

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Power in Numbers

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A few years ago, Lending Tree ran a commercial featuring a man showcasing his great life; he had a four bedroom house in a nice community, a new car, swimming pool and the likes. “How do I do it?” he asked. “I’m in debt up to my eyeballs. I can barely pay my finance charges. Somebody help me!” The ad is effective because it taps into the personal shame and secrecy that people experience when they incur debt and have a hard time paying it off. When I first saw it, I couldn’t help but wonder how many people silently struggle behind a façade of financial success.

Now I think of that commercial as I watch the masses take on Wall Street and what it represents. Consumer debt is a widespread reality, but Occupy Wall Street somehow captures the backstory. It offers a prophetic word about how corporate culture and greed managed to bamboozle us into believing they have proprietary rights to the American Dream. Corporations have bought our politicians, usurped the power our democracy intended for the people, and taken our money. And our silence and shame has made the victims look like the problem – until now. For those in the thick of the struggle for social justice who have fretted about the apathy of our nation, these images of streets bursting with people taking back their power is a beauty to behold.

In just over a month, what began as Occupy Wall Street has become a global movement. Media coverage has grown over the past month as the numbers have swelled and Occupy moved from local to global. The movement offers a place for people who are fed up with a myriad of social ills: lost jobs; foreclosed homes; the ongoing war; the struggle for affordable health care; and the chipping away at collective bargaining rights, just to name a few. If a big chunk of the discontented 99 Percent is in the streets, building power and amplifying voices, it feels as if the rest are watching live via social media and wondering how to join the party.

I pray that the Occupy movement is proving to ordinary people that we can each contribute to social change. We each have a story and a voice and a vote. We matter. Our problems matter, and we're not the only ones faced with them. Wherever our location, we have the ability to be witnesses for justice together, exercising our power with our wallets, our voices, our votes, our bodies in the street and our presence online. United, we become the people we've been waiting for.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,277 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.