

“All the People” begins from a different vantage point — a simply affirmation that each person is a child of God and should be welcomed and embraced as a member of the household of faith (*Eph. 2:19*). Although just about every church would view itself as welcoming, it’s the radical, inclusive, non-judgmental embrace that sets the UCC apart.

Both commercials illustrate the good news of the gospel: no matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are God’s precious child. We in the United Church of Christ do not have bouncers, litmus tests or creedal affirmations that must be adhered to before a person can enter into the fellowship of our church family. All are welcome and embraced as we seek to fulfill Jesus’ mandate, “That they may all be one” (*John 17:21*).

### How will seekers find our congregation after viewing the commercial?

The UCC website <ucc.org>, posted at the end of the commercials, will be the gateway for viewers seeking a church in their area. Every UCC congregation has been invited to be a welcoming church in the national marketing campaign. Those churches that “opt in” and participate in a regional training session will be listed in The Stillspeaking Initiative database that can be accessed through <ucc.org>.

### How can our congregation take a more active role in the identity campaign?

While we have high hopes for these commercials, the reality is simple: airing spots on TV alone will not bring people into our churches. Our task is similar to Jesus parable of the sower (*Mark 4: 1-9*). For God’s word to take root and grow, it must fall upon fertile, fresh-tilled ground. Commercials will make the general populace more aware of the United Church of Christ — a place where all persons can find a non-judgmental, spiritual home — but the commercial message also must be enhanced and accentuated by a congregation’s active presence in the community. So when an individual pursues the “promise” of the commercial and attends a UCC church, will he or she find a welcoming, fertile environment? That part is up to each congregation.

Your congregation's participation is as easy as 1-2-3:

1. **Opt in and get trained:** Register your church and attend a training event led by your Conference.
2. **Identify yourself to your community:** Utilize signs, banners, brochures, print ads, etc., that connect your church with The Stillspeaking brand.
3. **Contribute to the cause:** Help us make our goal of \$8.5 million so that we can reach everyone. Your financial support is essential to the success of this campaign.

The Stillspeaking Initiative is creating resources to help local congregations develop opportunities and programs for invitation and welcome. **If your church would like more information** about these resources and the identity campaign, you can call the toll free number, 866-UCC-UCC4, and ask for **The Stillspeaking Initiative**, or e-mail <stillspeaking@ucc.org>. Additional information can also be found on our websites, <ucc.org> and <stillspeaking.com>.

Your financial support, special gifts and pledges can be sent to:

The Stillspeaking Initiative  
UCC Financial Development Office  
700 Prospect Ave., 8th floor  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1100  
toll-free 800/846-6822; fax 216/736-2297

## “God is still speaking,” 30-second TV commercials Theological Reflection

### COMMERCIAL SCENARIOS

#### The Bouncer



The scene: the exterior of Any Church, USA. A diverse group of people — all ages, ethnic backgrounds, varying abilities, gay and straight — gather outside the front door. But instead of a clear entry point, two large nightclub-type bouncers stand behind a roped-off barrier. The first bouncer decides who shall enter, the second enforcer allows in only the approved, properly attired, socially acceptable people.

The beefy bouncer’s words make it clear who is welcome and who is not. Pointing to the camera, he gestures: Step aside, please ... NOT you ... You can come in ... NOT so fast ...

A fade to black, then the following words on screen: Jesus didn’t turn people away. Neither do we.

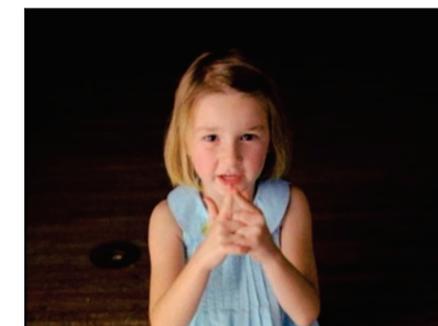
Cut to a new scene: Another diverse group is gathering for a church family portrait. As they happily jostle and maneuver into position the voice-over continues: The United Church of Christ: No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey — you’re welcome here.

Cut to red and black graphics: tag line, United Church of Christ, logo and ucc.org.

#### All the People

Remember the childhood game you played by entwining your hands, extending your index fingers and opening your thumbs to reveal all the people? “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open the doors and see all the people.”

This commercial, using the simple rhyme known to almost every child, portrays the UCC as a church that welcomes all people. A single child starts the rhyme followed by a series of God’s children of all ages picking up on the refrain. Ending in a similar fashion to “The Bouncer,” this commercial offers a simple, positive message that “God accepts all the people ... so do we,” regardless of where you are on life’s journey.



### Unpacking the commercial

The commercials described above are the media cornerstone of a national identity program initiated by the United Church of Christ. During the national campaign, commercials will be broadcast in every market across the country. It is estimated that 70 percent of the U.S. population will see a commercial at least once. As many as 45 percent will see a commercial 4-5 times. To help you and your congregation understand the commercials’ purpose, content and theological foundation, the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have been prepared.

## Why should the UCC become involved in advertising and marketing?

Jesus was in the advertising business. He had the ultimate product — God’s salvation — and used all of his creative skills to spread the word. Jesus taught in synagogues, spoke in parables (stories with a message), walked on water, healed the sick and even raised the dead. Why? Not to bring glory to himself, but to point to his main product: God’s redemptive love.

Jesus was a walking, talking, living, breathing commercial for the advent of God’s reign. He continuously told stories of God’s reign (*Mark 4: 33-34*); went out to where the people were to get across his message (*Matt 5: 1-11*); shared meals with those who were outside the religious establishment (*Luke 15: 1-2*); and sent his disciples out in pairs to advertise the power of the gospel (*Mark 6: 7-13*). Although we usually think of glitz and hype when it comes to marketing, isn’t that really the business the church is in — advertising Jesus’ gospel of love?

