Social Justice and “One Person Is of More Value than the World”

Our program is called Good Shepherd Volunteers, and we connect volunteers with Good Shepherd ministries in the US and around the world to serve women, children, and adolescents affected by poverty, violence and neglect. Most of our volunteers are young adults who have just graduated from college/university, and they come into our program with big, idealistic dreams to “change the world”. But after seeing all the social problems affecting the women and children we serve, they come to realize that they are limited by so many social and structural injustices, and that they can only do so much as one person.

All of us who do Good Shepherd work must surely have this feeling also – when we feel overwhelmed by all the injustice we see, how it affects the most poor and vulnerable in our world, and how we wish we had the power to make things better for the lives of the people we serve. So, how can we cope with these realities of social injustice in our world? We thought this question would be something useful to provide for this Good Shepherd Social Justice Prayer of the month.

1) Let us start with a prayer:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

- Romans 12:15-18

2) Reflection:

Most often, the most valuable and enriching contribution we can make for the most poor and vulnerable is through developing relationships, offering love and support, and being a simple presence to the women, children, and adolescents we serve through the Good Shepherd. St. Mary Euphrasia tells us that “One person is of more value than a world.” This quote challenges us to put our main focus on building relationships with each individual we serve – the real persons in our life, one at a time – rather than concerning ourselves only with global problems and losing sight of the people around us.

3) Now please read the following quotes from some of our Good Shepherd Volunteers who have served women and children through our program:
“Through my work and relationships with the children, moms, and families, I have not only become passionate about ceasing violence in their lives, but I have also become passionate about raising awareness about and putting an end to domestic violence for everyone.”

“Before GSV, I viewed Social Justice as this all-encompassing, global passion that I could only understand by exploring the world. Now, I realize that Social Justice is how I interact with the world every single day; it is how I speak to a homeless woman on the street, how I interact with my clients and community members, and how I treat every individual with dignity and respect.”

“Working with the people at my site showed me how we often think of youth as rebellious or lazy or unmotivated. There are reasons for those attitudes in youth that are deeply rooted in systemic causes of poverty.”

4) Reflection questions:
   - Pick one quote that stands out to you.
   - How does this quote speak to what you experience in your own Good Shepherd work?
   - What does it tell you about social justice? What does it tell you about “one person is of more value than the world”?

5) Read this final quote from a Good Shepherd Volunteer about justice:

“The only conclusion that I have come to in my short time here is that social justice is not a cookie cutter kind of goal. It’s slow. It’s temperamental. It’s a difficult, evolving process. For a generalized goal that strives to bring peace and justice to all, it’s more extensive and complex than I ever imagined. Most of my days in my work, I have felt like I’ve failed to make a difference. But what I’ve come away with is that if I’m only trying to see the results, I’ve missed the point, which is this in my own experience: I’m only a witness to the good work trying to outrace the bad. This much I’m okay with.”

6) Closing prayer:

"Go after the lost sheep without other rest than the cross, other consolation than work, other thirst than for justice."

   – Saint Mary Euphrasia

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