

A Back to the Future Church

by Michael Neuroth

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If you follow pop-culture, you know that October 21st 2015 was the long-awaited “Back to the Future” day. It was on this date that Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) traveled to the “future” in the iconic sequel *Back to the Future II*. At the time of its release in 1989, it was a vision for what the future might hold. That vision included hoverboards, video phones, flying cars, and the Chicago Cubs winning the World Series. I am old enough to remember watching this movie and wondered if any of these technologies would ever come true. Now that the day has passed, we know that some predictions did come true, at least to an extent. Generally, though, the world looks different than we imagined it to be in 1989. (Sorry Cubs fans.)

What if we were to look thirty years into the future today? What would it be like? Will October 21, 2045 include flying cars, hoverboards, and happy Cubs fans? More importantly, will it be a future of greater peace, justice, and equality for all? I certainly hope so. But if we take anything from the “Back to the Future” series, we realize that hoping for something isn’t enough. Shaping the future takes action.

How are we shaping a United Church of Christ that will be prophetic and relevant in the year 2045? How are we training young people in our churches to be prophetic, faithful, justice-minded leaders that the future will demand? There are several local and national efforts that contribute to this, but few are more important than the UCC’s Young Adult Service Communities (YASC) network.

Young Adult Service Communities are programs set up by UCC churches in cities across the nation. Each program is distinct, but all offer the opportunity for young people ages 21-35 to live in intentional community; to work in service or justice focused non-profit organizations; and to explore elements of spiritual formation and justice leadership in connection with local congregations.

I served for two years on the board for one of these programs. I saw first-hand how exploring vocation, faith, and justice in the context of church and

community can change lives and guide vocational discernment. Now that I am on the UCC national staff with Justice and Witness, I am even more convinced of the need to develop young justice leaders for the future of the church and the world. What if every UCC association sought to create a YASC program modeled after the Westmoreland Volunteer Corps in Washington, D.C., the growing service communities in Massachusetts and Chicago, or Justice Leadership Program in Seattle? How would the world in 2045 be different?

Back in 1989, we could only dream about the world of 2015. Yet, there were people then who invested in the church with an eye to its future. We are called to no less today. Let us create and support local and national ministries that train young leaders in justice and mercy. These young people are the future church, and they will be the ones to carry and proclaim the values of the United Church of Christ in whatever future lies ahead.

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