

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United Church of Christ connects literacy and social justice with launch of Reading Changes Lives

The denomination's initiative, launching on National Literacy Day, is a faith-based response to the illiteracy epidemic in the U.S. and worldwide.

CLEVELAND – (Sept. 8, 2014) The United Church of Christ believes that literacy is essential to achieving equality and justice. That key point is the emphasis of Reading Changes Lives, the UCC's national initiative to address the problem of illiteracy in the United States and abroad and its connection to social justice. The program, which aims to engage all 5,100 UCC congregations nationwide, kicks off on Monday, Sept. 8, National Literacy Day.

Reading Changes Lives encourages UCC churches throughout the country to participate in community service projects meant to improve literacy rates among both children and adults, while raising awareness about how illiteracy directly impacts a range of social justice issues.

"The UCC has a long commitment to public education and to education in general," said the Rev. Linda Jaramillo, a national officer of the UCC. "The fact that we face such a serious problem with illiteracy calls us to address the issue. The impact of illiteracy is broad, intersectional and complicated because it proportionally affects more people who are poor and of color."

As illustrated by the accompanying infographic, illiteracy is a broad social justice issue, contributing to economic and racial injustice, gender inequality, and education gaps, and also fueling the school-to-prison pipeline. But illiteracy also affects simple, everyday tasks, from being able to complete a job application to reading instructions on a prescription bottle. Limited literacy skills are a major contributor to poverty, and illiteracy becomes a barrier for those marginalized by race and economic status.

Reading Changes Lives, an ongoing initiative, begins on National Literacy Day with the church's "One Read," a program that encourages all UCC members to read the inspirational book, "Hotdogs and Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age," by author Rob Shindler. Reading Changes Lives will continue into next year with "March Forth for Literacy," beginning on March 4, 2015, which will promote goals and hands-on participation from the UCC's nearly 1 million members.

"There is a great need to address the wide gap of opportunity, as it has been stagnant for too long," said the Rev. Geoffrey Black, UCC general minister and president. "The crisis is not only a global issue, but a growing issue in the U.S. Our history [as a church] dictates that we are charged as people of faith to take action."

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About the United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC's motto ("That they may all be one") and tagline (God is still speaking,) supports the church's long-standing commitment to social justice issues and its extravagant welcome to all, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

About Reading Changes Lives:

Reading Changes Lives is a response to the crippling literacy gap in the world. This gap continues to be a persistent problem in the United States and abroad.

In our continued fight for equality and justice, the United Church of Christ (UCC) recognizes that the inability to read is detrimental to a person's basic human rights. The need has never been greater for faith communities to stand up and take action, and the UCC is ready to accept the call to justice. The time to address the current crisis is now, and the need is pressing upon us.