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The Challenge of Serving a Diverse Church: Being Christ for Others

Gregory J. Boyle, S.J.
Homeboy Industries, California

Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J., was ordained a priest in 1984 and shortly afterward became the pastor of Dolores Mission parish, serving from 1986-1992. While at Dolores Mission, he developed numerous programs for at-risk youth in the community. In 2001 his various projects assisting youths in gangs were united under one banner: Homeboy Industries. Through Homeboy, Fr. Greg has provided job training and work experience, mental health counseling, tattoo removal, and education, including Opportunities for Learning Charter High School, all in an environment where once-rival gang members are able to work side by side. In his talk to the Catholic Higher Education Collaborative conference (CHEC) attendees at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), Fr. Greg challenged educators to reach out to youth at the margins. Rather than being in service to, he called on his audience to be in solidarity with those who are most at risk. His story is an example of what can be accomplished through unconditional love for troubled youth. What follows is the text of Fr. Greg's talk to CHEC at LMU in January 2009.

I consider myself an expert on nothing. So, when I was invited to come down here and give a talk, I thought to myself, "What the heck am I doing here?" After carefully looking over some of my expertise I came up with an answer: I am an expert on nothing. For 25 years I have worked with gang members and this might be the reason why the organizers of this event thought that I am suited to address you this afternoon. As Shane [Martin, dean of Loyola Marymount University's School of Education] mentioned, for years I have had the privilege to be pastor at Dolores Mission parish in the city of Los Angeles. It is nestled in the middle of two public housing projects, Pico Gardens and Eliso Village, and together they comprise the largest group of public housing west of the Mississippi. In those days, we had eight gangs and half of them were at war with the other half. We started to work out some sort of response to this reality. When I first started as pastor back in 1988, I buried a kid killed by the gun of a rival gang, and last Saturday I buried my 164th kid.

One of the things we did was organize a school for these kids that were escaping the gang life or that got out of jail, and then we started a jobs program giving these kids the opportunity to get some skills in order to function in society. Now we have various businesses because we were not able to find new friendly employers [who were willing] to hire gang members. Thus, we started Homeboy Bakery in 1992, and today we have two markets. This has led us to us the title Homeboy Industries, though the concept of industry is far-fetched for our purpose or means. We have been around for two decades and now we are the largest gang intervention program in the country; 1,000 folks a month walk [through our doors] from 45 different zip codes. [We serve] 80,000 gang members from 700 different gangs. We have tattoo removals along with 12 doctors and 4,000 treatments a year for mental health services; [we also have] 4 job developers and a charter school on our brand-new premises. We have 5 businesses: Homeboy Silk Screen, Homeboy Bakery, Homeboy Merchandise, Homeboy Maintenance, and Homegirl Café. At this café you will see women with criminal records and young girls from rival gangs working together and learning to get along for a brighter future, or at least a more peaceful one. Here the waitresses with attitude will gladly take your order, so if you are in Los Angeles come and see us. Now, I question myself and wonder what does that have to do with what you are about?

I want to start this session globally and with the vision of the prophet Habakkuk: “Vision will have its time as it presses on to fulfillment. And will not disappoint or if it delays, just wait for it” (2:2-3). What exactly is that vision to which we all find ourselves being invited? It begins with a sense of God, a sense of the vast spaciousness of what Saint Ignatius would say is the God who is always greater, and who cannot take His eyes off of you. He is the God who is too busy loving you to be disappointed. It is that giving and loving that we seem to have a hard time comprehending. Habakkuk says, “All this narrow forming I feel so vast” (3:2). So how do we enter that sense of vastness and how do we understand what exactly is on God’s mind? What is God’s hope for us? I want to begin at the highest possible aerial view. Oftentimes we say, where do we find God, and frequently we ask ourselves, where does God want to be found? I think we need to answer these questions through the lens of our own faith, and by doing so we find the answer: God must be encountered in Jesus.

We just finished celebrating the birth of Christ, a season where God chooses to be born, not only 2,000 years ago but in us. God seeks and desires and longs to be encountered in Jesus. But there is another place where God wants to be met and that is at the margins, which may have an impact on the theme of [this] conference, that somehow God wants to be encountered

with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless, with the people who are excluded and who are easily despised and left out. God wants to be met with the culturally despaired, with those whose burdens are more than they can bear. God wants to be, in fact, encountered in the demonized precisely so that the demonizing will stop. God wants to be met in the disposable so that the daylight will come when we stop throwing people away. This is precisely the location where God is found and where He desires to be met.

