

MINNPOST

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'Catch and release' or courage and real help for the homeless?

By Charles P. Morgan | 10/12/17

There's a lot of talk in the air lately about race, about poverty and, particularly, about homelessness in Minnesota. What sometimes gets lost in the discussion is that we forget that we are talking about real people, not statistics, not buzzwords that have somehow lost their meaning in a charged environment.

Getting at the root causes of why someone is homeless is, frankly, very hard work. As a licensed family therapist, I know that it can sometimes take eight to nine months to win someone's confidence, where they can openly talk about the pain they are carrying.

We see this at Union Gospel Mission, where some people who come to us assume that we are here for some sort of "catch and release" quick fix effort to help. I didn't invent the term, but a new movie about a true story at a rescue mission like ours cemented it in my mind.

I often tell people, and it's true, that we are fooling ourselves if we start to believe that changing a person's life for the better can be accomplished without personal cost. Food and shelter are needed, counseling and education, and many people who are committed to stick with it and help. This brings me back to this film, "[Same Kind of Different as Me](#)." It gives an example of a homeless African-American man, Denver Moore, who has profound pain that comes out in the form of anger.



Charles P. Morgan

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A need for affirmation

Growing up in the South, I can identify with what he experienced, the anger that's sometimes necessary to survive in that environment. What we find with this true to life character, who also is the co-author of the book behind the movie, is that he needed affirmation as a human being, friendship and, dare I say, love? The world could look at him and say that he's insane, but that wasn't the case at all.

I came from Los Angeles a few years ago, having worked at a rescue mission there to help people through numerous programs. As I met people in Minnesota, I would ask them if they knew about Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities. "Yeah, they're great, a great organization," would be a common response. Then, I would probe further, inquiring if they knew about what we do here. The answer? "No, I really don't." We have been around for 115 years, and there is much work left to do.

Courage and being valiant

As I think, pray and meditate about that labor, I am reminded about the character attribute of courage and being valiant. They're kind of old-school terms, but I would say they're critical in whatever you do. It takes courage for people who have hit rock bottom to recognize their need and come to us. It also takes courage for those without a need to step out of what's comfortable, and join with those we serve.

May I introduce you to a term I like to call "radical hospitality?" It's much like setting the table, making someone feel welcome. This can take on many forms, but I would argue that it's the doorway to a person's heart. What you find there might surprise you, but it takes a step forward on our part to start the healing process.

Charles P. Morgan is CEO of Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities, a Christian ministry dedicated to serving those who are homeless, poor and addicted in Minnesota communities. He grew up in Thibodaux, Louisiana, and is a graduate of the University of Southern California. He later earned his doctorate of theology from Antioch Christian University. Morgan also holds a master of science degree in marriage and family therapy from Fuller Theological Seminary.

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Blest be your work

SUBMITTED BY SHEILA EHRRICH ON OCTOBER 12, 2017 - 1:53PM

Every year I hear the advertising for funds for the Mission around the holidays. I hear the stories that are told and know that each one of those victories represents months, if not sometimes, years of work both by the Mission and by the person who is telling their story. I also recognize that there are probably fewer success stories than stories whose endings are not there because they have given up or are still working toward what they need in life. May your work continue to be blest and as more and more people are in out of the elements everyday, may more and more clients find your excellent services.

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