



## Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

January 4, 2010

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

--Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear Nichola,

This January, as we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., we are reminded that none of us can be saved on our own, that we are inextricably bound up in the web of existence. Freedom for anyone depends on freedom for everyone.

Frankly, sometimes this is hard to see.

Freedoms and privileges are unequally available to those with economic means, white skin, clearly identifiable masculine gender expression, U.S. citizenship status, fluency in English, higher education, and so on. Some people look pretty free.

And yet, even those of us who benefit disproportionately from these privileges (and that would be most of us, in one way or another) don't necessarily experience ourselves as free. Many of us feel enslaved to debts, or to jobs we hate, or to unrelenting pressure to produce, or to worry about the state of the economy, the world, our intimate relationships. Even those who perceive themselves to be doing just fine don't have access to relationships with people who are different than them, or to the fullness of their emotional lives.

We are all bound up in inherited ways of being that we did not create, but in which we participate, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes unconsciously, often under duress (which might look like the threat of humiliation, or loss of financial security, or deportation/imprisonment, or even being beaten to death on the street for failing to play by the rules). These inherited ways of being run the gamut from



how we treat people based on the color of their skin, to whether we look each other in the eye as we pass on the street, to whether we can cry or even feel sad or angry. And all of these inherited ways of being serve to keep injustice in place.

Most of the world's spiritual traditions tell us there is another way, that it is possible to get free. And almost all of them emphasize that it's not possible on one's own. That, to quote King again, "No one is free until everyone is free." We need each other.

As you enter this new year, we urge you to think about what enslaves you and how it is related to what enslaves others.

Many of the classes we are offering at Seminary of the Street this winter have to do with getting free. We urge you to join us in our collective freedom effort. Email soon to sign up; space is limited.

And for those of you who live outside the San Francisco Bay Area, don't despair! Read on for resources you can access from anywhere, and be sure to join our Facebook group at <http://www.facebook.com/#/group.php?v=info&ref=ts&gid=45655450887>.

## **Liberating Our Ethics**

**with Nichola Torbett**

Ethics can be oppressive. This is the bold claim in Miguel A. de la Torre's *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. In this lively participatory seminar, we'll use excerpts from this book and the wisdom of participants to explore the problem with talk of "universal values" and discuss the possibility of a liberatory ethics that bends toward justice.

NOTE: You do not have to be a Christian to participate fully in this class! Our reading comes from a Christian ethicist, but our practice will draw from a variety of traditions.

**Mondays, January 11, 18, and 25, 2010; 7-9pm**

**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**

**Sliding scale \$30-45; financial assistance available**

**Email our [registration desk](#) to sign up**

## **Undoing Oppression Through the Body**

**with Victor Lee Lewis and Vanissar Tarakali**

This embodied workshop for both people of color and white people will explore the impact of trauma (personal, intimate, social) on our experiences of oppression, our participation in oppressive systems, and our efforts to free ourselves from both. Assuming that oppression traumatizes both targets and agents, we'll work with trauma and shame as they live in the bodymind, introducing concrete practices for engaging consciously with adaptations that keep oppression and privilege in place and discovering empowering alternatives.

Participants will spend time in both joint sessions and POC/white caucuses. People of color will explore ways to recover resilience in addressing racism and internalized racism. White allies will become conscious of automatic behaviors that interfere with efforts to undo racism and learn effective ways of working with them. People in both groups will become more resourceful in managing feelings of anger, fear, overwhelm, discouragement, "burnout" and stress in themselves and others.

This is a rare opportunity to learn from two pioneers in the field of social justice education. Victor Lee

Lewis, MA, is a social justice educator/healer with more than 25 years of experience. Best known for his role in the groundbreaking film *The Color of Fear*, he is pioneering new ways to bring fast, deep and lasting emotional healing into social justice education. Vanissar Tarakali combines intimate and social trauma expertise, anti-oppression education, a Ph.D. in East-West psychology, and a deep understanding of the body's intuitive, energetic, survival and healing mechanisms to design embodied educational programs.

**Saturday, January 23, 10am-5pm**

**Sliding Scale: \$80-180; limited financial assistance available**

**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**

Email our [registration desk](#) to sign up.

## **Love Your Neighbor As Yourself: A Laboratory for Cultivating the Love That Does Justice**

with **Nichola Torbett**

In Christianity, loving your neighbor is supposed to be "the greatest commandment," but what does it mean to practice this commandment, really? How is it possible to love in ways that challenge existing power relationships and transform injustice?

In this "laboratory," we'll work with scripture and our shared wisdom to develop and then, between sessions, try out concrete practices to help us love ourselves and our neighbors in real, tangible ways.

