

A Ministry in Grand Coteau

For over 10 years my ministry in southwest LA has been with the folks in Grand Coteau and Sunset. During this time I have come to realize that having lived and worked in East Harlem for 7 years was an excellent preparation for ministering here. So to my rscj sisters who lived at 118th St. and worked at Little Sisters of the Assumption, I am eternally grateful.

I can sum up in a single sentence what this ministry means to me. It is simply this - that these people have stolen my heart because they tell me so much about who God is and what God is calling me to. However, Bonnie Kearney said I must talk from 3 to 5 minutes!

First of all these folks are resilient and so forgiving. In their youth they have had horrendous experiences. One lady says that as children who daily walked to school (they weren't allowed on the bus with the whites) a man up the hill would occasionally sic his guard dogs on them and the scary thing was that they never knew when this would happen. Another man said his father was beaten for trying to enter a white church. Even worse was the crippled man who told me that as a young boy he saw a lynching in Sunset. "Sister", he said, You don't know anything." And he was right - I don't and never will understand what they have endured. And yet these folks are not bitter. They love us and hug us and invite us to their parties. And they are frequent visitors at our house. A distinguished lady, once mayor of Grand Coteau says that the only reason she learned to read was because of Mother Baudel. No doubt the continued rscj presence here in G.C. that dates back to 1821, has left and indelible mark.

Just last week I went to bring communion to 4 of my favorite ladies in Sunset. They never leave the projects, none can read, one is a Baptist and all have a deep unshakable faith in God. They don't know much ABOUT Jesus but they know Jesus. We were praying over the story of the blind man Bartemeous in Mark's gospel. They showed such a profound insight into the meaning of that passage that it put my faith to shame. I left there feeling both humbled and privileged. And what struck me was something very obvious - external differences don't really matter. What makes us one is our faith and openness to the gospel. Now I read that passage with new eyes.

I deeply respect these folks and yet can smile at some of their descriptions - the old lady in "intentious" care, the man getting radiator therapy, the baby

born with the biblical cord around his neck. Here's one of my favorites. I was taking communion to an old lady who was very proud because her great grand niece had given birth to triplets. One day I said, Miss Yola, how are the triplets? She gave me a sort of pitiful look. "Sister, she said they're not triplets, they're twins – there's 3 of them."

Economic poverty is not their only deprivation. There is a glaring inequality in the delivery of health care to these folks. And here, I'm not even going to address the overwhelming needs of the children. Most adults suffer from arthritis, diabetes, hypertension and/or obesity. For many dental and eye care are simply beyond their means. Many die from heart attacks or strokes. Sickness and death are common occurrences. When it seems that someone's illness or death could have been avoided with routine medical care, I feel so helpless. But just to be there with a person in his or her loss can be a gift for each of us. And when that happens God becomes very present.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a section from our constitutions:
In humble prayer and contemplation of Jesus poor, both in the Gospel and in our world today, we learn to open our hearts to the poor, to serve them, to share their aspirations for human dignity, and make their cause our own. We discover what they teach us as of the Gospel and we recognize in them the face of the suffering Christ. Wherever we are, we direct our energies our resources and our choices to the search for a more just and loving society.