## Why are we undertaking an identity campaign at this time?

A recent survey on the state of the church revealed that 87 percent of Americans feel that religion is important to their lives. Yet only 42 percent of U.S. Christians attend worship services on a regular basis (defined as at least once a month). Even more startling, 85 percent of mainline churches are in a state of membership decline.

If so many people feel that religion is important, why do so few attend church? More than ever, there is a large segment of our society that has little or no church background. Others, who do claim a history within the religious community, feel that worship is boring and uninspiring. Some feel the church has lost its vision in society while others have had a negative personal experience in a church community and feel unwelcome.

As a mainline church, the UCC also is experiencing a declining membership. In recent focus groups of people who are no longer part of a church community, almost no one had heard of the United Church of Christ. We are a well kept secret. It is time to let the world know that the UCC — with its vibrant heritage, diverse congregations and progressive theology — offers an invitation to everyone to know the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus told his followers: “You are the light of the world ... do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel ... let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to God.” (*Matthew 5: 14-16*).

## Why the theme, “God is Still Speaking,”?

The theological context of the identity theme may have been best addressed by Dr. Wilson Yates, president of UCC-related United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (New Brighton, Minn.), in the most recent issue of *New Conversations*:

“The formulation [God is still speaking,], brief and succinct, is foremost a creative forging of images that gives shape to an aspect of our understanding of God ... Four words: “God” and a verb, “is,” the location of action; “still,” and the action itself, “speaking,” followed by a comma. The words imply a past — if God is still speaking, we can assume God has spoken in the past, speaks in the present, and, by implications that flow from both the verb and the comma, will speak in the future, for the future is indicated by the comma and is being created by the actions of the present. And the word “speaking” points to the active presence of God and to the possibility of dialogue between God and the human community ...

“But the statement is not simply a linguistic structure of an idea. It is a theological statement that is related to a context, the United Church of Christ ... The statement’s four words and a comma call us more deeply into that theology ... In the shaping of a single simple sentence with a creative ending, we are invited to play with that theology through the sentence’s words, images, verb and its clever transforming of an item of punctuation into a metaphor. And through its particular formation, it engages us in asking such questions as, “Who is the God who is still speaking?” “Where will God speak?” “How do we prepare ourselves to hear God?” It is a simple, imaginative statement that, once it has entered into our thoughts, becomes a marker that leads us into our theology and our spirituality, that invites us into authentic dialogue with God. The statement’s theology, then, is not new; it’s part of the church’s tradition. What is new is the statement’s formulation of that theology in such an imaginatively simple and direct way that it is given to us with a freshness and immediacy, inviting us to explore new experiences.”

## Who is directing the Identity Campaign?

Conference and national leaders, in consultation with local church pastors, have mounted a major new undertaking called The Stillspeaking Initiative. This project has several key goals:

- to **strengthen** the United Church of Christ’s distinctive witness;
- to **promote** and advertise our inclusive identity;
- to **speak** directly to persons who yearn for God’s love, yet feel ignored by the church;
- to **inspire** increased generosity among church members;
- to become a **catalyst** for church growth and renewal.

The Stillspeaking Initiative will generate new resources to assist congregations, Conferences and the national settings of the church to work together to say “no” to decline and “yes” to empowering our church for generations to come. In order to create the television commercials and provide professional guidance in advertising, The Stillspeaking Initiative has procured the services of Gotham, Inc., a major New York City advertising agency with billions of dollars in commercial account revenue. Gotham, in its desire to share our message and provide a service for the community, has offered to work with us at cost.

## Why television commercials?

We live in a post-modern culture, where visual images speak louder than words. Mass media marketing drills home product identity 24/7 on television, radio and, now, on the internet. TV commercials have become an art form in themselves, with corporations paying millions of dollars for a single 30-second spot. To reach today’s culture (particularly those in the under-40 demographic), it is essential for the church to use today’s preferred communication medium — television. Advertising on television is the most direct way to highlight our identity and tell our story to the world.

## Who is the target audience?

These commercials are not aimed at those church members already in the pew on Sunday morning. Four demographic segments of society are being targeted:

- Those outside of the church. (Those already within our church family have found a reason for being there. Our task is to reach those who believe the church is irrelevant to their lives.)
- Individuals who feel alienated from the institutional church. (Many people have had a negative experience in the church and feel rejected for a variety of reasons. Shouldn’t the church be a place of welcome, safety, and affirmation?)
- People under the age of 40. (While the commercial will speak to people of all ages, it will have its biggest impact on “Generation X,” those born between 1965 and 1980. Gen-Xers have the same spiritual needs as the baby boomers, but experience and process their spirituality in different ways.)
- Women, especially women with young children. (Studies show that this demographic is most likely to return to church as their children reach school age.)

## What is the meaning of the commercials?

Commercials are often designed to break down stereotypes by first setting up a negative image, then shattering it, and then offering a punch line that reorients the viewers’ preconceptions. “The Bouncer” commercial does the same thing. It is a metaphor, a modern-day parable. The bouncers on the screen are symbolic of the alienation separating many people from the church. Imagine if Jesus told the commercial’s story without the aid of television cameras, actors, music background, voice-over narration, and electronic editing. It might sound something like this:

Once there was a Samaritan woman who, seeking spiritual enlightenment, undertook a journey to visit the temple in Jerusalem. Upon arriving at the main gate, she was barred entrance by a scribe and a Pharisee, who said, “We do not allow your kind, a woman and a Samaritan, to set foot within this holy place. Only the righteous and just may enter to receive God’s blessing. Be gone.” And the woman left, never to return. If I do not turn away the oppressed and the outcast, why should you? God is still speaking. If you have ears to hear, then listen.