Tentative schedule (but please register for the full series):

Week 1: Experiencing Ourselves as Loved

Week 2: Love, Power, and Difference

Week 3: Loving in a Culture of Individualism

Week 4: Generosity Practices

Week 5: Hospitality Practices

Week 6: Loving Your Enemies

Week 7: Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself

Week 8: Celebration and Closure

**Wednesdays, January 27-March 17, 7-9pm**

**\*\*Sliding scale: \$80-180**

**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**

Email our [registration desk](#) to sign up

## **Simplify: Finding a Path to Greater Freedom and Creativity (in an Era of Scarcity and Greed)**

with **Mark and Lisa Scandrette** of the [ReImagine Community](#)

In light of the continuing economic crisis, many of us find ourselves anxious about our own financial situations. Freedom and creativity in how we deal with our finances may feel far out of reach. At the same time, we are increasingly aware of the disproportionate privilege we possess in comparison with most of the world's population. What does it mean to live justly and sustainably in a culture of prosperity and materialism?

This class will use the teachings of Jesus as a starting place for a conversation about our relationship to money and resources. (Note: At Seminary of the Street, we recognize the harm that has been done in the name of Christianity and other religions, and at the same time we are committed to recuperating their

radical potential for social change. People of all faiths, as well as agnostics and atheists, are welcome to attend any of our events and to bring their own background to the discussions.)

How can we apply what Jesus taught about time, money and possessions to our current life context? In this one-day workshop we will explore how we might translate these teachings into concrete life practices: abundance, gratefulness, contentment, trust, generosity, simplicity and frugality.

**Saturday, January 30; 9am-3pm**

**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**

**Sliding scale \$60-40**

**To register, email [our registration desk](#).**

## **Who Is Jesus? A Dogma-Free Discussion about the Historical Jesus**

**with Ryan Dowell Baum**

One of the things many of us are trying to get free of is an oppressive version of Christianity. Several of the board members at Seminary of the Street are committed to "plumbing the ruins" of Christianity, in full recognition of the harm that has been done in its name, in an effort to see what is still life-giving. This class is offered as part of that effort.

Why was Jesus killed? How does the historical context of first-century Palestine help us make sense of his life and mission? Did he really rise from the dead? And ultimately, what do the answers to these questions say to how we live our lives? To the possibility of a reign of love and justice?

In this exploratory, intimate, and lively discussion of *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, we'll explore two different views on these questions, one from popular Christian revisionist Marcus Borg, a member of the controversial Jesus Seminar, and the other from N.T. Wright, a prominent standard-bearer for the traditional Christian stance and an outspoken critic of the Jesus Seminar.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the book is the way these two authors argue passionately for their own perspectives while continuing to respect and even love each other. We will strive for a similar tenor—exploratory, intimate, and supportive. We hope you'll join us!

**Mondays, January 25-March 15; 7-8:30pm**

**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**

**\*\*Sliding scale \$15-45**

**To register, email our registration desk.**

## **FREE Workshop: Be a Resource in Your Community**

**with Miki Kashtan of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication**

Would you like to learn how to become a resource in your neighborhood or community?

In this workshop you can learn basic skills in empathic listening that can support you in the following areas:

- \* capacity to stay present in challenging situations
- \* ability to reflect your understanding regardless of content
- \* competence in checking for understanding of deeper meaning of what is shared
- \* willingness to listen without trying to solve problems

Miki Kashtan, certified NVC trainer, is a founder of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication and the North

America Leadership Program. Miki conducts organizational trainings, consults with private and public sector organizations and teaches NVC at workshops in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the country. Miki has been supporting global social change movements, including coaching of Peace Alliance members in their Department of Peace campaign, facilitation of the African Alliance for Peace summit in Ghana, and a global peace building and conflict transformation summit in Japan. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley.

Continuing Education Units are available. For information, please go to:  
[http://www.baynvc.org/new\\_announcement\\_details.php?announcement\\_id=289](http://www.baynvc.org/new_announcement_details.php?announcement_id=289)

Note: Space is limited. Although this is a free event, we ask that you pre-register if at all possible. To register, contact BayNVC at (510) 433-0700 or [register@baynvc.org](mailto:register@baynvc.org). Donations accepted.

**Friday, February 5, 2010; 4:30-6:30pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland**  
**See [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) for more information**

## **Contemplative Practices for Lent**

**with Michelle Murrain**

Lent is a time when Christians look deeply at ourselves, work to change the rhythms of our lives to slow down, look closely, examine our hearts, and dig deeply into what it means to be people of God and followers of Jesus.

Contemplative practice can be an important part of our Lenten process. These two 1/2 day workshops are designed to introduce you to a variety of methods of Christian contemplative practice, from centering prayer, to *lectio divina*, to praying the hours and others. These workshops will be primarily experiential, with lots of time for practice and small group discussion.

**Saturdays March 6 and 20, 2010; 1-5pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland**  
**\*\*Sliding scale \$15-30 per workshop**

## **FREE Workshop: Empathy in the Workplace**

**with Miki Kashtan of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication**

Would you like to increase effectiveness and connection in your organization?

Are you tired of difficult conversations and strenuous meetings and would like some manageability in your work life?

In this workshop we plan on exploring some basic principles related to empathic communication in the workplace. We are particularly hopeful that groups and organizations that may not have a training budget will send some key individuals to this event.

