



Seminary of the Street

At the intersection between radical love and justice

June 26, 2009

Dear Nichola,

We are coming into Pride weekend here in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I know that many other celebrations of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer pride are happening at the same time around the country. Given that, Seminary of the Street board member Rev. Lynice Pinkard and I wanted to take a few minutes, as lesbians, to reflect on what there is to be proud of. In other words, what is the transgressive potential of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or otherwise queer?

At its heart, we believe that the radical potential of being queer is the way that it demonstrates that anyone can love everyone. As lovers who challenge conventional notions of who may love whom, queer people have the potential to show forth in a particularly vivid way the Spirit-given capacity, given to all people, to love in spite of all obstacles—in spite of homophobia, in spite of state sanctions, in spite of family expectations, in spite of workplace discrimination, in spite of rejection from our religious communities, in spite of all of the accumulated wounds incurred by being people who do not conform to cultural norms. The radical notion embodied in this kind of queerness is the notion that we can get up out of the shame that the culture tells us is our due, that we can get up out of that swamp of shame and love anyway. The Spirit has vested in human beings the capacity to cultivate deep bonds of affection with ANYBODY, no matter how unlikely, and to enter into solidarity with all life. We have the capacity to make a circle with NO ONE OUTSIDE IT, to define ourselves as one interconnected life community. This is a radical act in a culture driven by self-interest.

The good news is that you can be “straight” and still be queer in this sense. Some of the queerest people I know are not gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender but have used other forms of suffering to bring them into solidarity with all life.

And on the other hand, those of us who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender often have a ways to go to live fully into this radically transgressive potential that, first of all, calls us to own our own wholeness, to refuse to take the fear that homophobic people direct at us and turn it into self-hatred, and second, to make connections between our suffering, as people whose love has been unacknowledged and even derided, and the suffering of all other people who are oppressed, exploited, and threatened with violence. We are called, I think, to move beyond identity politics to be in solidarity with people living in poverty, immigrants, people of color, those experiencing illness as a result of environmental factors, people who have been the victims of violence, and all other suffering beings. Can we let our own pain open us to the pain of others?

One of the ways we think about Seminary of the Street is as a training academy for “queer” people, in other words, for people who are willing to step out of the crowd and live in alternative ways. Below are some resources to that end.

Film Screening: THE ORDINARY RADICALS

Some of us learn best by example. If you are among that group and want to learn about a movement of people who are living “queer” lives that embody an alternative to the dominant culture, come to our screening and discussion of THE ORDINARY RADICALS, a movement of Christians who are dedicated to “doing small things with great love,” and in so doing, breaking 21st Century stereotypes surrounding this 2000 year old faith. As Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw write, “This is not a set of political suggestions for the world; this is about invoking and embodying the alternative. All of this is an invitation to join a peculiar people- those with no king but God, who practice jubilee economics and make the world new. This is not the old-time religion of going to heaven; this is about bringing heaven to the world.”

People of all faiths are welcome and eagerly encouraged to come and share how this movement resonates or fails to resonate with your own beliefs or values.

You can watch the trailer [here \(http://www.theordinaryradicals.com/\)](http://www.theordinaryradicals.com/).

Tuesday, July 14, 7-9:30pm

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

Free

For more information, email ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org.

Witnessing Dreams from the Monster Factory

Sunny Schwartz is one of the queerest people I know, and I don't just mean she's a lesbian. (She is—no mean feat itself when you work for the sheriff's department.) She is one of the people who has used her own suffering (growing up in a working class home on the south side of Chicago and failing to navigate the school system, among other things) to connect with the suffering of others. I've written before about her gripping book, DREAMS FROM THE MONSTER FACTORY, in which she tells the story of her founding of Resolve to Stop the Violence, a restorative justice program in the San Francisco jails. If you need a dose of hope rooted in the gritty details of day-to-day realities, go immediately to get a copy of the book.

This week, I had the opportunity to go with a group of others from Seminary of the Street to observe the program in County Jail 7 myself. It was stunning to walk with Sunny into the dorm where the inmates were working. It is clear that Sunny loves these guys—loves them, and holds them accountable because she knows what is facing them when they get out.

My friend and fellow Seminary of the Street board member Dave Belden wrote beautifully about the experience [here \(http://www.tikkunblog/2009/06/24/the-beginning-of-the-end-of-the-prison-system/\)](http://www.tikkunblog/2009/06/24/the-beginning-of-the-end-of-the-prison-system/). Enjoy.

