

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Kelly Burd
Minister for Leadership Development

Witness for Justice #478

May 31, 2010

For God So Loved

Kelly Burd

60 Minutes aired a feature story on the Seed School in Washington DC on May 24. Located in an inner city community, this public charter school gives low-income children an education that more than triples their odds of graduating and going to college. But because it can't accommodate all families hoping to send their children, admission is done by lottery. A crowd of hundreds watch as numbered lottery balls are pulled from a cage. A number is called, and someone shrieks. A parent and child jump up and embrace, ecstatic and sobbing. The camera pans briefly to a family still hoping for their number to be called as their nervous teenage daughter wipes tears from her eyes. And I begin to weep. Why must the children of poor families enter a lottery and try to "win" a quality public education in one of the world's wealthiest nations?

When I first started coordinating a children's program in a homeless shelter in Connecticut, I was baffled and annoyed to be reprimanded by police as we played on the school playground nearby. They told me the neighborhood wasn't safe and I should reconsider working there, but made no reference to my young playmates that attended the school. Did they warn me because I was white? Because I was more affluent? Because I lived two miles away in a safer neighborhood? More importantly, what message did this send to the children gathered around me about the importance of their well-being? In the United States, where the average age of a homeless person is nine, I began to see the ways our culture accepts the disparity of resources offered to its youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

Years later as a new parent, I was bombarded by marketers that exploit people's innate desire to care for their children. Already, as I looked at products like car seats and opportunities like daycare, I saw that my income would dictate various factors in my child's life. Meanwhile, I began to see everyone I encountered - from elderly ladies to burly truckers - as someone's once-held infant, full of promise and worthy of intense, life-giving love and devotion. This

is how God must love us -like a new mother devoted to the care and well being of her child. It helped me to remember why God so loved the world, and to renew my zeal for mending it.

When Jesus came "that they may have life, and have it abundantly," I trust his efforts weren't limited to those born into privilege or lucky enough to have a winning lottery number. All of us want the children in our lives to live abundantly. But why stop at the children we know, when their classmates are just as deserving and their futures are bound up together? As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be." By advocating for an investment in quality, free education for every child, we bear witness to the God who so deeply loves this world and contribute to a better future for its children. For more information and to take action go to <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education>.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.