



Rooted in Community

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Minister for Immigration Justice

When I taught United Church of Christ History and Polity as a local church pastor, I began by drawing a circle (this is the local church) and then drew concentric circles (this is the association/conference/national ministries) around the first circle. Because in the UCC, the local church is the reference point for everything else. The first sentence of Article 5 in the Constitution of the United Church of Christ is “the basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ is the Local Church.” Local Churches in the UCC have the radical freedom and weighty responsibility for their organization, membership, theology, and ministry. Authorized ministers in the United Church of Christ must be a member of a local church, regardless of their setting for ministry, to maintain standing as a minister. We are congregationalists (small c) to our core. In our ecclesiology, the world can swirl and turn all it wants but we are anchored and moored by the local church. It is our cornerstone. It is where we are formed as followers of Jesus, and participating in a local church is world-forming. We follow the lead of the early church, understanding that living the Way of Jesus is not a one-time decision but a way of life lived most completely with others. The local church is a living reminder that the well-being of one contributes to the well-being of all, and the struggles of one do not exist in isolation because we are One Body.

The decision made by the Supreme Court on June 25 to succumb to the will of the executive branch to abandon Temporary Protected Status for thousands of Haitian and Syrian immigrants (Mullin vs. Doe) pretends that thousands of



neighbors can be excised from our local communities without consequence. “It is not our decision to make” sums up the Court’s response, and thus the Powers that Be will be released yet again to expel those who have rooted themselves in our economy, our neighborhoods, and our hearts. We who commit to living life in spiritual community day after day, year after year, generation to generation understand that to cast out our kin is something we do at our own peril. As a nation, we will witness lives knit into the fabric of local communities unraveling all around us. We will be called upon to stand with those who face the impossible decision to abandon carefully rebuilt lives or to live in the deepest, most dangerous shadows. There is no amount of legal gymnastics that can minimize the pain and disruption of tearing away hundreds of thousands of people from this colorful tapestry of us. There is no “us” apart from one another, such shaping in congregations cannot be undone or forgotten. We know that everything touches everything. The way we were created. Let us pray for our kin whose lives are forever changed. Let us pray for the soul of a nation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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