



Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

March 8, 2010

Dear Nichola,

The “Love Your Neighbor As Yourself” class I am teaching this session continues to provoke and challenge me. I thought I’d start this month’s newsletter by sharing some insights from that class with you in the hopes that you will find them provocative and inspiring, as well. If you’re in a hurry, please scroll down and have a look at our upcoming classes, workshops, and projects.

In class, we’ve been grappling with the scriptural call to “take the very nature of a servant.” This is a tall order for all of us, and for women and people of color, there is a particular resistance to claiming a role into which most of us feel we have already been socialized, and in ways that have cost us too much. One woman introduced as particularly problematic the image of a woman of color washing the feet of a white, wealthy corporate CEO. Another woman, who works with people who are without homes, mentioned that being a servant to the outraged client who can’t believe the coffee machine is broken seems only to reinforce his sense of entitlement. (She recognizes that his entitlement is likely the result of his real and perceived powerlessness and wondered how serving him could address the deeper need for empowerment.) How can servanthood do anything but reinforce existing power relationships and distorted adaptations to them?

Here are some of the thoughts we generated in the discussion:

- Who or what are we serving when we become servants? Because this class is focusing on Christian scripture, we looked to Jesus as an example. He appeared to serve, in each interaction, the impulse toward full aliveness, wholeness, health, and freedom in the person with whom he was engaged. Often he encountered resistance either from those in positions of authority within the religious-imperial domination systems under which he lived and ministered, or from the people he sought to serve. The latter were sometimes said to suffer from “demons,” which could be characterized as internalized beliefs, rules, expectations, distorted psychological adaptations, or addictions fostered by the religious-imperial domination systems. (Contemporary examples might include internalized oppression, addiction to status or achievement in the eyes of the world, addiction to consumption, anxiety in the face of financial or other insecurity, etc.) As another friend recently put it, Jesus served the Spirit of Life manifest in each person, not the systems in which the person was embroiled or the symptoms those systems created in him or her.
- Jesus did not give in to the resistance he encountered from the forces of control, repression, addiction, domination, or exploitation. He knew they could and likely would kill him—they did!—but he placed his trust in something larger than the systems of the world and the rules by which it operated. That allowed him to serve in ways that were disruptive and transgressive. The power of the resurrection for Christians is that it suggests that the death systems of the world do not get the last word, that life ultimately prevails.

- Jesus, in “taking the very nature of a servant,” knew full well that he was the utterly beloved child of God and gave willingly from that state of grace. Most of us have not internalized this knowledge and so tend to serve out of a sense of necessity or as a strategy for getting our needs met. Resentment is usually the result. What inner work, prayer, meditation, or empathic community building can we do to enable us to serve from a place of choice and love rather than obligation, habit, or codependent compulsion? Several of us had the sense that if we could really know that we are beloved and held, we could more easily distinguish between serving the Spirit of Life and serving systems of oppression.

Update: West Oakland Social Healing Project

A group of us from Seminary of the Street will be moving into an old Victorian in West Oakland in just a few weeks to explore whether it is possible to interrupt the gentrification that is happening there and instead, working with people of color and organizations led by low-income people, invent opportunities for economic and racial reconciliation in this historic neighborhood. Recognizing that we are moving to West Oakland for our own healing as well as to be part of the healing of the neighborhood, we'll start by building community on our block and see where our relationships lead us.

We'll also be making Seminary of the Street offerings available to people in the neighborhood, many of whom will not be able to pay for them.

In order to make that possible, we need your financial help. Please send donations to Seminary of the Street, 329 41st St, Oakland, CA 94609.

"Alternatives to Gentrification" Reading Group

Join us in our new home on Tuesdays, May 4-25, from 6-8pm, to discuss *THEM*, Nathan McCall's poignant, grimly funny novel about gentrification in an Atlanta neighborhood much like West Oakland. *Publisher's Weekly* calls the novel by McCall, an African-American former *Washington Post* journalist, “masterfully orchestrated and deeply disturbing” in its illustrations of the depth of the racial divide and the difficulty of building community in its face.

Bring your dinner or enjoy some snacks that we'll provide.

**Tuesdays, May 4-25, 6-8pm
1724 Filbert St.**

Freewill donation requested to help with cost of snacks.

RSVP by [emailing us](#), and we'll send you a reading schedule.

Launching Your Allyship: A Workshop for White Folks Who Want to Understand and End Racism

Saturday, March 27, 10am-5pm

The starting assumption for this workshop is that all humans have a deep longing and need for fairness and connection with other humans, and that racism withholds this from all of us--people of color and white people alike. A variety of obstacles threaten to keep white folks from recognizing racism and white privilege operating through us and around us, much less taking steps to counter them.

In a compassionate, caring setting, we will deepen our collective understanding of what racism and white privilege are, how they show up in our bodies, our lives, and the organizations and institutions to which we belong. In community, we'll support each other to stretch beyond our comfort zones and grow in awareness, empathy, and commitment to end racism. If you've had bad experiences in past antiracism workshops or have been meaning to learn more about what you can do to work for racial justice, this is a great next step.

In this workshop, you will

- * gain tools to help you approach your blind spots about racism and privilege with humility and hope
- * learn simple practices to help you stay self-loving, resilient, persistent, and committed to doing your part to end racism
- * practice asking and receiving support with other white folks committed to ending racism
- * develop personal "next steps" plan to continue growing your awareness, learning and allyship
- * explore tools to help you stay relaxed, authentic and receptive in your relationships with people of color
- * find out about options to follow up the workshop with ongoing white racial justice allyship support

Saturday, March 27

10am-5pm

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St.

