



# 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

**Bentley de Bardelaben**  
Executive for Administration and Communications

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**The Voice of the People Continues**

**Bentley de Bardelaben**

Pondering the Occupy movement, which is coming upon a two month milestone in some of its incarnations, I find that I am still excited that members of our great republic are continuing to protest as a way to make their frustration known about US economic inequality. Being a proponent of activism and advocacy, I realize that demonstrations can be a tool to demand change to tax, civic and corporate laws. As the race for the White House begins a countdown to the 2012 elections, I watch how the President and Congress might address the concerns of those feeling unheard, invisible and/or taken for granted.

Varying in political outlook, ethnicity, age, religion and income, these protesters have assembled vowing to remain present until their concerns are addressed. Unfortunately, there is still no cohesive message being released to the media, government agencies or elected officials. Moreover, the violent fringe element connected to the occupy movement in Oakland, CA and NYC has been counterproductive to the brand. Nonetheless, it is clear that their overall intent and goal is to communicate that something is indeed wrong with our economy and it must be addressed for the good of the citizenry.

The United Church of Christ national staff has heard from many that we must support those who are feeling marginalized and overwhelmed in this economy. Our five-person Collegium of officers issued a statement in late October urging members and churches to “*seek the common good as the church and in society through creative vision, faithful action and prayer.*”<sup>1</sup> Further, as a Christian I understand that it is my responsibility to live out the mandate of Christ to stand with the vulnerable in our communities. The occupy movement has identified who the vulnerable are. It is not possible for anyone to say that they have no awareness of such need or suffering. With the change of season, it is my hope that these courageous individuals will not be deterred from continuing to let their voices be heard.

As we embark upon the holiday season, I hope that we will honor the ways we have been blessed as family, community or nation. While for people in other countries, the opportunity to protest could come with the threat of bodily harm, imprisonment, or perhaps even death. Yet in our democracy, in most instances, we can disagree with the ruling establishment and protest publicly without those fears. With this right, comes responsibility.

German pastor and theologian, Martin Niemoller, wrote “*First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.*”<sup>2</sup> Friends, we must not take our freedoms for granted; they can be taken away from us if we aren't paying attention. I am confident that with our help the demonstrators will continue to challenge the establishment and thereby remind us of who and whose we are.

*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.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ucc.org/news/ucc-leaders-issue-pastoral.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_they\\_came%E2%80%A6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came%E2%80%A6)