

Grab A Mop

Jeff Sigel, July 23, 2017

Opening:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ,
The courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference

Reinhold Niebuhr

Sermon

- Good morning – for those who don't know me, my name is Jeff Sigel – for the past 3 years I was the President of the board of Gather the Spirit for Justice which runs the breakfast and community center at UCH's market St. Building
- I am not going to spend a lot of time on all the good things we do there ... many of you know those better than I do .. rather I'd like to spend time on the topic of volunteering in general ...
- Volunteering is by its nature an act of free will ... a purposeful giving of one's time ...
- It is ultimately bounded by how much one gets from it ... human desire to give is not boundless, there must be something in return - a sense of meaning/purpose, a sense of satisfaction
- Volunteering cannot be forced

But more of that later ... let me step back a bit t and give a little background on **How I began working with Gather The Spirit**

- My family moved to PA about 10 years ago with a 3 year old son Noah (who is now 5'10") and a 2 week old daughter (Abby – now 10 of course) ... 2 things led us to UCH ... First, Noah started to feel left out because everyone he knew went to church ... Second, We had a girl in the neighborhood who would babysit the kids and we discovered one morning that she was praying with the kids before bed ... we thought "ok – no big deal", but then she started telling Noah about her beliefs that women were subservient to men ... well that wasn't going to do ... so we needed some other source of religious information to counteract this influence (we certainly weren't going to just give up a good babysitter) ... so my wife started bringing the kids to UCH

- I personally had never been a churchgoer – in fact I come from a proud tradition of lapsed Jews ... so really never a churchgoer. So I came to UCH services some of the time – but it really just wasn't my thing.
- Doing the dishes at the Saturday breakfasts was something that appealed to me though ...
- Last time I spoke at a UCH service – a few years ago with my family – I talked about this ... that doing the dishes for me was a form of worship ... something I wanted to do because it gave me a sense of calm and satisfaction - a break from stresses of my week and my day job
- So that is where things stood for about 3 or 4 years ...

So now I need to diverge a bit into a little bit of the history of Gather the Spirit for Justice

- The programs at Market Street are many decades old and have been led by different churches – including The Shared Ministry, joined by UCH until 2014. Always until that time the programs were church programs.
- In 2011 – Suzanne Marsh worked with others in the congregations to create a non-profit corporation called Gather The Spirit for Justice ... with the specific goal of supplementing church support for the programs with other sources of funds that the church could not access ... So articles of incorporation were submitted and accepted by the State of Pennsylvania
- And then things stalled for about 3 years ... because they could not form the required six person board of directors ...
- There was not yet the will, not enough people were yet moved to action ... so things went on and the churches continued to provide for the programs financially, through the market street building and through paid staff

So how did things get unstuck ... and how did I become the President of the board

- In 2014 as UCH was struggling financially and seeking new leadership, a small group formed a board to start to seek external funding and alleviate some of the burden on the church...
- Tom Conners had asked me if I would be part of the board ... and I agreed
- And Sometimes you agree to do something and you end up taking on more than you expected ... everyone else had a better excuse than I did for not being the President of the board so I became the Board President
- Over the next year – through much work led by Frances Myers ... GTS became a non-profit and took over the market St programs as a non-religious organization ... completely separate from UCH – though still with a special relationship ...

Wins & Setbacks

- In the 3 years since, we have had many wins and some significant setbacks
- Up until this spring – we continued to run breakfast 2x per month, we still have the center open 3x per week, we continue to serve food and give out advice and state IDs ... about 200 people at each breakfast, and maybe 60-80 each day during the week
- We have raised about \$60K total ... with help from some generous donors: Giant Food Stores, Churches like St. Stephen's (Fun Run), A number of UCC Churches, UCH share the plate and the Keystone Rotary ... who also worked with GTS this year to fund Painting the kitchen at UCH's Market St building among other support
- We have had great volunteers from places all over the area – the Keystone Rotary, Isaac's, the Girl scouts, Milton Hershey School, Numerous churches, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, Messiah College, etc.
- We have brought on new people like Sarah Ballard, Ryan Tobin, Tom Miller, Jacquie Rucker, Beth Ann McCoy, and Darlene Kvaternik, John Hargreaves as well as Ann Lebo, Bob Shafer, Guy Dannelley among many others who have brought new energy and improved the way we operate - we are more safe, and more organized than in the past ... others have stepped up their involvement as well
- We have also had some significant setbacks ... Losing UCH funding and support for staff - Sparkie and Kathleen - (for good and understandable reasons) has been very challenging for us financially – along with paying rent to UCH – which increases by \$50/month every 6 months by design and is now at \$350/month ... the reasons for these changes in GTS's relationship with UCH are understandable, but those costs among others have made our financial needs bigger than we had anticipated ... about \$50-60K/year
- People who were deeply embedded and important to GTS have left us (again for good and understandable reasons) - Sparkie, Kathleen, Frances, Richard, Perry, Denny & Barb, Phil & Donna, Tom & Meg have had to step away or step back for various reasons
- In f f my role as President I have also had to deal with a great many issues - hiring people, asking volunteers to step away, HR issues ... mostly boils down to keeping the peace and keeping the balance between what GTS needs as an organization and what keeps those volunteers willingly coming back ... Too much they burn out, too little they become bored, not enough volunteers - things fall apart ...
- One important thing I have learned through these challenges ... Sometimes people take on what they think they should - that is not enough ... take on what you are moved to do ... Many times I have asked people to step aside because they agreed to do something - and then could not or did not ... volunteering needs to be an act of free will but also an act of self knowledge -- knowing your own strengths and limitations ... and not overstepping them – it helps no one

