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LIVING IN ATLANTA

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MY SPIRITUAL TYPE—AN INSIGHT INTO MY STRUGGLES WITH A CHURCH'S DECISIONS

Saint Patrick's Day weekend the members of our house, our site director, and our spiritual guide went to the Calvin Center in Hampton, GA. The main purpose of the retreat was to help us learn the process of discernment, which I found to be quite interesting. The part of the weekend that I found most enlightening, however, was when we learned about spiritual types.

Corinne Ware, D. Min., has written a book entitled Discover Your Spiritual Type. We only focused on a section of the book, but I learned that there is a congregational style and a personal style and when the two are not in sync the congregant is usually unhappy. Through a series of questions I discovered that my style is action faith with kin-dom spirituality and it helped me understand why I feel to be at such odds with my home church, which would probably fall under the thinking faith with head spirituality.

My spiritual type views action as prayer, focusing on social justice and direct service. We see God's face in the poor and Matthew 25:40 "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" would probably be our motto. We have a great intensity for causes and call people and the church into action. Unfortunately, we don't understand why others just don't get it and while some may find us extremely inspiring, others may find us judgmental. That is probably why someone once commented that I was living higher than I am. But what is wrong with seeing faults in society, in the system, in yourself, and wanting to change them? If people do not question the injustices of the world, then how will things ever improve?

We all approach things differently and I just don't understand why people don't see all of the problems in the world and feel called to change them. I don't understand why a church would feel the need to attract

a minister to its congregation with a fancy salary and housing package when we are told not to store up our treasures on earth, but in heaven. I don't understand the reasoning that it is comparable to what other churches offer. That is the bargaining chip that many actors and athletes use, but does that make multi-million dollar salaries right? As a member of a group of young people all over the world serving others in exchange for housing, a food allowance of \$75/month, and a living allowance of less than \$93/month, I know that a person doesn't need millions, or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to live happily. And since when does a church base its actions on what other churches do? Isn't a church only supposed to worry about how God judges it?

I don't understand why a church would consider selling its manse to help a new minister buy a house. I don't understand the reasoning that the manse is not adequate for the new minister. It is apparently adequate enough for the Interim Pastor and was adequate enough for the former Associate Pastor. Suppose for a moment, though, that the manse is a bit shabby. Why not fix it up? It would most certainly cost less to fix it up than it would be to participate in equity sharing. Besides, the church would NEVER regain the TRUE value of having a manse, especially one just down the street. The church definitely has an architect in the congregation that could help design the remodeling, and I am pretty sure that the church has enough Habitat and mission trip volunteers to help with various aspects of construction and rehab, all of which would cut costs.

If there is such opposition to having the new minister live in the manse, then why not use the manse for other church purposes? According to the PCUSA website, church property may be used for worship AND other purposes of its ministry. I don't understand why the

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whole house couldn't be used for transitional housing. Or maybe the second floor could be used for transitional housing and the first floor could be used by Ross Warfield and the Stephen Ministers so that people could seek guidance in privacy.

I don't know why a church would choose to increase its budget when it ran a deficit last year (offset only by selling assets) and pledges are down. I don't understand why a church would choose to look for an Associate Pastor before its new Head Pastor has arrived. The rolls have been cleared and the church's numbers are down—did anybody research as to whether or not a full-time Associate Pastor is necessary? Perhaps only a part-time Associate Pastor is needed and the savings could be applied to other ministries of the church. Perhaps having a seminary student intern with the church could be an option and again the savings could be applied to other ministries of the church. I don't understand why people are comfortable going with what has always been done rather than going for what is right and for what might

just be more sensible.

I don't understand why some people feel they know what is best for the church, acting contrary to the Book of Order and keeping many of the congregants either misinformed or uninformed. One of the keys things to know about Christian discernment is that it is meant to be done in community. It pains me to know that many members of the church don't know that they can question the budget, the terms of call, or the selling of the manse. It's okay to disagree, and it's okay to voice your opinion.

While it is comforting to know there is a reason as to why I am struggling to connect with my home church, I am still searching for a solution. The struggle is only amplified by my memories of so many amazing moments at the church and my connection to so many amazing people at the church. Perhaps my way is not the right way for my home church, but it is the right way for me. So as long as I continue to disagree with the church's decisions I will continue to struggle with my place in the church, if it still exists at all.