Tools for Liberation



Most of us are not even aware of the degree to which the brutality of the dominant culture has damaged us, causing us to withdraw from ourselves and each other, to buy into self-defeating beliefs about ourselves, and to accept cultural imperatives to be quiet about things we know are wrong. Social justice educator Victor Lee Lewis will be teaching a workshop on Saturday, July 18,



designed to help get free of socialized roles as oppressed and oppressor and to become a powerful force of healing for the communities in which you operate. A full description of Victor's workshop is available at <http://seminaryofthestreet.org/id23.html>.

Space is limited; please reply to this email to sign up.

Saturday, July 18th, 9-5

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

Sliding Scale: \$100-160 \$20 off, if registered by July 11th.

To register, email ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org.

Finding Your Calling in Community

How do you find the inner strength and clarity to recognize those places where you are less than loving and to move beyond those limitations? I believe the answer has something to do with coming into deeper relationship with some Higher Power (which, as the twelve-step movement has taught us, can be known in any number of ways—God, Spirit, the Universe, the force of healing and transformation, the fellowship of the community....).

In this class, we will learn practices for listening to the call of that Higher Power on us--in and through community with other seekers. Whether you are seeking a clearer sense of your gifts, looking to find the place where you are called to serve, or simply craving a more meaningful way of life, this is a place where it is safe to bring your deepest questions and yearnings. Far from peddling a particular understanding of Spirit, we will trust each person's inner teacher, or inner compass, to point him or her in the direction of call. Our role is simply to be a loving and supportive community, to practice active listening with each other, and to share ourselves in the group.

Tuesdays, July 21-September 8, 7-9pm

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

**Sliding Scale: \$80-120

To register, email ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org.

Exile, Exodus and Tribe: Prophecy for Our Times

One way of thinking about "queerness" as we are using it is to ask the question, "How can we help to heal the culture from a status of exile?" This is one of the questions that will be considered in this class on the Biblical book of Isaiah.

"For prophets to be alive and present to us, we must think not about them, but in them...."

--Abraham Heschel.

How do we understand prophecy today? What is prophetic fire? Prophetic hope? What is the relevancy of Biblical prophecy for our day? This four-week study will examine exile, exodus and tribal identity as gateways for each of us to reclaim the prophetic spirit. Can we see exile as more than a shameful event of the past? How is exodus more than a prelude to the Promised Land? How can we view our distinct tribal identity in context of G-d's promise to all humanity? We will take as our basic texts the Book of Isaiah and the perspectives of the late Abraham Heschel.

Tuesdays, July 21, 28, Aug. 4, 11, 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Chochmat Halev, 2215 Prince St. in Berkeley
\$60 for members of Chochmat Halev, \$90 for the public
Please pre-register by July 10 by calling 510.704.9687.

Charley Lerrigo is a long-time member of Chochmat, a ger toshav, and a student of Torah -- who for 46 years has been a United Methodist clergyman and writer. His quest for appropriate connections between Jewish and Christian spiritual practice and teaching will challenge us to find a new reading of the Prophet Isaiah for Jewish life today.

Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty 7: Witnessing Humanity



The "Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty" series, led by Miki Kashtan of Bay-Area Nonviolent Communication and cosponsored by BayNVC and Seminary of the Street, uses the skills of Nonviolent Communication to explore the places where shame, guilt, fear, and anger block us from authentic living. As we become more conscious of our needs and habits, we might find ourselves embracing vulnerability where previously we were afraid; experiencing more choice; increasing our willingness to rely on others for support and creating connections and community; taking responsibility for our actions and our lives; and working for change where we want it with loving energy instead of anger. In this day-long workshop, we will focus on cultivating presence with another's experience and seeing another's humanity regardless of their actions.

For a full description of this class, visit <http://seminaryofthestreet.org/id4.html>.

Saturday, July 25, 9:30am-5pm
First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland

Visit www.baynvc.org for information and to register. Those who live outside the Bay area will be able to take this workshop by telephone via NVC Academy:

<http://nvctraining.com/courses/telecourses/index.html>.

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.

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 presentations
Digital camera
LCD Projector

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

Blessings, and Happy Pride!

Nichola Torbett
Founding Director, Seminary of the Street
[Seminary of the Street Website](#) | [Email Us](#)

To unsubscribe, email info@seminaryofthestreet.org with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.
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