

WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from
the United Church of Christ

Issue #766 | December 7, 2015

Let's Put Our Soup Kitchens Out of Business

by Edith Rasell
Minister for Economic Justice

It's early December. Yikes! So much to do. So many demands on our money — presents, special foods, decorations, cards, and other holiday “essentials.” And, don't forget, this is also the time when many charitable organizations ask for financial contributions.

Let's give to these groups and support their work with those who are struggling. But, generous friends, please give your money carefully and wisely.

Millions of people in the United States live in poverty, millions can't find good jobs, and millions have largely lost hope in a better future. How can we help? We can first recognize that many of our serious social ills are due to structural and systemic problems, for example, the lack of affordable housing, too many low-wage jobs and too few good ones, too few treatment opportunities for those suffering with drug and alcohol addiction, inadequate programs for people leaving jail and prison, and federal and state budgets that provide too little funding for essential programs. The list could go on and on. People on the margins need immediate assistance from government and charitable organizations. But even more, they need us to change our economic system to address the underlying causes of our grave social problems.

So in the weeks ahead, when you get appeals in the mail or in your inbox, please do give. Give money to charitable organizations that will feed and house people and otherwise meet their immediate needs. But don't stop there. Also set aside money to give to groups that seek to change the more fundamental, flawed structures of our economy and our society. Give to groups that pressure Congress or state governments to spend

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



more on affordable housing and drug treatment programs. Fund workers' organizations that are in the streets seeking higher wages, full-time hours, and regular schedules. Give to those who want reform in the criminal justice system, more support for suffering veterans, early childhood education for all our children, and affordable higher education.

The society we seek to create is not a place where all the soup kitchens are located in beautiful dining halls and serve steak (with meatless options for vegetarians and vegans)! While charity meets the immediate needs of those who are suffering, it also erodes self-respect, breaks down human dignity, and corrodes the spirit — even when offered by wonderful volunteers in pleasant surroundings. The good society is one where no one needs to go to a soup kitchen. In a just society, people would have jobs and earn enough to care for themselves and their families. Those unable to work would receive sufficient support to live with dignity.

So with this vision in mind, let's be generous and wise in our giving. If you choose, give to charitable organizations that meet suffering people's immediate needs. But let's also donate at least some of our dollars to groups that are working to put the soup kitchens, clothes closets, and homeless shelters out of business.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edith Rasell is Minister for Economic Justice.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

bit.ly/jwmnin

ARCHIVE

WJ
f

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.