Sliding scale \$80-180; some financial assistance available

[Email us](#) to sign up

Transforming Racial Trauma into Healing and Justice: A Workshop for People of Color

Victor Lewis has had to cancel his March workshop but will reschedule soon. Stay tuned!

Lenten Practice of Feeding

Wednesdays, March 10-31, plus Good Friday or Easter

Seminary of the Street is happy to let you know about a Lenten spiritual discipline sponsored by Share First Oakland and First Congregational Church of Oakland. This series includes scripture-reading and meditation, journaling, vegetarian food preparation, and communion with the recyclers who redeem their bottles at the West Oakland Redemption Center. Assignments and handouts will be given each week, connecting the last week's service with this week's and guiding the experiences we are having on the food line.

For 3/10, read John 1:35-39, praying with the passage. What would you say if Jesus asked you, "What are you looking for?" Ask "What does feeding mean to me?" Consider the thoughts, feelings, and images that arise in you.

Contact Theresa Freeman for more information and to register: tfreeman7@sbcglobal.net or 510-227-4060

Contemplative Practices for Lent

Saturday, March 20, 1-5pm

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. This 1/2-day workshop is

designed to introduce you to a variety of methods of Christian contemplative practice, from centering prayer to the prayer of examen and others. The workshop will be primarily experiential, with lots of time for practice and small group discussion.

Saturdays March 20, 2010; 1-5pm

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland

****Sliding scale \$15-30 per workshop**

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

FREE Workshop: Empathy in the Workplace

Friday, March 26, 12-2pm

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.

Continuing Education Units are available. [_](#)

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 Donations accepted.

Friday, March 26, 2010; 12-2pm

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland

See www.baynvc.org for more information.

Dharma and Social Justice: What is Beyond Buddhist Patriarchy?

Saturday, March 27, 9:30am-4:30pm

Less talk, more silence - can what arises from deepening our meditation practice help us to envision new paradigms for radical enlightenment accessible to all, laypersons and monastics alike? Alternating periods of silent meditation with facilitated discussion, we'll explore what forms of spiritual practice, and both lay and monastic community structures, may arise as we collectively go beyond internal and external patriarchal structures. Sitting and standing meditation with instruction and accommodations for those with disabilities, Dharma talks, interactive exercises.

Sponsored by our friends at East Bay Meditation Center.

Saturday, March 27, 9:30am-4:30pm
East Bay Meditation Center, 2147 Broadway @22nd St.
No registration fee, but dana, or generous giving, requested
Click [here](#) to register or [email the center](#) for a registration form

Finding Your Calling in Community

Wednesdays, April 7-May 26, 7-9pm

Are you longing for some time to connect more deeply with yourself, with the Spirit, and with other people? In this eight-week class, we will learn tools for discerning the call of Spirit on our lives and create a welcoming space to go deeply into our own yearnings for wholeness in ourselves and our communities.

One of our flagship offerings, this class is for people who

- feel pulled in too many directions in their justice work and want to focus
- are craving opportunities for reflection and connection with the Spirit, by whatever name they know it
- find their lives less meaningful and joyful than they'd like
- are looking for the areas in which they are called to serve
- long for a deeper sense of community

Whether you are searching for your vocation, trying to focus your social justice efforts, or just trying to find a more meaningful and less painful way to live, your questions and struggles are welcome.

Wednesdays, April 7-May 26, 7-9pm
First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St.
****Sliding Scale: \$120-80 (work exchange available)**
To register, email our [registration desk](#).

Interested in Christian responses to suffering and injustice?

Ryan Dowell Baum, recent seminary grad and theologian, and I are hoping to gather a small group of people this spring to read and discuss selected political theologians who address the relationship of Christians to state-sponsored violence, poverty, racial and economic injustice, and other forms of suffering. Here are just a couple of the questions that we're hoping to grapple with: Is it sufficient for Christians to work for progressive governmental reform, or is something else asked of us, and if so, what does that "something else" look like? How do we respond to war, police brutality, and other forms of state-sponsored violence? Are there times when violence is necessary in order to protect life and serve liberation?

There would be a small fee for participation, probably in the neighborhood of \$30-40—just enough to cover texts and space rental.

If you would be interested in being a part of these discussions and could commit to six or eight weekly meetings, please respond to this email with your availability. (If enough people respond from other parts of the country, we might consider doing this by conference call.)

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, WA
[Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries](#) in Southern California
[The Servant Leadership School](#) in Washington, DC
[The Alternative Seminary](#) in Philadelphia, PA
[City Seminary of New York](#) in New York City, NY
[Word and World](#) (traveling)

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.

One of the best ways for people of relative privilege to unlearn racism and classism is to take on a low-level service-oriented volunteer opportunity with an organization led by people of color and low-income people. Seminary of the Street is currently developing a partnership with Causa Justa: Just Cause through which we organize white folks and others of privilege, especially those living in West Oakland, to do this kind of volunteer work. Particular needs include giving their members rides to meetings, answering phones, and helping with mailings. Seminary of the Street is hoping to be able to provide ongoing emotional, spiritual, and somatic support for people who volunteer through us, working together to deal with the feelings and reactions that come up in us. [Email us](#) if you are interested in this project.

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 with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.
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