The focus of this workshop is to provide an initial exposure to the following principles and practices and to the inquiry about how to bring them into the workplace:



- \* presence, even in the face of difficulty
- \* clarity of purpose when making decisions or running meetings
- \* attention to both parties' needs in a conflict
- \* providing feedback without criticism

Miki Kashtan, certified NVC trainer, is a founder of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication and the North America Leadership Program. Miki conducts organizational trainings, consults with private and public sector organizations and teaches NVC at workshops in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the country. Miki has been supporting global social change movements, including coaching of Peace Alliance members in their Department of Peace campaign, facilitation of the African Alliance for Peace summit in Ghana, and a global peace building and conflict transformation summit in Japan.

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**Friday, March 26, 2010; 12-2pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland**  
 See [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) for more information.

## **Online Resource: Staci Haines on Integrating Personal and Social Transformation**

Through the work of Victor Lewis and Vanissar Tarakali (see their first-ever workshop above!), I've become very interested in the relationship between the body and social change. In [this video](#), one of the pioneers in this field, Staci Haines, discusses this relationship. Learning, she explains, is embodied and becomes lodged in our muscle memory. Think, for example, of learning to drive or play an instrument or ride a bike. Chances are, you don't think much anymore about how to do these things. Your body just does them.

In the same way, she suggests, our bodies have learned our social context--the belief systems, the history, the values and actions that we've been born into--and for most of us, this happened when we were too young to decide whether or not we agreed with those belief systems, values, or actions. As a result, many of us are unconsciously still embodying alienated and even oppressive ways of being that we don't consciously support. You can learn more about Staci Haines's work at her website, [Generative Somatics](#).

You can also learn more about generation Five, the organization she helped found to end sexual abuse of children within five generations. Through survivor leadership, community organizing, and public action, generation Five works to interrupt and mend the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse on individuals, families, and communities. Rather than perpetuate the isolation of this issue, they integrate child sexual abuse prevention into social movements and community organizing targeting family violence, economic oppression, and gender, age-based and cultural discrimination. Click here for more:  
<http://www.generationfive.org/index.asp?sec=1&pg=1>

## **Finding "Seminary of the Street-Like" Offerings in Other Places**

We often get emails from folks in other parts of the country, lamenting that they can't attend our classes. For this reason, we are starting to compile a list of places where similar kinds of things are happening. Here is the beginning of that list. If you know of other places, please [send them to us](#) for consideration.

[Tierra Nueva/The People's Seminary](#) in Burlington, Washington  
[Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries](#) in Southern California  
[The Servant Leadership School](#) in Washington, DC

Also, we are willing to take some of our offerings on the road if you can organize a group large enough to raise enough money to cover travel costs and pay our instructors. Please [contact me](#) for more information.

## Your Donations Make Possible....

We are taking on a number of new projects this year, including the [West Oakland Social Healing Project](#) I mentioned in my last email to you--a project to support low-income residents and residents of color in West Oakland to maintain a say in what happens in their neighborhood by educating newer residents about gentrification and organizing them to do low-level service work (such as childcare, for example) for organizations led by their lower-income neighbors.

For the first time, we are considering hiring a paid staff person, to support this and other efforts. (Many of you probably didn't know that this has been an entirely volunteer-run organization.) We are so gratified at the response we have received and at the opportunity to be of service. In order to move to the next level, we really need your financial support.

Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to Seminary of the Street, 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609.

## Volunteer Opportunities

We can always use help with set-up and clean-up before and after our events, and we also have periodic needs for office help.

Do you go to a lot of coffee houses, libraries, and other community spaces with bulletin boards? Would you be willing to help us post flyers about upcoming events? Reply to this email for details.

We are also interested in finding a group of people who would be willing to work with us to create and invite the community to a "potluck communion" service in a public park once a month. Last November, Seminary of the Street, in collaboration with Urban Sanctuary and First Congregational Church of Oakland, held a potluck picnic in the park, to which we invited all comers, including homeless people in the park and business people on their lunch hours. We had music and much good conversation, and most people left with hugs. Several of us were powerfully moved by this experience and have been dreaming of organizing such a picnic monthly, or maybe organizing local faith communities to coordinate it on a rotating basis, as a way of moving people from a "distant charity" model to being in real, transformative relationship with people who are hungry and poverty-stricken. We need a couple more people with a fire in their bellies for this project in order to make it sustainable for us. Are you such a person? Email Nichola at [ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org) and rest assured that we will only move forward with this if there is a way of doing it without overstressing any volunteer.

More volunteer opportunities are coming soon.

## Wish list

Do you have something on the list below that you could donate to us? We'd be happy to provide you with a tax receipt for the value of the item.

Presentation easel for flip chart paper  
Canopy for tabling at festivals and street fairs

I hope you find these resources helpful. Your comments and suggestions are always appreciated, so send them our way.

Blessings,

Nichola Torbett  
Founding Director, Seminary of the Street

\*\*This mark indicates classes cosponsored by First Congregational Church of Oakland. Members and pledging friends may attend classes so marked without paying tuition (though donations are welcome).

[Seminary of the Street Website](#) | [Email Us](#)

To unsubscribe, email [info@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:info@seminaryofthestreet.org) with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.  
www.seminaryofthestreet.org \* 510-225-8561 \* 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609