

JULY 2007

## LEARNING TO LET GO

When I interviewed to be a Jesuit Volunteer at the House of Charity over a year ago, Mike Cain, our Program Coordinator, warned me about something. He warned me that I should abandon any expectation of changing the lives of the homeless people whom I would encounter daily. Thinking somehow I held the key to ending homelessness, told Mike “No problem,” knowing things would be different once I got there. It didn’t take more than a day on the job to find out that Mike was right after all. It’s been a slow, graceful lesson to learn what I can and cannot do, and to accept how much of what I deal with daily is out of my control. To paraphrase something my boss James said recently, “We can’t make somebody go to rehab. All we can do is wait and support them when they’re ready.” But when you come to care deeply about somebody’s life, letting go is easier said than done.

I’ve seen an overwhelming amount of pain of the last year. I think of all the men who have died, all the cycling in and out of addiction, all the danger and violence of the streets, and all of the hopelessness and despair of dealing with the systems of a society that would like to pretend that homelessness doesn’t exist. But I’ve also seen things that give me hope in the face of all of it. I’ve met some of the funniest, most creative and life giving folks I’ve ever known. I’ve met people with the most generous hearts and supportive attitudes who will welcome a stranger into their fold as if they were brothers. And I’ve met people whose faith in the goodness of all creation cannot be shaken by the mightiest of storms. There have been success stories. I think of all the people who have gotten into our housing program and are starting to get their lives back. I can think of numerous people we’ve helped get bus or plane tickets so they could get back to their families. And I think of one guy in particular in our housing program who is brave enough to go to Seattle for rehab in spite of the fact that all of his friends are still using.

Out of all the things I’ve learned this year, and there have been many, I’d have to say the greatest one is to keep an open heart to each moment in life. If you can abandon your ideas about how you want the world and its people to be, and instead just be present to them where they are, that’s when the real miracles happen. Thank you for supporting the House of Charity. May peace be with you all.

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