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