



Strengthen the Church Supports Youth Leadership Development

"If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"

***The questions of John Lewis – activist, legislator, and justice advocate –
echoed in the art of Dr. Deborah Rundlett.***

She knew the heartfelt hopes and challenges of youth in her community. Youth wonder about what their world will look like. Despite these challenges, teens and young adults demonstrated a commitment to social change, contributing energy and passion. Rev. Rundlett sought ways to help "unleash the potential and intrinsic power of area high school students to fulfill their capacity as current and future leaders and world citizens."

In response, Ridgebury Congregational Church, with community members, founded the "The Meetinghouse" which sits between two towns: one affluent yet progressive, with little diversity; the other multicultural, representing a wide diversity of peoples, economically, socially, and politically.

The congregation saw an opportunity to bring together youth from both communities for dialogue, wisdom, and collaborative partnership.

With funding from the Strengthen the Church Offering and the State of Connecticut, Dr. Rundlett and The Meetinghouse are gathering high school students to “meet with leading social entrepreneurs, environmental designers, and social justice advocates to learn how to draw from respected leadership models and learn how to move intentional change in their contexts.” Students decide on a pivotal social issue and then create initiatives to address change.

The Meetinghouse helps youth become change leaders empowered to shape a future grounded in hope. Rudy Marconi, the First Selectman (mayor) of one of the towns, recently spoke about the impact of this program. "Let me tell you what Debbie Rundlett and The Meetinghouse are doing: They are reclaiming the Commons and building a bridge between Ridgefield and Danbury. Essential work for our community!"

Innovative projects like The Meetinghouse happen because generous donors across the United Church of Christ support the **Strengthen the Church Offering.**

Together, through this offering, we support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations as we work to become a multicultural/multi-racial, accessible to all Christian movement.

