



Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

September 3, 2009

Dear Nichola,

We're inviting you to join a movement of "love warriors," ordinary people who are willing to commit to our own healing as well as to some portion of the healing of our communities. Seminary of the Street board member Rev. Lynice Pinkard is fond of saying, "Love is a do-word." In other words, love is not a feeling but a commitment to actions that serve the flourishing of lives—our own, other people's, and the planet's.

The problem is, having lived this long in a dangerous world, most of us have developed habits and ways of being that do not serve life. Even when we try to work for justice and peace, we bring those ways of being with us, and that results in suffering—our own and other people's.

Seminary of the Street is creating a training academy and community to help people unlearn those stunted and often harmful ways of being, cultivate alternative practices, and let the Spirit of Life lead them into projects to heal the culture that made them sick to begin with. We have already instituted a whole series of interfaith spiritual formation classes (you'll see our fall course listing below), including a class focused on listening for the Spirit's call. (See "Toward Full Aliveness.") These classes combine provocative ideas with practical, transformative homework.

We also seek to provide, in this newsletter, valuable resources and information about efforts already underway.

We are also exploring ways to provide more ongoing support for people who want to commit themselves to the "love warrior" path. Stay tuned for details in future newsletters.

A Force That Gives Us Meaning

Below is a blog post that articulates the exciting potential of a movement that harnesses our desire for meaning and purpose and channels it toward serving the flourishing of life.

Kathryn Bigelow's film *THE HURT LOCKER* is an explosive device buried deep in a somnolent country. Marketed as an action movie ("As tense and compelling an action drama as you are likely to see all year," claims critic Eric Snider in his review on [films.com](http://www.films.com)), this intense on-screen portrait of a three-man Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit in Iraq is actually a subtle critique of a deadening and unendurably trivial stateside culture, and it raises some questions we need to be asking ourselves.

Read [more](#)

(<http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2009/08/22/dissident-discipleship-a-force-that-gives-us-meaning/>)

Upcoming Classes

We've got a full schedule of classes for this fall. Please visit our website for details and email [me](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org) (ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org) to sign up!

- Theology for Ordinary Radicals: Wednesdays, September 23-November 11, 7-9pm
- Toward Full Aliveness: Listening for the Still, Small Voice: Saturdays, September 26-November 14, 10am-noon
- Building the Alternative Community: A Bible Study: Sunday mornings, September 27-November 15, 9-10am
- Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty 10: The Heart of "No": Saturday, September 25, 9:30am-5pm
- Humanity's Choice: The Torah's Vision of Global Transformation: Sundays, October 11-November 1, 2:30-5pm
- Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty 11: Living Without Enemies: Saturday, October 17, 9:30am-5pm
- The Transforming Power of Forgiveness: Saturday, November 7, 9am-5pm
- Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty 12: Moving from the Heart: Saturday, November 21, 9:30am-5pm

The Potency of Grief for Social Change

Grief and lament are powerful. Expressed publicly in response to public tragedies, they pose a threat to the powers that be. They signal to all who witness them that all is not well with the status quo, and they water the seeds of transformative change.

Is it any wonder, then, that officials want to limit public grieving over the three Palo Alto high school students who have committed suicide on the Caltrain tracks in the last four months? All evidence of a memorial to the latest victim has been removed, and a police officer assigned to patrol the area to prevent any further public grieving.

One psychiatrist has dared to suggest that the rash of suicides might signal something wrong in the culture: "There is a real problem at this high school and in Palo Alto — these children are killing themselves and they're doing it in a particular way," said clinical psychiatrist David Arredondo, a national consultant on teen suicide. "We need less blame and more understanding of what's really going on in the culture of these high schools." No wonder the powers want to distract the public.

As an antidote to this silencing, Emily Joye McGaughy, a chaplain to veterans, recently posted the following to her Facebook profile. (Warning: This passionate piece of writing contains one incidence of profanity. Please do not read it if that offends you.)

The Press

"With a third Palo Alto student apparently committing suicide on the Caltrain tracks in just four months, railroad officials, educators and mental health professionals described the deaths Monday as an extremely rare "cluster." Concerned that other troubled teens would continue to be drawn to the site, transit officials said they were enforcing their policy on removing memorials, worried that the public grieving could inadvertently glorify the deaths and inspire more attempts. In contrast to the flowers and notes that crowded East Meadow Drive after the previous deaths, the only visible sign Monday of the latest tragedy was a police officer on patrol."

A Poem

Cluster

fuck.

Sick inside.

Outside: Stanford, white 'successful' people and houses that sell for (cheap at) 1.5 million dollars. No one says hello in my neighborhood, but they eat organic food and drive hybrid cars--hallelujah.

Translation of the Transit Official Memo

"Please don't grieve, beings who value life, because other teens struggling with life might see you valuing life lost and think that's the best way to feel valued. They might see your vigils, your sorrow and flowers, signs of living love and think "I want those things too." Absence begs presence right? Instead we think they should see a single police officer patrolling the streets which will inevitably make them feel "protected." Cover up your deaths; they're not welcome here."

Pastoral Response

Since when do public officials get to dictate our rituals for the dead? Last time I checked stifling grief is one of the most effective ways to prolong misery and perpetuate violence. Get out there and weep. For those we have lost. For what remains scooping up in the dust. Put flowers on the ground. Hold signs and candles. And if they arrest you, scream out for the sake of all our souls.

Public grief is evidence of the losses we sustain by living under empire. That's why Seminary of the Street sponsors a "Funeral for the Empire" every spring. The next funeral will be Saturday, April 3, 2010.

Reasons for Hope

So many individuals and organizations are laying the groundwork for a new way of living that it's hard to keep up! Below are just a few of the efforts that have come across our radar in the past month or so:

Ella Baker Center has started a new program called [Soul of the City](http://www.ellabakercenter.org/index.php?p=sotc) (<http://www.ellabakercenter.org/index.php?p=sotc>), the mission of which is Transform Oakland into a socially just, spiritually connected, ecologically sustainable city with shared prosperity for all. Soul of the City brings residents together to address their deepest concerns and build for their highest hopes through learning, service, and leadership.

A community is working together in inner city Richmond to [revitalize a community park](http://www.eastbayexpress.com/news/a_park_grows_in_richmond/Content?oid=1000976) (http://www.eastbayexpress.com/news/a_park_grows_in_richmond/Content?oid=1000976).

["Hope in Common,"](http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/21526) (<http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/21526>) a contribution to ZNet's Reimaging Society project, suggests that many of the building blocks are in place for a new economy and way of relating.

We Need Your Support

We have a policy at Seminary of the Street that we won't turn people away for lack of funds. We offer a range of work exchange and discount opportunities to attend our classes and events. We also make a point of promoting the good work of other organizations, even though some would say it's not in our "best interests" to send potential donors to other good causes. We believe that life is not a zero sum game, and that "We all do better when we all do better," as the late Senator Paul Wellstone used to say.

We are currently facing a number of large expenses and really need your support to make this work possible. Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to Seminary of the Street, 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609. (One of those expenses involves getting a secure mechanism in place for people to

make credit card donations through our website! For now, though, we are limited to old-fashioned checks.)

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 and rest assured that we will only move forward with this if there is a way of doing it without overstressing any volunteer.

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.

Easel for flip chart paper
Camcorder

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

[Seminary of the Street Website](http://www.seminaryofthestreet.org) | [Email Us](mailto:info@seminaryofthestreet.org)

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