God's dream and vision is that we create, in fact, what we are—people with whom we are blessed to accompany. We are called to create a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. It's about imagining a circle of passion and imagining that nobody is outside that circle, and to that end you stand at the margins. It is about geography, it is about locale, it is not about choosing to take the right stand on issues, but it is really about choosing to stand in the right place. This is, of course, the strategy of Jesus, and we hope to embrace it. Embrace it as we educate, as we imagine, and as we form a community of kinship that is recognizable to God.

The purpose of it all is addressing forces that seek to exclude following the diagram that was laid out to us by Jesus. It is [not merely about] choosing to be men and women for others, but discovering that we are called really to be one with others. I think there is a world of difference in that. I have discovered that in my own life when you move beyond a service provider and service recipient role. Most of the time we think that everything is categorized under service, and it is a good start, but service is a hallway that leads to the grand ballroom and that grand ballroom is kinship. Thus, there is no us and them because we all form part of this community of kinship so that makes it about us.

I have been to 25 different detention facilities to celebrate Mass, and at the end of every Mass I do the same infomercial. I tell the gang members to call me when they get out and I hand them my card. I end every conversation with the following:

I won't know where you are but now you know where I will be. Call me as soon as you get out. And if you do, we will find you a job; we will help prepare you by giving you skills that are needed for employment. This will help prevent you from returning to this place. We will take out your tattoos [free of charge], and we will give you a therapist and just about anything you can imagine. You have to call me and don't delay.

I do the same pitch to thousands of gang members every weekend.

Years ago I had a homie by the name of Luis, who was 16 years old. He appeared in my office excited and thrilled. He sat on the chair in front of my desk and said, “Here I am. I just got out yesterday.” He claimed that I was the very first person he paid a visit, but he had more hickies than any other human being I have encountered in my life. His whole neck was completely covered with them. I looked at him and I said, “Luis, I have a feeling I was your second stop.” Well, we just died and collapsed in laughter. Here is a clear example that it is not about service, but rather about us living in kinship. This is exactly what God had in mind—we have to move beyond this place that says it is about service, but rather become a community joined together as God intended. Sr. Elaine Roulet, C.S.J., was the founder of My Mother’s House, a network of homes in the New York area; they help women and children who are incarcerated. Somebody asked her why she worked with the poor. She said, “I don’t. I share my life with the poor.” This resonates with the message I am hoping to get across. It is about bringing people inside who are currently outsiders and for that reason we stand at the margins like in the paralytic gospel. Because we are human beings we always tend to look at the wrong end of the miracle. You know the story of the paralytic. You recall that the house is packed and something breaks through the roof and the sky is lowered through the roof, and Jesus, of course, sees this and cures the paralytic, and we are astounded that there was paralysis and now movement. But the real miracle was that the roof was ripped off and somebody that was outside was to come in. No matter where we are, in higher education, or elementary school, or instructing educators to go out into the world, it is about how we are able to rip the roof off the place.

Ignatius has one line that I find very compelling; he sees Jesus standing in a lowly place, and that is what we are called to do. We must stand in a lowly place for the least; for all those that are found in the margins and whose burdens are no longer bearable. Of course, we must remember that Jesus loves the rich young man, but he is not in service of him. His ministry is not really to him. He loves him and he invites him to stand in a lowly place. That is not to discourage anything we do or any population with whom we work, but the goal is always the same: How can you stand at the margins? How can you invite people to stand at the margins? We can only do so if we rely on the model of kinship that was provided to humanity by Jesus.

