

The Bartimaeus Internship as Outward/Inward Journey

By Joshua Bleyerveen (BCM Intern, Nov 2009 – Feb 2010)

As a young student of the radical discipleship movement and social justice, I recently completed the inaugural Bartimaeus Internship. It involved staying six weeks at the Open Door Community in Atlanta, GA, and seven weeks with Ched and Elaine in Oak View, CA.

Part I: The Open Door Community. I am a young student of the radical discipleship movement and a sociologist at heart. The first part of my BCM internship consisted of six weeks at the Open Door Community (ODC) in Atlanta, GA. The ODC is an intentional Christian community in the Catholic Worker tradition which, seeks to “dismantle racism, sexism and heterosexism, abolish the death penalty, and proclaim the Beloved Community through loving relationships with some of the most neglected and outcast of God’s children: the homeless and our sisters and brothers who are in prison” (see <http://opendoorcommunity.org>).



Despite wanting to be greeted as if I had stumbled in upon the back of a donkey, the instant I stepped foot into the sanctuary of the ODC’s home I was received as if I had stormed in upon a mighty stallion. I was eagerly showered with handshakes and hugs—my first lesson in a house where strangers are always joyously welcomed (*left, Josh during a meal*).

What’s more, joy in the house spreads like a wildfire! For instance, I vividly recall a moment when the house was brimming with friends from the street who were being sheltered, showered, clothed, medicated and fed. Suddenly Eduard Loring was exuberantly yelling throughout the house in his inimitably theatrical way that Carlton Gary, a man who was facing death at the hands of the state of Georgia, had been granted a stay of execution. As the good news was passed around, the mood in the house was electric, smiles spreading from the infectious joy. I learned that the importance of joy within communities should never be overlooked, because in it one can see that others care. After all, who wants to walk through a door, however widely open it may be, if no joy can be found inside?

Being indulged in joy is but a small part of what I experienced at the ODC. What I most commonly and powerfully experienced was the devotion of the residential community to recognize that the gospel is not just a theological proposition but a vision attached to a mission.



This mission is most clearly revealed in Luke's gospel, where Jesus directs his good news to the poor, the blind, the lame, and the captive. He very intentionally seeks to be with those hanging on the margins of society. In its unrelenting service to the poor, the ODC seeks not just to talk about this mission, but to walk in Jesus' footsteps.

Furthermore, by supporting and standing with the poor, I see the ODC sowing seeds that one day may finally sprout into the center of society, effectively bridging the gap between the poor and the rich. Admittedly, this ideal may never fully be realized on earth. Yet to have people seeking to bridge that gap is a blessing, because any success in this endeavor, however small, is a step closer to making the Kingdom of God real on earth as it is in heaven... AMEN!

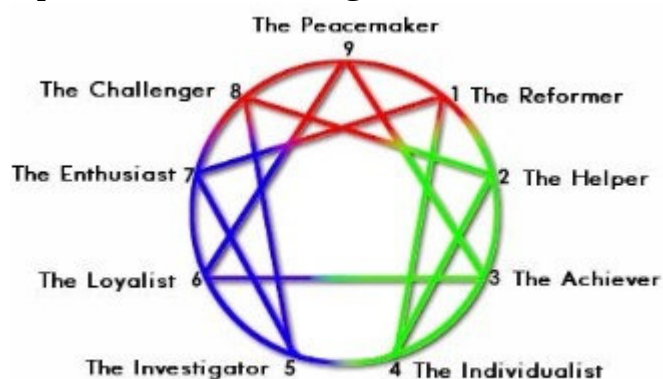
Despite being a tourist in the heart of Atlanta, an economic powerhouse consumed by the intoxicating glitz of capitalism, I found myself more often than not walking in the city's shadows rather than along its brightly lit and bustling streetscapes. I spent much of my free time discovering and rummaging through backstreets, alley ways, tunnels, dumpsters, forgotten bridges, railway yards and abandoned structures. I am convinced that, at least in part, my intense fascination to encounter Atlanta's shadow side instead of its shining face is a testimony to the contagious zeal and warmth that ODC residents show daily to the homeless living in the metropolis' shadows.

In hindsight I believe that the most significant aspect of communities operating in the Catholic Worker tradition lies in their commitment to undo the structural violence of the domination system which serves to empower some and disenfranchise others. Though lack of financial means undeniably impairs the poor in a money hungry world, these communities insist that it should not *dis-able* their right to live a healthy life. Poverty is at its most debilitating when it is neglected. By being in solidarity with the poor, the ODC and the wider Catholic Worker movement seek to counterbalance the invisibility of the poor in Western society by showing love to them through service. I must admit that prior to staying at the ODC, I failed to recognize how much more powerful love shown in action is than love merely verbalized. Because of ODC residents' seemingly boundless and magnificently open love, extended not only to each other but also to *all* those outside of the community, I believe that during my residency I came as close as I ever have to experiencing what the Kingdom of God might look like. (Right: Josh, underground Atlanta.)



