



In it for the Long Haul

Anissa Glaser-Bacon

Minister for Ministers in Specialized Settings and Professional Endorsement Coordinator for the MESA Team

“The least will become a thousand, and the smallest a powerful people. I am the Lord; at the right moment, I will hurry it along.” (Isaiah 60:22, CEB). The prophet Isaiah, offering words of hope to people returning to a destroyed homeland, promises that nations will be drawn together and rebuild their once beautiful city. These are encouraging words, no doubt. Yet, they cannot negate all that happened to get to this point, nor what is needed to not just restore their home, but to build it into a place of hope for all of God’s people.

The State of Minnesota has more UCC ministers serving in specialized settings than any other state. They serve in hospitals, in community centers, as advocates, in housing and many other settings which require compassionate attention in settings in which people are suffering. In the last year I have seen the clergy in that state, both inside and outside our churches, try to cope with the difficulties of the world that many clergy experience, but with a poignancy and urgency that most don’t have to face day to day.

I’ve seen my colleagues in Minnesota laying on streets, tear-gassed and beaten. I’ve seen them in handcuffs and dragged off by an enemy I can’t identify. They’ve grieved the death of community members and coworkers and been denied the opportunity to solemnize their grief. They’ve entered detention facilities to offer support, encouragement and spiritual services and been turned from the doors, therefore denying basic spiritual support to members of their community. They’ve put



lives and reputations on the line – all to offer hope and love in places where it seems all is lost. The trauma affects Minnesotans is lasting and will forever be felt in the bones of her communities.

Even so, there are signs in the midst of all of this that show a new life being born and a new promise being extended, just as Isaiah promised, “The least will become a thousand, and the smallest a powerful people.” Minnesota’s chaplains have fought hard for the right to serve the least, on the streets and in court, and have won. On March 20th, clergy won the right to enter into the places they had been turned away, to build up those in need. Every case, every prayer, every hug, every handshake is a step forward to rebuilding the land they once knew, not as it was, as God dreams it can be.

What is being built is a new coalition of hope, more diverse, more attentive to the needs of others and more filled with hope. As humans we may feel urgency about that, because we desire a more loving world. With each step we are reminded that time does not work the way we want it, no matter how hard we push, even towards building something good. Isaiah reminds us that even God will also feel that urgency and “hurry it along”. It may not be now, it may not be tomorrow, but God also will feel and push forward the urgency of a new creation that we are taking the small steps to build.

May we witness to the justice-building that God is doing through us today, and may we pray our work and God’s urgency create a new reality for all of us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Anissa Glaser-Bacon serves as the Minister for Ministers in Specialized Settings and Professional Endorsement Coordinator for the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Team in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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