

## Mission Moment

Even when every door is closed to us, God will make a way for us to become who we are meant to be. And so, when Teresinha, a young girl from Brazil, heard that a rural school would be opening near her small town, her heart sang with joy. At last she would be able to learn to read and write—a privilege her mother never had. But her father refused to give his permission, insisting that there was no reason for his daughter to learn such things. Schools were rare in rural Brazil many years ago, and girls were not allowed to attend. The only place that Teresinha and her sisters were allowed to go outside the home was to church.

Teresinha made her decision on one of the three-mile walks to church. After Mass, Teresinha told the priest she wanted to become a nun. The priest secured her father's permission to take Teresinha to the convent in the city, where she learned to read and write. While still a novice, she became an assistant teacher in a local grammar school and after four years, met her future husband, married, and had a family. Today, Teresinha has but one paper diploma, from the Course for the Training of Community Health Educators, a program sponsored by Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

Teresinha's self-esteem as a woman, able to be an active member of the community besides being a wife, mother and now grandmother, is a victory example for women. We can be proud of the role Our Church's Wider Mission played in Teresinha's story.

*February 2009*

**God is still speaking,**



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## *Ask the Question*

What am I going to do with my life? How can I make a difference?

For what purpose was I created?" Maybe these are questions most of us ask at one time or another in our lives. For some, they are questions that lead to wondering about a "vocation"—a call to serve God through ministry in the church.

In the United Church of Christ, we have a special website designed for anyone who wonders whether ministry is for them. Even if you're just curious, you might want to check out [www.askthequestion.org](http://www.askthequestion.org). It's a site to help people on their journey of exploration. There are video testimonies from others who have asked themselves the question, resources for prayer and study, and an online forum about church vocations. In February, we celebrate Church Vocations Sunday. Maybe someone you know would make a wonderful pastor... maybe you are someone who has wondered about answering God's call in your life. Seek a sense of the sacred.

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**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



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The concerns that Martin Luther King addressed back in the 1960s were not just issues of society and culture, they were issues of justice. The same is true for many of the challenges that face this country today.

The call to respect and care for each other as sisters and brothers isn't just a political or sociological statement. Remember the words of Jesus: "If you love me, feed my sheep." The greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all our hearts and minds, but the second one is like it, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Concerns about racial equality, poverty and homelessness, war and health care, and the marginalization of the voiceless and powerless are moral issues, they are issues that people of faith must be engaged in. If this exciting moment in time is going to be anything other than a short-lived, feel-good moment, then all of us must be partners in bringing about the change we seek.

And that includes those of us who are people of faith. We don't have the luxury of sitting in church on Sundays and not taking our faith with us on Mondays. Our role as the church and as Christians is to continue to raise our voices for more just systems, for eradication of poverty, for policies that don't discriminate on the basis of race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation, to encourage and support and pray for peace. And we are called to do this not because of a particular political perspective but because of our belief in a Still-speaking God, who is a God of love and a God of justice.

Edith Guffey  
UCC Associate General Minister

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Many of us will fast this Lent. We will give up chocolate or red meat or *American Idol*, so that when we feel the craving for these things, we will be reminded of God's craving for *us*. The prophet Isaiah, writing long before the first Lent, says that while this kind of fast is OK, it just isn't enough.

He suggests a different kind of fast: one from all injustice and oppression. Oh, sure, Isaiah! No problem. For most of us, the only injustice we're part of is systemic: it's in the institutions and cities and countries where we live. How are we supposed to give up *that*? Move to Antarctica?

It's not simple, but maybe we can just start. Maybe there's a way to take a "journey-of-a-thousand-miles-begins-with-a-single-step" approach. What if we began with fasting from just *one* piece of injustice: from non-fairly-traded coffee, from stores that don't compensate their workers fairly, from driving when public transportation is available? What if we just *start*?

What change might we create in the world, or in ourselves, with such small steps? Would it be enough? For Isaiah, who is known for being unyielding, probably not, frankly. But for God, who is known for being merciful and loving? Almost definitely.

--A selection, by Quinn G. Caldwell, Associate Pastor, Old South Church, Boston, from *The Stillspeaking Lenten Daily Devotional*, which can be ordered at [unitedchurchpress.com](http://unitedchurchpress.com) or by calling 800-537-3394.

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