

Strengthen the Church Offering Helps Make Miracles Happen

By Rev. Andrew Warner

Do you believe miracles happen? I do.

Miracles like Pentecost can seem impossible: the gusty movement of the Spirit, tongues of fire, and crazy preaching that made sober Peter sound drunk.

And yet I believe in miracles because of my own Pentecost moment back in 2014. I long wanted to marry but Wisconsin law forbade same-sex marriages. Jay and I thought it would never change. And then, two days before Pentecost 2014, a judge overturned the law. The Milwaukee Courthouse announced it would stay open so same-sex couples could finally marry.

Jay and I rushed down to a courthouse filled with people. Couples stood before judges and hastily summoned pastors. It was all so new that the marriage license forms still read 'groom' and 'bride.' (I was the bride).

Flames may not have danced on our heads, but joy filled our hearts, and the warmth of the crowded hallway felt like the closeness of God. Judge Jeff Kremer led us through our vows and then he choked up when his own line came: "I pronounce you married under the laws of the state of Wisconsin." His stutter through words he knew well sounded like the spirit itself getting choked up.

Throughout that weekend I performed weddings for church members and friends. And then on Pentecost Sunday, 8 couples who thought they'd never legally marry gathered in the sanctuary of the church I served. We wept, cried, and celebrated the amazing thing God had done.

Miracles do happen. I know because I experienced one.

On Pentecost most of our congregations will take the Strengthen the Church Offering. The offering supports the work of our conference and the wider United Church of Christ as we equip pastors and leaders, form new congregations and help existing ones find their way through conflict.

Through this offering we ensure Pentecost miracles keep happening. Strengthen the Church funds once helped congregations learn to discuss LGBT rights, equipped leaders as advocates, and established inclusive congregations. The Strengthen the Church Offering made possible the innovation and leadership which put the UCC at the forefront of the LGBT rights movement.

Just as the Strengthen the Church Offering helped set the stage for my Pentecost miracle, I know the offering we take on June 9, 2019, will equip the Church to do Jesus' miraculous work.

Half of your gift to Strengthen the Church will support the Wisconsin Conference. It provides the financial resources our conference needs to try new innovative programs like the Damascus Project, to advocate for immigrant justice, and to deepen the leadership gifts of our clergy. The other half of your gift to Strengthen the Church supports projects across the country, especially resources for new congregations and programs for youth and young adults.

I believe in miracles. And I know that with the Strengthen the Church Offering we can help them happen.

Links to new Strengthen the Church resources:

- [**Worship Service**](#)
- [**Bulletin Insert**](#) - Many thanks to the Northwest Association's Division of the Mission of the Church in the World for creating and sharing this.
- [**UCC STC Resources**](#)
- [**UCC Insert**](#)