

OPINION

Movement is a Voice to the Vulnerable

BY BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN

Pondering the Occupy movement, I find that I am excited that members of our great republic are continuing to protest as a way to make their frustration known about economic inequality.



Being a proponent of activism and advocacy, I realize that demonstrations can be a tool to demand change to tax, civic and corporate laws. As the race for the White House begins a countdown to the 2012 elections, I watch how the President and Congress might address the concerns of those feeling unheard, invisible and taken for granted.

Varying in political outlook, ethnicity, age, religion and income, these protesters have assembled vowing to remain present until their concerns are addressed. Unfortunately, there is still no cohesive message being released to the media, government agencies or elected officials. Moreover, the violent fringe element connected to the occupy movement has been

counterproductive to the brand. Nonetheless, it is clear that their overall intent and goal is to communicate that something is indeed wrong with our economy and it must be addressed for the good of the citizenry.

The United Church of Christ national staff has heard from many that we must support those who are feeling marginalized and overwhelmed in this economy. Our five-person Collegium of officers issued a statement last month urging members and churches to "seek the common good as the church and in society through creative vision, faithful action and prayer.

As a Christian, I understand that it is my responsibility to live out the mandate of Christ to stand with the vulnerable in our communities. The occupy movement has identified who the vulnerable are. It is not possible for anyone to say that they have no awareness of such need or suffering. With the change of season, it is my hope that these courageous individuals will not be deterred from continuing to let their voices be heard.

As we embark upon the holi-

day season, I hope that we will honor the ways we have been blessed as family, community or nation. While for people in other countries, the opportunity to protest could come with the threat of bodily harm, imprisonment, or perhaps even death. Yet in our democracy, in most instances, we can disagree with the ruling establishment and protest publicly without those fears. With this right, comes responsibility.

German pastor and theologian, Martin Niemoller, wrote: "First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me."

Friends, we must not take our freedoms for granted; they can be taken away from us if we aren't paying attention. I am confident that with our help the demonstrators will continue to challenge the establishment and

thereby remind us of who and whose we are.

Bentley de Bardelaben is an

executive with Justice Ministries in the United Church of Christ.

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Occupy Portland Response

Kudos to Portland Mayor Sam Adams and Police Chief Mike Reese for their respectful, appropriate and successful handling of the Occupy Portland ad hoc campground event in the parks near City hall. Congratulations also to Lt. Robert King whose graceful and subdued work as a TV spokesperson was exemplary in helping to keep things calm.

TV reporting was a mixed bag. Local television news is mostly about "blood" and "puppies." There wasn't much of either at the Occupy Portland encampment. Nevertheless, one reporter in a hyper excited voice tried her best to find controversy where none existed. She clearly would have relished a fight or a fire. She wondered on camera why so many of the Occupy Portland folks didn't like the media.

Letter to the Editor

Most citizens, most of the time don't have a clue how government works nor do they care. About 18 percent of eligible citizens don't even bother to register to vote in Portland. It stands to reason that if you don't know how something works it's hard to fix it.

Nevertheless, Occupy Portland, despite its reported lack of focus has accurately and authentically expressed the frustration and anger of the 99 percent, the "rest of us" - an apt phrase once used by Apple computer.

Even if most of the local TV news crowd doesn't get it - the rest of us do. America's national political and economic system is

broken. Our Congress is dysfunctional. Our President seems more a bystander than a player. The Republican candidates for president perform as a very bad reality TV show where ignorance, deception and the assault on reason are the main attractions.

We mere citizens can't compete with those individuals and corporations that have most of the money and the power to keep getting more. The best we can do is stand up in public and shout, "We are in pain. Your greed is killing us."

That shout from Occupy Portland was heard around the world. Thank you.

Richard Ellmyer
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