I remember years ago, there was this kid, Cesar, who came to me every time he lost a job [asking me to help] find him a new one. He was a knucklehead, and had a dangerous sense of humor. I have known him since he was a little kid growing up in the housing projects of Pico Gardens; he was from a gang called *quatro flats*, where he sold and used drugs. He had just been

released from prison and was begging me for a job, saying this time it would be different. I had heard this many times from this guy, but I thought, “What the heck?” I picked up the phone and called my friend who had a vending machine company in Alhambra. Cesar was hired on the spot. Two weeks later Cesar comes into my office after getting his first paycheck. He is just so delighted and so happy and proud and he waves this paycheck and says “*mi jefesita*—my little boss—is so proud of me, and my kids aren’t ashamed of me, and this is honest clean money.” He then looked at me to say, “You know who I have to thank for this job?” I was being boastful and told him, “Oh oh oh...well, who?” He looked at me strangely and said that he must be thankful to God, and of course I agreed with him, but Cesar looked at me and asked me if for a second I thought he was going to say that he was thankful to me. I told him no, that I knew God is number one. He then reminded me of a good lesson. He said that we were lucky that we did not live in the time of Genesis because my boastfulness would have been struck down by God. Once again we are reminded about kinship, kinship, kinship; in a heartbeat, in a blink of an eye we are called to be one with others where there is no separation whatsoever between us. That cannot happen unless we choose to stand in the right place: at the margins.

The Beatitudes say blessed are the single-hearted, blessed are those who work for peace, and blessed are you if you struggle for justice. Apparently, the absolute perfect translation is not blessed or happy, but really precisely from its original language is “ought to be blessed are you if you are single-hearted.” You are in the right place if you are a peacemaker; you are in the right place if you struggle for justice—it turns out that it is not about spirituality at all; it is about geography. It tells us where to stand. In the end, it is the only way that sinful social structures get toppled because we have chosen to stand in a certain place.

Do I think that we can do that at this university? Absolutely! Do you have to abandon this place in order to do it? Of course not, preposterous. But it is through this process that things change. It is the only way the kingdom would come here and now, it is the only way to a community of kinship. Jesus is standing in the lowly place and he invites, he beckons, he asks us to join him. Jesus was a man of equal opportunities and he pissed off a lot of people because he did not fall within a category. The Right was completely upset with him because he did not respect their purity codes. He associated with the wrong people: He shared table fellowship with sinners, he talked to lepers even before healing them, thus he was rendered unclean immediately. Obviously, this annoyed the Right. What were you doing there with those people in the lowly place at the margins? The Left was equally upset with

Jesus because they said, “Where is the revolution? Where is the 10-point plan? Where is the proposal that will lead to the toppling of sinful social structures? Do not just stand there—do something.” Mother Teresa said we are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful. You could well imagine a strategy that is more successful than the one that Jesus embraced, but you will not be able to find one with more fidelity than the one that Jesus happened to land on: standing in the right place, in the lowly place, with the people who are excluded until such time that they are included or he gets crucified, whatever comes first.

The principal suffering of the poor is not that they cannot make the entire payment of their rent or they are \$3 short on a package of Pampers. It is in the history of the world that the principal suffering of the poor is shame and disgrace. That is how it works. When you stand at the margin the hope is to preach in and dismantle the message of shame and disgrace and replace it with something else: the truth. Alice Miller, the child psychologist, calls it choosing to become enlightened witnesses, people who through their kindness and tenderness, and attempt to love, return people to themselves. It is never about holding the bar up and asking the poor to measure up; it is only about mirrors. Here is the truth of who you are and it happens to be your truth as well. You are exactly what God had in mind when God made you; and then you watch the poor and the folks on the margin and the culturally despaired become that truth and having that truth and nothing is the same again. No bullet can pierce this. No four prison walls can keep it out. Death cannot touch it because it is the most powerful thing in the world.

We discovered in Homeboy Industries that it is really the key to resilience to return people to themselves. Tell them the truth, they will be okay, and then they can withstand anything. What could possibly stop them? At the office in Homeboy Industries there is a boy by the name of Filiberto. He is one of the saddest gang members I have ever met. I think he was always sad—never smiled and was quite stuck in a place of sadness and part of it is that he beat himself up. [He came from a] very large family and he was the only gang member so it was easy for him to disparage who he was in the face of that. Once I had my older brother and his wife come to visit, and when they left Fili came into my office and he said, “Hey, what’s your brother do for a living?” I told him he was a principal at a middle school in San Diego with a master’s degree from Loyola Marymount University. Then he asked me about my sister-in-law, “And your *cuñada*?” I told him she is a nurse in the intensive care unit at a hospital in San Diego. He shook his head with great sadness and he said, “Damn G, everybody in your family is somebody.” He was referring to his family and to him and how everyone is a “nobody.”

