



# Invest in the Vision

THE STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH OFFERING

## About Strengthen the Church

Each day, visions and dreams are created in the hearts of many in the United Church of Christ. Through the Strengthen the Church offering, they can become a reality. As God calls our congregations to be church in new ways, your gift will plant new churches, awaken new ideas in existing churches, and develop spiritual life in our youth and young adults. Because of this offering, many more will hear the good news that "God is still speaking."

## About Stillspeaking

Stillspeaking: It's the shorter form of "God is still speaking," a campaign by the United Church of Christ to remind us that God still has a lot more to say. Since 2004, Stillspeaking has worked with thousands of UCC churches and individuals across the country to extend an extravagant welcome to all—because no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here.

## God is Still Speaking,

*Your offerings are directed to your church's Conference, Local Church Ministries, and The Stillspeaking Ministry for these purposes.*

## Strengthen the Church: Invest in the Vision

**W**hen her close friend received a second homophobic note left anonymously on his car windshield, the Rev. Laura McLeod used preaching power to respond to the acts of hate with an outpouring of love. Members of her church, Delavan United Church of Christ Congregational in Delavan, Wisconsin, overshadowed the hurtful words by writing nearly 40 "love notes," delivered to McLeod's friend Paul Dombrowski, an openly gay elementary school teacher, in one joyful bundle.

"When I heard about the second hate note left on Paul's windshield, I knew that I had to respond," said McLeod. "That Sunday, I told our congregation about it and invited them to respond to hate with love."

"You are loved just as you are," said one note. "Know you are loved, and not just by your local supporters," read another. "You are a wonderful person and God loves you," still another of the notes said.

"This was an outpouring of love from people I really didn't know. These notes were from people who 'walked the walk and talked the talk.' They went out of their way to say what happened was wrong and unacceptable. There aren't many people who would take the time to do that."

"I'm extremely proud of the people in my congregation who did the right thing in standing against hate," said McLeod. "We are just a little church in small-town Wisconsin, but they are brave, bold people of Christ."

That's the vision of the Strengthen the Church offering . . . growing churches of extravagant welcome seeking to transform lives.



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





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**A** routine traffic stop changed the life of Misael Perez. A native of Guatemala who built a life for himself as a roofer in Phoenix, Arizona, Perez—facing deportation after police pulled him over—was taken into sanctuary at Shadow Rock United Church of Christ.



"We're just responding to a neighbor's need," said Shadow Rock pastor, the Rev. Ken Heintzelman. "A law firm took on Misael's case and asked us, because of our history, to do this and stand with him. He's a good citizen, contributing in every way in this community."

"The congregation of Shadow Rock UCC will stand between Misael and the system which would rip him away from his life, job, church, and community," said Heintzelman. "We offer him sanctuary, which is consistent with our congregation's core values of inclusion, justice, and spirituality."

Arlene Dominguez, co-chair of Shadow Rock's sanctuary quick response team notes, "Misael has been supporting his elderly parents who are no longer able to work. As the oldest of eight children, he is very proud that he has been able to pay for three of his siblings to attend school, as there is no free education in Guatemala."

"We do not know, nor can we help every deserving and suffering person that lives under the threat of deportation and devastation, but we do know Misael and his story," Heintzelman said. "We welcome the day when comprehensive immigration reform is characterized by justice for all, instead of suffering for the many."

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