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# WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from  
the United Church of Christ

Issue #710 | Nov. 10, 2014

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## A Taste of Justice

by Vivian M. Lucas  
Team Leader and Director

If you've never eaten a sweet scuppernong grape, you have missed an unforgettable treat. One of my fondest childhood memories is of enjoying the small deliciously juicy bronze globes grown in my grandparents' yard. Under a huge living canopy created by grapevines growing on hidden trellises, my sisters and I would pick grapes and eat to our hearts' content. It never occurred to me that over 40 years later I'd buy these wonderful Southern delicacies for a price of almost ten cents apiece! So last week, when one of the neighbors of Franklinton Center at Bricks ([ucc.org/franklinton-center](http://ucc.org/franklinton-center)), a UCC Center for Education and Social Transformation, offered cuttings from her scuppernong grapevines, I jumped at the chance to add a small vineyard to the center's 5-acre garden and acre-sized orchard that help provide healthy food to families living in the eastern North Carolina area where the center is located. "A vineyard will put a naturally sweet touch to the food justice project," I thought.

As the gracious neighbor began to clip cuttings from her grapevines, I noticed something unique. The small branches were cut from the vine, but they remained attached in other areas of the branches. Upon close examination, I saw that young tendrils from one branch had grown long enough to attach themselves and curl around other branches to stay connected to the grapevines. I learned that what had begun 10 years ago as four small grape plants had grown to become a 20-foot long and 4-foot wide grape arbor by making intricate connections that helped to produce hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of grapes. To help the plants become most fruitful, the owner had cared for the growing grapevines with trellises and had pruned and trained the branches to reach within their surroundings to help them move themselves upwards. As the

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tendrils wrapped themselves around the branches and vines, their grips had become strong enough to support the continual growth process. This reminded me of the way children and youth grow within the context of family, school, community and church.

Young people seek support, training and education to grow, strengthen and produce. It is our responsibility as those who have benefitted from the gifts, leadership, and courage of our foreparents and community institutions, to give our children and youth something they can “wrap their hands and minds around.” We must build upon the work completed by those upon whose shoulders we stand. We must make connections to ensure that our systems are strong. We must repeal unjust laws and enact just legislation that helps us work in unity to build new and exciting infrastructures. It is our job to set fair policies and lovingly and wisely teach our children and youth how to navigate in ways that successfully help move these young people upward and forward. Are we doing our best to make the future fruit of our youth *sweet and just* or *just bittersweet*?

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Vivian M. Lucas is Team Leader and Director of the UCC's historic Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, N.C.*

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