One day he came into my office and out of the blue, totally inconsequentially, he started talking about this little photograph of him. "I found this *flicka* of me. Little tiny photograph, black and white...I think I may be 10 years old. I look at it and I go, 'Damn, is that me?'" Out of the blue he says this and I say, "Wow, that's interesting." Cut to several days later, he brought it up again and he said he keeps looking at it. "It's just me and I am 10 years old," he says. "I think my parents took it for, like, immigration purposes. It's just me; I can't believe it's me." And I said, "Yeah, you mentioned that the other day and that's the oddest thing." Several days later he came back to my office and placed the picture on my desk. He looked at the picture with a smile. I said, "Wow, Fili, look at that." I had no idea what to say, so I proceeded to say, "That's you, my gosh." I had no idea if Fili was giving this photograph to me, or if he wanted me to give it back to him, and the only way to determine that was to extend my hand to give it back to him, but he handed it back to me and did not take it. As a response he said, "Can you make it big?" So the next day I went to the mall and I walked into the camera store and this guy asked me if he could help me. I [handed him the picture and] said to him, "Make it big." He said, "You know the truth, I think it's too small to make big." I said, "Gosh, I don't know what you're gonna do, but you have to make this photograph larger." He worked his magic; I don't know how he did it but it worked. But this is not a story about a photograph, it is about the story of [someone being made to] feel too small [after] being bombarded with messages of shame and disgrace. How is this not a task of everybody in this room? Every institution you represent? To dismantle those messages and to replace them with the truth, and to stand at the margins where you find the excluded and invite everybody to join you.

We have never strategized ourselves with a strategy. We have never toppled sinful social structures with a strategy. We have only ever done it with solidarity. We did not think our way out of slavery. We did not get it abolished because we had a think tank. It was because the people chose to stand in a lowly place with the slave so that slavery could not stand; it is because we chose to stand there. That is how it works. I am confident that that is how it will work.

I come from a family of eight, and as Shane [Martin] mentioned [in the introduction], years ago I discovered that my mom was an opera singer. My brothers and I were not aware of this until recently. We came across a recording of *Oh Holy Night* and it was a recording of her singing. My siblings and I played the grooves off this record as we listened to the glorious voice that [would] holler at us to come to dinner. In the song there is a line which became a mantra for me: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appears

and the soul felt its worth.” It is the principal activity of all of us as we stand at the lowly place at the margins: hoping for the circle of compassion to enlarge and grow and to keep no one out and welcome everyone. “Till He appears and the soul felt its worth.” It is the principal activity of what we are called to do. It is what the rich young man was invited to do. It is what it means when we rip the roof off the place. The soul feels its worth exactly right.

I know a homie who was named Bandit, a name that fit him well since he was a true bandit. He was a *cabezon*—bigheaded, stubborn—determined to continue the loose path of his choice. I used to ride my bike to the project in Eliso where he lived and where his gang would kick it, and he would very politely resist any effort I would offer to get him on a right track. He was in the business of selling crack cocaine on the streets; he ran up to cars to sell it on the spot. He served time for his choice of life. Then 15 years ago he showed up in my office. I was stunned to see him finally taking a step in a different direction. I told him it was *un milagro*—a miracle—having him in front of me in my office. He said he was tired of being tired and that was my cue to find him a job. We found him an entry-level, unskilled position in a warehouse. Now, cut to 15 years later—he is the director of that warehouse. He owns a home, he is married, and he has three kids. After being out of touch with him for awhile I got a phone call from him one Friday afternoon. In this world of uncertainties, no news is good news with gang members. That afternoon he called me, breathless, asking me to bless his daughter, and I automatically began to worry. Is she sick? Is she in the hospital? He said, “Oh no no no, on Sunday she is going to Humboldt College.” He was amazed that his oldest daughter, who is 18 years old, is heading out to college.

