

## Discipleship Ministries places Giving Tuesday ad in Times Square

By Emily Clemons, Director of Communications  
November 30, 2018

For the first time in almost 15 years, a United Methodist Church ad graced the digital billboards of Times Square in New York City. The Giving Tuesday ad, an expansion of Discipleship Ministries' "See All the People" campaign, shared the message "Let others see Christ in you today" 256 times across three screens on Tuesday, Nov. 27, generating 1.1 million impressions.

"We are just starting to expand the See All The People messaging to those outside the denomination," said the Rev. Steve Horswill-Johnson, chief communications officer at Discipleship Ministries. "This message was a first attempt, an experiment, but we will be working to expand our efforts."

The church's strong presence in the New York City media landscape began in the early 2000's when, in the days following the Sept. 11 terror attacks, the UMC placed billboards two blocks away from ground zero. The message, "Fear is not the only force at work in the world today," was accompanied by an image of praying hands. During its three-month presence in Manhattan, the ad reached an estimated 600,000 people per day.

Building on this momentum, Horswill-Johnson (who was then working with United Methodist Communications) later placed the church's first Times Square ad, using screens on the Reuters building. The ad reinforced a TV ad-buy for the "Igniting Ministries" campaign, known now as "Rethink Church."

Unfortunately, the Reuters people weren't too keen on the idea. Back then, churches "just didn't do that," Horswill-Johnson said, and Reuters was hesitant to sell ad space to a religious organization.

"[The ad] was a very first attempt at thinking of ourselves as a brand, and that not being a bad thing," said Horswill-Johnson.

After a heartfelt letter from then-General Secretary the Rev. Larry Hollon, Reuters amended its policy on denying ad space to religious organizations in October 2003.

"Provided it is made clear that the material in question is paid advertising and that there is no possibility of confusion with our news output," wrote then-Reuters CEO Thomas Glocer in response, "I believe you should have the same access to commercial space as any other organization."

For this year's Giving Tuesday ad spot, however, there was little trouble. Discipleship Ministries purchased the space through Five Tier, a New York-based marketing consultant company that bought a bunch of ad space to resell for Giving Tuesday.

Discipleship Ministries and Five Tier worked together to negotiate an exceptional rate of \$2,500 USD, making the cost of each impression far less than 1 cent.

*The Connectional Table congratulates Discipleship Ministries on this exciting and impactful means of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ! This is just one example of the many ways our United Methodist Church agencies are innovating and working in support of our mission: creating disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*