Part II: Oak View. I have grown interiorly over the last four months due, in no small part, to fact that my time in Oak View was spiritually-nourishing, encouraging and inwardly-focused. A great deal of my time was spent

reflecting on the question: Who am I? For example, being an idealist at heart, and I would prefer to ignore the fact that I am a white, educated Australian male. But as the result of many discussions with Ched and Elaine in Oak View, I have learned that this geography and particularity is an essential part of who I am. I need to work with the shame I experience under the shadow of this enormous privilege. I must admit that previously I had not given this question much thought. Ched and Elaine recognized this early on and pointed

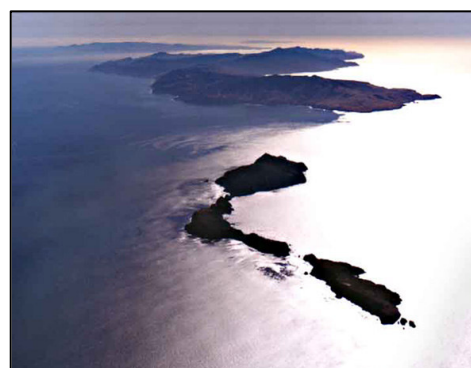


out to me that it was a fundamental flaw in the work I had been doing. After all, how can one effectively help others if they are unable to name their own struggles? A text which helped me to realize some of these issues was Richard Rohr's *Discovering The Enneagram: An Ancient Tool, A New Spiritual Journey* (1992). This book was a fascinating read. It proposes

that everyone has a core energy which drives their personality, and that discovering this is an essential tool for spiritual growth. Of the nine different core energies identified in Rohr's book, I determined that I was an Eight (although in many ways it pained me to realize this). As an Eight my core energy is derived from a "need to be against." Eights are challengers; we desire to determine our own course in life because we fear being violated by the rule of another. Thus Eights are headstrong and aggressive –we must not appear to be weak to others. However, since we carry a covert fear of being weak, we also have a deep sense of justice and compassion for the vulnerable, which also makes us great defenders of the marginalised.

Let me speak frankly and say that writing this reflection piece is difficult and awkward for me– I would be far more comfortable writing an academic paper! I don't like talking about myself since it makes me vulnerable to *your* thoughts! In truth, however, whether in public or private, I realize that when I hear someone else speak I want to know who they are and where they are coming from – especially if they are a teacher. Every public speaker that I have admired has been able to effectively and unashamedly do this. It is therefore hypocritical of me to avoid being personal during conversations, since I search for this in others. I feel that being able to name this is a big first step for me.

Did you know that Ched and Elaine are addicted to weed? OK, weeding in the garden! Anyway, in addition to doing some interior, spiritual work in Oak View, I was also lucky enough to visit many amazing places and to meet lots of wonderful people. The most memorable place I visited was the Channel Islands off the coast of Ventura (*right*) with Ched on



local friend Eric Hodge's boat, while poor Elaine was snowed in at a conference in Pittsburg. The trip was simply unforgettable. We saw countless dolphins, which swam at the bow of the boat; numerous seals, including an Elephant seal; a whale; some stunning coastal geography; and a gorgeous sunset. We also brought home a couple of the lobsters our friend Eric dove for, which we cooked for dinner the next night.

Some of the other great places I visited while in Oak View included: the local pizza joint in Ojai, where Ched displayed his impressive "wingman" abilities; the surrounding foothills, where Elaine and I learned what to do if we see a mountain lion; the last vestige of wilderness in Orange County, where I think I may have actually seen a mountain lion (Ched and Elaine are doubtful even though the park ranger showed some faith!); local beaches; the serene Ventura river; a number of impressive local oak trees, some of which are hundreds of years old; Ojai Community Valley Church, which graciously included me in one of their fellowship groups; Pasadena Mennonite Church; and the L.A. freeway, where Ched and I challenged Elaine to enter into a high speed chase to catch up to a cool old car we saw, which with sweaty palms she obliged!

Some special shout outs to some of the wonderful people I met. First, to my new friends Carl and Tim, who ensured that I became familiar with American pubs. Second, to John Jenson, who welcomed me to play cricket with a team of ex-gang members, who appreciated having a "foreign import" for the day.

Third, to David Omondi, who took good care of me during my brief stays at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. Finally, to the Abundant Table Farm women, who befriended me and provided hospitality second to none during my visits to their farm. *(Right: A thorn between two roses: Josh listens to George Fox Seminary student Brittany Ouchida-Walsh and Farm intern Sarah Baget at the February Bartimaeus Institute.)*



Only fittingly, I would like to close my reflection with a big thank you to Ched and Elaine. My stay in Oak view was a joy--you really are both "cooler than you look"! The fact that you could really level with me was a little bit of a shock and a real blessing. Thank you sooo much for providing me with this remarkable and extremely worthwhile internship. I hope that it has marked the beginning of an enduring friendship between us.