



Creating a Home in the Love of God

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Relationships are hard. It takes work to maintain a healthy relationship—with God, your spouse, or even your children. It should be no surprise, then, that it also takes work to transform broken relationships into healthy relationships—creating a beloved community, a community of hope.

In reality, the work of reconciliation is counter-intuitive—rather than moving away from pain and hurt, you move toward it. You move into the pain and the hurt and stand in that muddled mess. It is not that we are seeking more pain in our lives, but rather that God lives in the suffering of his people. We are called to stand alongside those who are hurting.

We do a circle every Thursday at the only Catholic school in our area. It is a small school, serving many of the poor of our community. I cannot imagine any of the children paying much of a tuition. As our last circle concluded, a young girl handed a note to one of the staff. It was a long note, but the message was simple—she and her family of nine were recently evicted from their apartment. They were now living in a hotel—and not the Holiday Inn type of hotel.

Given all that we are already trying to deal with—other families who struggle to maintain a

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roof over their head, the violence and the daily impact of poverty—I have to admit that I was tempted to say, “What can we do?” However, in conversation with the principal of the school—a 78-year-old nun—we are working on a plan.

Reconciliation is a ministry that demands that we be willing to be stained by the blood of Christ—to touch the wounds like Thomas, to walk alongside the harmed on the road to Emmaus, or to stand at the foot of the cross. It is not an easy place to be. It is messy and at times very lonely. You want to say enough is enough!

The ministry of reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. It demands that we go to the margins or stand in the breach and witness to God’s love. The margins can be the kid who sits in the classroom shunned by other students or the neighbor who never seems to come out of the house.

Whenever I go into the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center, I go to two places for sure: intake, which houses the recent arrivals, and segregation, which houses those who have been deemed “bad.” You never know what you will encounter—anger, fear, loneliness, or all of the above.

A young man who had just been brought into the Juvenile Detention Center asked if I would call his father. He wanted his father to know where he was. I assured him that his father knew, but he wasn’t convinced and so I agreed to call. Before I left the unit, he called out again from inside his cell. I approached and—with a look of desperation—he asked if I was really going to call. I assured him I would.

When I did call on my way home that night, the father was obviously relieved and overjoyed to hear that his son was ok. I could feel the relief in his voice to finally hear some word about his boy. He was extremely thankful. “I know you have much to do,” he said, “but that you took time to call means everything to me; you don’t know how much I wanted to hear some word from my boy.”

Nothing really changed in their situation; the young man still was held in the detention center

and the father was separated from the son he loved. But for that very brief moment their isolation from one another was interrupted.

The gospel writer John says that it is the love of God that will dispel the darkness. God’s love creates a home in which we reside.

I sat in court for Joe a young man from our Center. I had been in court with him many times before. He had no other family member there. As they brought him in, he glanced out over the gallery of waiting families and caught my eye, and for that brief moment he was not alone.

The sentence was 8½ years in prison. That sentence felt like an eternity to Joe. His lawyer walked over and said that Joe asked the judge if he could say goodbye to me. The judge allowed it and I approached the front of the courtroom, embraced Joe, and said that I would be there for him through the years. As Joe was being led back to lock up, he turned and thanked me for being there for him.

Our mission statement says that we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation. It is a mission to simply stand in the breach and witness to the power of God’s love to create in us a HOME! ✠