

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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The Face of the 99%

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The Occupy Movement is surely a sight to behold. Thousands of people in over 900 cities in this country and all over the world are saying NO. NO, to the very small number who control the wealth and the power. No, we do not believe that money trickles down to the most vulnerable because the wealthy are generous. No, democratic elections cannot continue to be driven by who can raise the most money. No, we can no longer deny that money talks.

Regardless of whether it is in a capitalist or socialist economic system, money talks. It's time to get out of denial. While I am in deep disagreement with oligarchical societies, they are at least honestly portrayed. In countries, where oligarchy rules those who have the most money control the culture, the community, and the society. Sounds too close to what we're facing in the United States when the wealthiest control the culture, the community and the society that is further magnified by unjust tax laws that benefit them most.

Who are these 99%? They are more than the middle-class person who has experienced a recent economic crisis. The 99%

includes thousands of parents who do not have enough money to pay for quality child care while they work at a minimum wage job. The 99% includes the 13.9 million persons in this country who are unemployed. The 99% includes the 50 million women, men, and children who do not have health insurance, let alone access to basic health care needs (U.S. Census Bureau, September 2011). The 99% includes students who went back to college to improve their chance for better employment; now half of these students graduate with an average loan debt of \$10,000 while the cost of college increases at twice the rate of inflation (National Center for Education Statistics). The 99% includes those who owned one of the 1.5 million homes in foreclosure (RealtyTrac). I know many people, including close family members, in these situations. I'll bet you do too.

We see the faces of demonstrators everywhere. It is such a huge movement because so many have become the victims of greed on the part of a few. Besides all those included in the 99% mentioned above, activists and advocates and faith leaders from all religions are marching with those who have no voice. Whether we have seen a face we know in a demonstration on television or someone we have marched along side, I believe that we each know at least one person, probably many more, who are suffering the impact of our broken economic system.

Those raising their voices are people just like us expressing concern that our gridlocked political system seems incapable of adequately addressing these problems. Not knowing what else to do, people are taking to the streets and showing their distress, not just for their own well-being, but for the common good. By participating with nonviolent steady action, in spite of aggressive police actions and restrictive regulations, we are exercising the basic principles of the democratic system that we valiantly support and protect. Do not doubt that 99% of us can make a difference when we say YES to justice and fairness for all, not just some.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,277 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.