So what is the future of GTS/What are our Challenges

- I continue to believe that GTS is doing good work ... feeding people, helping people with issues, etc.
- We are definitely at a crossroads ... who do we want to be when we grow up ... I can tell you - it is a matter of collective free will:
 - After a 3 year term - I have stepped down as President - it is time for someone else to take up that mantle ... Clay Lambert has agreed to take on that role of moving the organization forward and anyone who knows Clay knows he will be great
 - Our core volunteers are burning out - Sarah Ballard has been putting together 2 big breakfasts a month ... it is a lot of work for someone who works full time during the week ... setting up the Friday before, making sure there are supplies and volunteers, etc. ... so the board has decided to cut back to 1 breakfast per month ... at least for now until we find more volunteers to take on more of the burden
 - Can we get enough Money? - our budget is \$50-60K for the year ... we have only raised \$25K ... almost half of that came from 2 donors ... we have not been able to find a fundraising lead to create fundraising events ... so we are in discussions about cutting back to 2 days per week for the center to try to save money
 - To get through these challenges – we will need to clarify our mission - cut out things and do different things that are "grant worthy" ... do we have the will/strength to stop doing things – that is sometimes the hardest challenge ... but burned out and broke will help no one – so we have hard decisions to make
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- I am optimistic that we will work through these challenges - we always have in the past ... people step up, new people take on the jobs of the previous ... ultimately a series of acts of free will working in concert to make it all work

So what is my message – it is not really about our challenges but about what it means to be a volunteer ...

I was once in conversation where UCH members said they felt harassed or shamed into being involved in the activities at Market Street -- that is not what I am looking to do here at all ... I just want to give an honest assessment of the wins and setbacks, the opportunities and the challenges that GTS has and will face ... and to express my hope that UCH members and UCH will continue to be a part of that but certainly not the only

part. I have no doubt that many here already do and will continue in the future. If you'll indulge me for a moment – Let's try something ... If you have been to a breakfast or the center as a volunteer stand up, if you have donated to GTS stand up as well, if you have donated to share the plate stand up ... if you have given to church that has given us a break on rent stand up... probably just about everyone ...

So this is not about recruiting – rather, I wanted to share my thoughts about volunteering....

There is this lyric to a song that we used to sing around the camp fire when I was a kid - "strength to lead and faith to follow all are given unto me" ... this is true ... that we all have innately within us the strength to lead and the faith to follow - they are gifts. It is up to us how, when, and where we use them ... that is free will.

In the end of the day, Common ground café and the community center are volunteer organizations -- they cannot function by shame or harassment ... only through free will ... If the spirit moves you to come to the center or to donate to us or to take on a larger role -- we welcome it - believe me we need the help ... and if the spirit moves you to do something else in this world - that is good too ... if enough of us act out of free will in concert, GTS will continue to thrive ... if not, that is ok too, as long as we individually and collectively are seeking to do good in the world in ways that are meaningful.

The serenity prayer of Reihold Niebuhr is incredibly familiar (maybe even cliché?) ... God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the strength to change the things that I can and the wisdom to know the difference. For me, this has become a new motto ... and so I realize it is time to be involved in a different way ... a time to follow not to lead ... I hope I have set up GTS for a good future - I will be honest that I wish it were a little stronger - but we have come very far ... I leave its future in your hands if you so choose and in the hands of others if the spirit so moves... So volunteer if that is what you are called to do - but it must be an act of free will.

I will certainly be doing what the spirit moves me to do ... perhaps washing dishes or cleaning floors. And if you are ever free on a breakfast Saturday or on a weekday morning ... and the spirit moves you, grab a mop – we can use the help.

Benediction

EACH OF US MINISTERS TO A WEARY WORLD BY DARCY ROARKE (UU MINISTER FROM NEW ORLEANS)'

There is too much hardship in this world to not find joy, every day
There is too much injustice in this world to not right the balance, every day
There is too much pain in this world to not heal, every day

Each of us ministers to a weary world.

Let us go forth now and do that which calls us to make this world
more loving, more compassionate and more filled with the grace of divine presence,
every day