



## Strengthening Global Advocacy

**Karen Georgia Thompson**  
**Online Communications Specialist**

My first overseas trip in the role of Associate General Minister for Wider Church Ministries was to Venezuela. We were invited by our partners—the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela (EPUV), with whom we have engaged in a relationship of solidarity for over 60 years—to visit and witness the impact the embargo was having on the people of Venezuela.

The visit was eye-opening. We heard from clergy, government officials, members of the Afro-Venezuelan community, and others about the challenges being experienced, as well as the innovations and resilience of communities in addressing the challenges posed by the embargo. On our final evening together, we discussed the ways in which EPUV envisioned the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ could be in solidarity with them.

They asked for prayer. They asked that we continue to raise awareness about issues in Venezuela. They asked that we advocate for change in U.S. foreign policy toward Venezuela and for a termination of the economic embargo. They also asked that we provide input into the [Universal Periodic Review](#) of the U.S., citing the human rights violations that were a result of economic sanctions.

In the United States, we often think of the U.S. government as our highest authority in addressing human rights violations we see here in the US and globally. In fact, the human rights of each person are guaranteed and protected under the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#), which was presented by the United Nations in December 1948. A Universal Periodic Review is conducted for each member state of the UN on a four-year cycle. The review offers the opportunity for member states to indicate the ways in which they are meeting and addressing the standards for human rights presented under the UDHR.

The UN process also allows for input from a variety of stakeholders. For the upcoming 2020 review of the US, the United Church of Christ was represented in drafting the input from mainline churches in the US with the World Council of Churches. The churches addressed the ongoing human rights violations in the US that are experienced in racial injustice, extrajudicial killings, the militarization of communities, and racial profiling.

The request from our partners in Venezuela came after the final document was submitted. However, the UCC has a place at the table in advocating for the human rights of all through the United Nations. The request from our partners in Venezuela was another voice calling for us to amplify our witness for human rights standards through the UN that will guarantee all are able to live with dignity, respect and freedom.

The UPR Working Group will review the U.S. in April-May 2020. The deadline for the U.S. government to submit its report is February 2020. What will the United States government have to say about the ways in which it is improving the human rights of its residents and citizens?

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Georgia Thompson is Associate General Minister of Global Engagement and Co-Executive of Global Ministries.

**LEARN** [ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

**DONATE** [ucc.org/donate](http://ucc.org/donate)

ARCHIVE  
**WFJ** [bit.ly/witness4justice](http://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.*