WAGING A LIVING

Last weekend Georgia Avenue Church had a showing of *Waging a Living*, a documentary film by Roger Weisberg that follows four low-wage workers through their struggles to make ends meet.

One of the workers, Jean, is a 51 year old certified nursing assistant in NJ and mother of 3. She has been at the same job for 15 years, but earns the maximum wage of \$11/hour despite working hard for her union to help increase wages for other nursing assistants. Her oldest daughter has thyroid cancer (usually treatable), but cannot get proper treatment because she lacks insurance. *Did you know that 18,000 adults die every year in the United States due to lack of insurance? And did you also know that 50% of Americans go without needed care due to medical costs?* Due to her daughter's illness Jean has custody of two of her children. Jean takes emergency custody of 2 more grandchildren because living with their father has become an unsafe environment. At this point Jean's income can no longer support the family of 8 and they are evicted from their home.

Jerry is a 42 year old security guard in San Francisco. He makes \$12/hour, which affords him a lovely single room occupancy. Not familiar with the luxuries of an occupancy? Well, he has a room with a microwave, a mini fridge, and a sink. The closet is not much wider than the door that accesses it and the room can not fit much more than his bed. The bathroom is down the hall and shared with other residents on his floor. My college dorm room seems like paradise in comparison. Five years earlier Jerry was an alcoholic living on the streets, but he has turned his life around and even sends regular child support payments to his son and daughter. His biggest goal is to save up enough money to visit his children in North Carolina, whom he has not seen in nine years because of financial reasons.

Barbara is a 36 year old single mother of five who lives in New York. She works at a juvenile detention facility making \$8.25/hour while attending college full-time. Barbara does not make enough to support her family, so she receives Medicaid, food stamps, child care

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assistance, utility assistance, and subsidized Section 8 housing. Rewarded for her hard work at the detention facility, Barbara is eventually given a raise to \$11/hour. One would think that would have been a step forward for Barbara, but instead she loses her Medicaid and food stamps and her housing subsidy drops. It now costs Barbara \$190 to get her son his allergy and asthma medication. Her \$450/month pay increase has cost her \$600/month in government aid. Doing better pay wise has actually forced her further down.

Mary is a 41 year old single mother of three in New Jersey. Until her divorce Mary enjoyed a comfortable middle class life, but she now works as a waitress, earning \$2.13/hour plus tips. *Did you know that the minimum wage for tipped workers, such as waitresses, has not increased in 20 years?* Mary works at the restaurant at nights, forcing her to hire babysitters she can't afford. She uses a food pantry so that she can feed her children and give them Christmas presents. *Did you know that only 37% of single mothers receive child support? And did you also know that the average payment is just over \$1300 per year? Do you think you could pay for all of your child's needs for an entire year with just \$1300?*

The end of the movie shows the four people a few months later. Jean seeks public assistance and while she does not qualify, her sick daughter does, and the family is able to get emergency assistance and move into a different house. But Jean still struggles to make ends meet, knowing that she will never make more than \$11/hour. Jerry finally saves up enough money to visit his children. Unfortunately, he has a disagreement with his boss and is fired. The union helps in find a new job, but takes a 20% pay decrease. His new company offers a quarter raise once a year. At that rate it will take Jerry 8 years to get back to his former income. Barbara completes her associate's degree and lands a job as a recreational therapist at a nursing home where she earns \$15/hour and receives full medical benefits, but loses the rest of her government assistance. Barbara excels and her boss praises her work, but Barbara realizes that in order to continue to improve her situation she will need to go back to school. To be able to afford to do everything, Barbara switches to part-time so that she can go to school and receive government benefits. Mary's divorce settlement helps

her pay off the \$15,000 credit card debt she had run up while trying to pay the household bills. She returns to school to learn computer skills and move beyond her job as a waitress.

