

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



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United Church of Christ Becomes First Religious Denomination to Sponsor the Gay Games

In the midst of its ground-breaking marriage rights lawsuit in North Carolina, the church continues to embrace LGBTQ rights and equality through Gay Games 9 partnership.

CLEVELAND (June 27, 2014) – The United Church of Christ has announced that it will be the first religious denomination to be a major sponsor of the Gay Games when the event comes to Cleveland, home of the UCC’s national headquarters, this August. The announcement comes in the midst of the UCC’s ground-breaking marriage rights lawsuit filed in North Carolina in late April, and further displays the denomination’s commitment to the LGBTQ community.

“Serving as a major sponsor of Gay Games 9 is a perfect fit because of the UCC’s longstanding commitment to social justice issues,” said the Rev. J. Bennett Guess, one of the UCC’s national officers and its first openly-gay church executive. “We pride ourselves on being a bold voice for progressive Christianity and look forward to offering the UCC’s trademark ‘extravagant welcome’ to the athletes, volunteers and spectators.”

As a major sponsor, the UCC will provide significant financial support for Gay Games 9, which is expected to bring more than 30,000 athletes and visitors to Cleveland and to generate more than \$50 million for the local economy. As visible evidence of the UCC’s “Faith, In Cleveland” campaign – a program aimed to invigorate communities nationwide – the sponsorship provides the UCC an unprecedented opportunity to welcome thousands of like-minded visitors to its hometown. Attendees will also be welcome at events held throughout the week at the UCC’s Amistad Chapel, a worship space located on the first floor of the UCC’s national headquarters in the heart of downtown Cleveland.

“This partnership allows the UCC to live out our values of diversity, inclusivity, and acceptance of all,” said Ann Poston, the UCC’s director of communications. “We are proud to offer financial support, alongside a range of in-kind, volunteer and support services that are needed by Gay Games 9 organizers. I couldn’t be more proud of the UCC and the city of Cleveland for doing everything possible to ensure that this summer’s games will be a success.”

The UCC's major sponsorship of Gay Games 9 adds another "first" to the organization's long list of precedent-setting accolades. The church was the first mainline denomination to affirm equal marriage rights for same-sex couples, and the first to ordain an openly-gay man. The UCC was also the first denomination to ordain a woman, the first predominately white denomination to ordain an African American, and the first mainline religious group to vote to move toward divestment from fossil fuel companies as a strategy to combat climate change.

"We're so appreciative to have the backing of the United Church of Christ and other members of the faith community," said Tom Nobbe, executive director of Gay Games 9. "The UCC's sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games on a national level amplifies their strong commitment to inclusion on and off the playing fields. Our partnership serves to illustrate the open and affirming atmosphere participants will experience when visiting Cleveland and Akron."

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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, Ohio, 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," (John 17:21)) 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 the Gay Games

The Gay Games were created in 1982 to promote LGBT inclusion and excellence in sports. Founded by U.S. Olympian Dr. Tom Wadell, the Gay Games now includes 36 competitive sports, a festival village, cultural and social events, interfaith worship, and opening and closing ceremonies. Held every four years, the Gay Games have been hosted by some of the world's greatest cities, including San Francisco, New York, Sydney, Amsterdam, and Chicago. The most recent installment of the games took place in Cologne, Germany, in 2010, and Paris will host the games in 2018.

In 2009, Cleveland was chosen over Boston and Washington, D.C., after a year-long site selection process for its facilities and infrastructure, widespread community support, financial plan, and the city's experience in hosting large-scale sports and cultural events.