Of course, these are new emotions and they can be startling ones. He wanted me to give his daughter a blessing before she left the house on Sunday. I told him that it would be no problem so I set a time [to meet with them]. Bandit came with his wife and the three kids. I saw Lisa, a little *chaparita*—a little woman—and I stood there in front of the altar. We placed her in the middle and all of us touched her, sending her good vibes. We placed our hands on her head. The homies constantly are saying that I do a “long-ass prayer,” thus, in the middle of the prayer I noticed that everyone had tears in their eyes. We were becoming *chillones*—cry babies. I suspect that the reason we were all emotional was due to the fact that Bandit and his wife had not known anyone who has gone to college except me. Certainly nobody in their families had. We stopped praying and then began laughing for becoming so emotional. I asked Lisa what she was thinking of studying at Humboldt, and she quickly responded forensic psychology. I said to her, “Damn, forensic psychology?” in my homie voice. Bandit turned and said she wants to study the criminal

mind. Lisa smiled and pointed at her father, as if to say it was his mind she wants to uncover. Bandit laughed and said that he was going to be her first subject. After the prayer and our small discussion we walked out to the car [to say our] good-byes and we gave each other *un abrazo*—hugs. I called Bandit aside, “*Oye, mijo!*” to give him credit for the man he had become. He said to me, “*Sabes que*—You know that—I am proud of myself. All my life people called me a lowlife, *un bueno para nada*—a good for nothing. I guess I showed them.” I said, “Yes, you did.”

And the soul feels its worth, exactly right. It’s about standing in the lowly place in order to return people to themselves, feeling a sense of kinship and moving out of the place of service, obliterating the sense that there is even separation that divides us, and removing the obstacles that exclude, and widening this circle so that nobody is outside. The kind of compassion we are after is to one that can stand in awe of what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment of how they carry it. In the end, if kinship was our goal we would be no longer promoting justice, instead we would in fact be celebrating it. The poet Mary Oliver writes that some things you cannot reach, but you can reach out to them all day long. That is part of the task to which we are all called.

One last story that is on my mind because the Bush administration is about to end: Laura Bush came to visit Homeboy Industries a number of years ago. They came to our Homeboy Silkscreen Factory, which is our biggest business. Thousands of gang members have worked there over the last 15 years, and we have lots of customers and clients including this [Loyola Marymount] University. (We are reasonably priced, do high-quality work, and we UPS to wherever you are!) We had the meeting at the factory where Mrs. Bush was sweet and nice with all [of us]. We had a roundtable discussion. The Secret Service, of course, had checked out the place and there were bomb sniffing dogs and sharpshooters on the roof. Two weeks before the meeting, a very severe looking Clint Eastwood type Secret Service guy came to my office asking me for the names of anybody who would be shaking hands with Mrs. Bush. They wanted their birthdays, their social security numbers, so that was a hint for me to ask all the undocumented workers to stay home that day. But it would be wrong if you are recording this, so yes, of course, I dutifully typed up the list of people who would be there and gave their social security numbers and birthdates and I handed it to the Secret Service. Two days later [this agent] is in my office shaking his head, looking more severe than he had days before. He came to the office to inform me that the people on the list had records. He thought it would be news to me, but what was he expecting with Homeboy Industries? We had to negotiate a couple of fellows but

the visit went off well and 3 months later I got a call from the White House from Mrs. Bush's staff. They called to let me know that Mrs. Bush was having a big youth conference in Washington, D.C., at Howard University, called Helping America's Youth, and she wanted me to go there and give a speech. I, of course, was honored. Then the staffer said, "Oh, by the way, Mrs. Bush would like you to bring three homies with you." Now whether Laura Bush actually used the H word, I am not certain, but I definitely was on board with the idea.

That was not the last surprise offer; afterwards [we were told] the First Lady would invite a few participants to the White House for dinner. Now certainly crooks have resided in this house, but it could well be the first time gang members have ever stepped into the White House. I began the delicate task of choosing three of my best men. I narrowed it down to Harvey, Gus, and Gabriel. These were older guys that had been in prison and were tattooed, the whole 9 yards, and so I pick these three guys and said, "Boys you've got to wear suits because we are going to the White House for dinner." So we went to the Men's Wearhouse in Burbank and I swear to you every salesperson was trying to find a way to get us out of their business as quickly as possible. I told them I needed three suits because they are going to the White House for dinner. Of course, the sales guy did not believe one single word of it. They found the suits to fit each one of the guys. While they were trying them on I was looking at ties and then I noticed Gabriel. He is about 25 years old with three kids, been to prison, very heavily tattooed all over the place, but they are diminishing because he has already received about 39 treatments. They are very painful. He needs just about 97 more and we will be good to go. We all make mistakes, but tattoos are the mistakes you can actually erase and to his credit he has been dedicated to that. So there he is in a suit and he is staring at himself in the mirror. He cannot believe his eyes. His mouth is wide open. He is just staring at this guy in the suit. Gabriel is a good-hearted soul. Back in the office, his job is to give tours of the facility, but I am moved by his constant stare into the mirror. I walk up to him and tap him on his shoulder: "Are you okay?" He breaks out of [his trance] and says, "Damn G, I am already pinching myself." He cannot believe he is in a suit. He cannot believe he is heading to the White House.

