

UUMAN and North Fulton Community Charities

March 12, 2017

88% of the region's poor live in the suburbs (Suburban Poverty, Atlanta's Hidden Epidemic, WABE, March 2016).

Between 2000 and 2013, poverty in Atlanta's suburbs had the highest rate of change of any metro region of its size (Ibid).

Between 2000 & 2011, the number of people living in poverty in the city has increased 11%. Over this same time period, the number of people living in poverty in the suburbs has increased 158% (Ibid).

Kim Anderson of the non-profit Family First says, "Poverty is moving to the suburbs primarily where more affordable housing is located (Ibid)". In many cities across the United States, the old inner-city housing projects are being torn down and replaced with high rise, high rent, high priced, apartments and condominiums. Gentrification - it's a big problem.

Although affordable housing might be located in particular suburbs, jobs are not. Kim Anderson again says, "A year or so ago, the cheapest rents were out in the Lawrenceville area. The largest number of entry-level jobs were in Kennesaw (Ibid)".

If you're driving from Lawrenceville to Kennesaw at rush hour you're probably talking about an hour and a half one way. If you're poor and don't have a car and want to take public transportation, getting from Lawrenceville to Kennesaw might take three to four hours.

I probably don't need to tell you that public transportation throughout the metro region is sorely lacking.

When I first moved down here last July, one of the first organizations I visited was North Fulton Community Charities (NFCC). I had heard about them from a few of our members who volunteer there regularly. I made an appointment to see their Executive Director, Barbara Duffy, who gave me an overview of their history and a tour of their facility. They seem to be very organized and I saw them as a potential partner with whom we could easily plug into and help one another. We can help them with to fulfill their mission; they give us the opportunity to be of service and to build relationships here in our own community.

Today, we are honored to have with us Vonda Malbrough, Director of Communications for NFCC. She comes to us on a Sunday, her day off, to speak with us. Please show your appreciation for Vonda Malbrough as she introduces NFCC to us.

[Vonda Malbrough of North Fulton Community Charities gave a 10-minute talk summarizing NFCC's mission and volunteer positions consisting of: Intake Desk, Food Pantry, Thrift Shop, Education Center, Office and Administration.]

Basil the Great, the 4th century Christian bishop of Caesarea known for his care for the poor wrote, "If one who takes the clothing off another is called a thief, why give any other name to one who can clothe the naked yet refuses to do so? The bread that you withhold belongs to the poor; the cape that you hide in your chest belongs to the naked; the shoes rotting in your house belong to those who [have no shoes](Justo Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity, 212)."

Ouch! That hurts.

Hopefully statistics I mentioned earlier challenge any preconceived notions and stereotypes you may have concerning poverty, the city and the suburbs.

I won't speak for you. I'll use I language; and I will say I'm challenged by these statistics. I've told you before that part of my spiritual practice is to ask myself each morning, before each meeting, before I write a sermon, "How am I wrong?" Statistics like these hit me like a gut punch and tell me, "Dave, you are wrong. You're wrong about poverty, cities and suburbs.

"Dave, you live in your little Dave Dunn bubble and fail to see things as they truly are. You see what you want to see Dave." Ouch!

I pray....

Spirit of Life – like the ghost of Christmas past, present and Christmas' yet to come in Charles Dicken's "A Christmas Carol," Spirit of Life, come to me, help me to see things as they are. Give life the shape of justice. Teach me. Show me.

We will be formalizing our volunteer relationship with NFCC so that we can be of service as a group and as individuals. As your order of service states, we will be having a kickoff meeting of sorts on Wednesday, March 15 at 7PM in the Discovery Hall living room. It would be great if you could be there.

Can you risk having a relationship with the other? Can you risk finding yourself in the other? Can you risk seeing the unseen? Can you risk seeing things as they are?

Jean Vanier is quoted in Sheila Cassidy's book "Sharing the Darkness":

...we are loved and have a mission to love...but the poor and the weak are not just objects of charity and love, even less are they useless and to be discarded or seen as a problem and a burden; but rather they are called to be a source of life for us all. If we

come close to them, in some mysterious way they bring us to what is essential; they call us to truth, to competence, to compassion and to [the] centeredness [of our very lives] (Sheila Cassidy, *Sharing the Darkness*, xi).

This is the gift; this is the grace that being of service bestows.