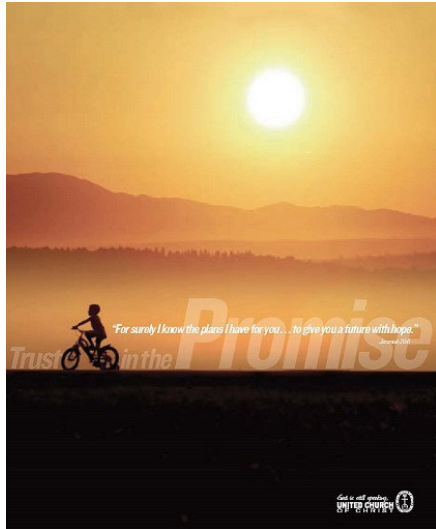


## MISSION MOMENT: SUE GERTH

### OCTOBER 11, 2015



We can do hard things through Christ who strengthens us. I know that I am better able to draw on the strength that comes from God when I am embraced by my church. My church, this church, serves as a constant reminder that I am never alone, whether I am sharing joy or facing a difficult time. My church family isn't afraid to stand up and stand out to take on difficult challenges together.

Stewardship, the sharing of our time, our talent, and our treasure is critical to the continued success of this church that I have come to love. I want to share with you some of my experiences in ways that our church, all of us who are this church, shine a light in this community by taking on the hard things that are needed through some of our outreach ministries.

Seven years ago, Alan and I had left a church where we no longer felt connected. About that time, our oldest child, who was 26 at the time, came out to us as transgender. She had been assigned male at birth, and we had raised her as our son. It came as a great surprise, because she had hidden it well, picking up cues from society that it was something very shameful. For us, it was a great relief, because it was an answer to why she suffered from great emotional pain. I knew that her coming out took great strength and courage, and Alan and I were ready to support her as she worked to present herself to the world as the woman that God had created her to be. She and I attended our first PFLAG meeting (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) in this church and felt as if God had given us renewed hope. Still, I knew that the journey ahead would be difficult, and I needed a church where I wouldn't have to justify why I felt that her coming out was not only right, but a "God thing." I realized that a church that supported PFLAG would surely be a safe place to proceed on this journey. On November 2, 2008, I entered the sanctuary here, wondering what kind of a congregation this was. I remember being greeted warmly by Martha Miller and Jean Hill, who introduced themselves, and someone gave me some information about the

church. I read the ONA (Open and Affirming) statement and felt a great sense of peace and belonging.

I have come to love this church home. While serving on the Cabinet, I saw how careful we are in managing the financial gifts we are given to keep this church running. While teaching children's Sunday school, I saw how much we love the children God has entrusted to us. And I have always felt encouraged and appreciated when sharing the gifts God has given me.

I felt a great sense of pride in my church just last month when we opened our doors and welcomed over one hundred guests and presenters to Kansas Statewide Transgender Education Project's TransKansas Conference. What a wonderful outreach to love loudly and send a message that all are truly welcome here.

Another area of outreach that is very special to me is the Ministry of the Decorative Scissors. One Saturday, Jerry Hanna joined us, taking in all that went on. The next day, he remarked that the group wasn't about crafting at all, but rather was about healing. Because this church generously shares its facilities with our group, we have a safe place where love and compassion abound. In addition to laughing and eating and working on scrapbooking or knitting or sewing, we work on healing. One woman has told me more than once that she would not have made it through the last three years without us. For me, too, the Ministry is therapy, because I find immense joy in our weekends, and laughter is greatly therapeutic. When our daughter came out as transgender, it turns out that one of the greatest, and most difficult, challenges has been our own family. Our three other adult children have religious beliefs which do not accept homosexuality or transgenderism as pleasing to God. As a result, we have not even eaten a meal together as a family in the last seven years. Our six grandchildren do not know that their beautiful aunt exists. But, my faith, and this amazing church, allow me to have hope for my family to someday be a real family again. My faith and this church family allow me to find so much joy and beauty in so many things. And I know that I can do hard things through Christ who strengthens me.