Some of the stories end happier than others; some of the people struggle more than they did at the beginning of the film. And money people struggle every day. Here are some interesting, and scary, facts:

- * 1 in 4 American workers - over 30 million people - earn less than the federal poverty level for a family of four.
- * Housing costs have TRIPLED since 1979, but real wages have remained static.
- * Almost 1/4 of the children in the United States live BELOW the poverty line.
- * Currently the Federal minimum wage is \$5.15/hour, but there is legislation pending that will raise it to \$7.25/hour over 3 years. In Georgia, the minimum wage is \$5.15/hour with no plans of increasing it despite the hard work of groups like 9to5 (www.9to5.org). I suppose you could be thankful if you live in New Jersey because the minimum wage there is \$7.25/hour. *Do you think you could live on \$7.25/hour?*
- * If you worked 40 hours per week at a wage of \$5.15/hour you would earn \$10,300/year. *Where would you live? How would you eat? What necessity would you choose to be most important, because you couldn't have all of them?*
- * If the minimum wage had kept up with inflation it would be at least \$7.50/hour.
- * After a divorce (on average) a woman's standard of living decreases by 27% while a man's increases by 11%.
- * If a low-wage worker wanted to get insurance for the entire family it would cost almost \$4,000/year. If you make \$10/hour, that is 1/5 of your income.
- * Low-income is defined as working families with an income less than 200% of poverty level.
- * In Georgia 29.4% of the population is considered low income. In New Jersey it is 17.4% of the population.
- * In Georgia 36.4% of low income families do not have health insurance. New Jersey is right there with them at 35.6%.
- * 47 million Americans do not have health insurance. [These statistics are available on the PBS website and in the Waging a Living Project document.]

POINTS TO PONDER

- * I was reading the February 5th edition of this year's *Newsweek* and came across an article by Allan Sloan entitled "Don't Forget to Fix Social Security" (p21). The article stated that the Congressional Budget Office projected a \$172 billion deficit for the current fiscal year; that's **52.5 percent** less than it would have been without the \$190 billion Social Security surplus. *If Social Security is already slotted for future retirees, how can you also use it to reduce the deficit?*
- * According to the US Census Bureau the poverty level for a family of four is an income just over \$19,000. Suppose that family consists of a single mom with three kids. She would have to make over \$9/hour just to survive and yet most state minimum wages are almost \$4/hour less than that.

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- * Keith and I seeing Jimmy again and being able to give him several bags of groceries to take back to camp
- * Women's league end of season tournament
- * Interviewing potential mentors
- * FCS Luncheon
- * Spending Keith's last weekend in Atlanta with his family, which consisted of playing ONO99 and Rummy 500 with his mom, as well as going to the playground with Kendra
- * Another mentor contract signing
- * Hearing Badly Drawn Boy perform at The Loft
- * Free tickets to the Thrashers-Rangers game — thanks Jeff and Katie!
- * Attending Katie's baby shower at FCS
- * Our retreat at Calvin Center in Hampton, GA; learning about discernment and my spiritual type; visiting the Global Village
- * Leading a Family Time lesson on service with the Junior Company and Apprentice Corporation
- * Conducting 2 new mentor trainings
- * Seeing Illstyle and Peace Productions perform at the Rialto Center for the Arts
- * Starting spring league; convincing Alicia to play again and being on Jenny Lee's team again
- * Watching "Waging a Living" at Georgia Avenue Church and listening to Shyria Coleman from 9to5 Atlanta Working Women speak about minimum wage and living wage advocacy
- * Being taught how to do the "Bankhead Shake" by members of the Apprentice Corporation
- * Free tickets to the Thrashers-Maple Leafs game — thanks Kelsey's dad!
- * Going to Arizona for my cousin Eric's wedding and getting to spend time with my family

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Thank you for pledging to sponsor me on my journey, both financially and spiritually. Many thanks to those of you that have already sent in your pledge money and to those of you that continue with your monthly pledges. If you still need to send in your pledge don't forget to make the check payable to DOOR and write "In support of Kim Burrows" on the check. Then mail it to:

DOOR
430 West 9th Avenue
Denver, CO 80204

If you would like to send me a note (I love mail!) my address is: **683 Grant Street, Atlanta, GA 30315**
 For more information on Moving in the Spirit please check out our website at www.movinginthespirit.org

For more information on Georgia Avenue Church and the co-ops they run, check out www.gacm.org or make a contribution to help support their work. Checks can be made out GACM, Inc. and mailed to GACM, 645 Grant Street, SE, Atlanta, GA 30313.

Thank you again for everything and I look forward to keeping you updated on all of my work here in Atlanta!