A week before we are scheduled to go I called him into my office and I asked if he had gotten the okay for the trip from his parole officer. He quickly answered yes and I felt a sense of relief that he had taken the initiative and gotten the okay. Yet, my relief was short lived when he told me that the [parole officer's] answer was no. I asked him why he waited this long to inform me that she had not given him permission. "Well, I didn't want to

tell you because I was afraid you wouldn't let me go." I was moved, and I told him we had to do this the right way. I asked him for his parole officer's number. When I asked her she said no, so I asked her for the number of the person above her. The guy said the same thing. I kept moving up through the ranks to try to get a yes, but I constantly kept getting "high control." It seems that they were not able to accept that this guy was going to the White House. Finally, we received faxes from the Justice Department and principally from the White House—this may well be the singular accomplishment of the administration!—granting Gabriel permission. We were going to go anyway, but permission is nice.

So we are ready to go. I pick everybody up and the homies were running late, and when we were halfway to the airport we asked everyone if they had their IDs. Silence overtook the ambiance. Suddenly, a lone voice from the back seat said, "Shit!" We had to head back to get the ID of one of the guys, but we made it on time. Then 2 days later in my brother's house in Washington, D.C., Gabriel was missing his pants. Poor Gabriel, when he was running to my car in the early morning darkness with his Men's Wearhouse suit over his shoulder the suit bag opened up, jostling the pants, which slid off the hanger. Somewhere in Los Angeles there is a homeless man who is liking the way he looks! We were just in total panic. He ran all over the house yelling that he had no pants. My sister-in-law brought in a pair of pants [that belonged to my] brother and it went well with Gabriel's suit, what was left of it. We walked into the White House after the conference and there were butlers walking the halls carrying trays with long-stem glasses filled with white wine and the homies were snatching those puppies as fast as they could. There was also a string quartet in every room, and a little brass combo in the blue room and the green room and all those different colored rooms. There was a huge buffet table with every imaginable food under the sun; they had these little potatoes, white potatoes cut length wise and very carefully they burrowed a hole and in each one they stuffed caviar and sprinkled chives. I was standing there with Gabriel and he takes all these puppies and pops them into his mouth and spits it out in his napkin. "This shit tastes nasty," he says. He apparently lost the knob on his volume control, because he was pretty loud.

I told you all of that to tell you this: The next day we flew home and somewhere in mid-flight Gabriel, a simple soul, very innocent in this world although the packaging might suggest otherwise, said to me, "I got to go to *el baño*—the bathroom." I said, "Well, *mijo*, it is in the back of the plane." Forty-five minutes later he comes back. I said, "*Que paso, carbon*,—What's up friend—I thought you fell in. What happened?" He said that he was talking to the lady in the back, and when I turned around I saw a flight attendant

standing by herself. He then informed me that he made her cry and that he hopes that is okay. I told him that it would depend on what he actually said to her. He goes on to say that she noticed his tattoos and his Homeboy Industry shirt and she began to ask him a bunch of questions so he gave her a tour of the office. At 20,000 feet Gabriel gave a tour of our office to this flight attendant. He walked her through the office and introduced her to the job developers; he handed her goggles so she could watch tattoos being removed. He showed her the bakery and the Homegirl Café, where enemies work side by side with one another. Then he told her that we made history last night: For the first time in the history of this country three gang members walked into the White House and had dinner there. He let her know that the food tasted nasty, and she began to cry. I looked at him and I said, “*Mijo*, what do you expect? She just caught a glimpse of you. She saw that you are somebody. She recognized you as the shape of God’s heart. People cry when they see that.” And two souls feel their worth, 20,000 feet, flight attendant, gang member. Nothing separating us. No shame or disgrace can divide us and the circle of compassion has widened. Yes, there are some things we cannot reach, but you can reach out to them all day long. A community of kinship. God longs to be encountered in Jesus and at the margins. See him in the lowly place. Stand there with them for the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and it will not disappoint and if it delays, wait for it.

Thank you very much.