



...educate...equip...mobilize...

Park Street Café Service Month: Educate for Service, 6/5/07

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."
- Matthew 25:40

Background

The month of June is Café Service Month: *Caring for and Connecting with a City in Need*. Café is partnering with CityWorks, Park Street's Urban Outreach ministry, to **educate**, **equip**, and **mobilize** the members of the Café community for local service.

In each of your three small groups this month, you will receive a short study guide to read through and discuss with your small group. These three study guides focus on educating, equipping, and mobilizing the Café community for service. Each study guide concludes with response questions, prayer, and references for additional information. This study guide is the first of the three, and focuses on EDUCATING the Café community on issues currently facing our community.

Youth Violence

In 2005, there were 75 homicides in the city of Boston -- the highest figure in ten years. In 2006, there were 74 homicides. Both years saw hundreds of non-fatal shootings. In 2007, Boston is poised to surpass those numbers. What is, perhaps, more alarming is that the young people caught up in this youth violence epidemic are younger than ever. Of these homicides almost 30 percent have been teenagers and 50 percent of the victims of gun violence have been between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. The first homicide victim in 2007 was a 14-year-old boy leaving a house party at six in the morning. His killing came just over a month after two girls, ages 14 and 15, and two boys, 16 and 17, were shot at a house party at three in the morning. Within a month's time in March 2007, an 11-year-old was arrested for bringing a gun to class, a 5-year-old was shot in the back of a car and both a 1-year-old and her 17-year-old father were shot as he cradled her in his arms.

While this violence affects all of Boston, the bulk of it has been sustained by the neighborhoods of **Roxbury**, **Dorchester**, and **Mattapan**. While the statistics are troubling, the greater concern is the effect this violence is having upon the youth living in these neighborhoods. Most know someone who has been killed, and are concerned for their own safety. While many youth have responded to this constant threat by avoiding significant portions of their neighborhoods, still others have determined that the best solution is to carry guns themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The senseless killing of a 22-year-old Michigan State student visiting Boston prompted a prominent Dorchester pastor to warn, "You will take your life into your own hands if you travel to Boston." As this senseless wave of shootings and killings continues to take a heavy toll on Boston's young people, the bulk of the state's taxpayer dollars fund law enforcement, prisons and prosecutions rather than more redemptive programming and services. While city and state leaders focus on more arrests and more police, young people in the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan continue to approach a deadly precipice with few mechanisms in place to stop them.

Poverty

In Boston, the financial and intellectual hub of the second wealthiest state in the nation, the percentage of the population living in poverty has jumped from 16% to 22% in the last 35 years. An estimated 116,000 people in Boston -- 35,403 of which are under the age of 18 -- presently live in poverty. In 2005, Boston was ranked the most expensive city in the country to live in. That year, when the estimated cost of living in Boston for a family of four was \$64,656, the federal poverty threshold for the same-sized family was \$19,971. Though alarming, these statistics reveal little about the daily struggles of those living in poverty. Many of these families and individuals are forced to choose daily between the basic needs of shelter, food, medical care, and clothing.

Homelessness

The increase of poverty in Boston has inevitably led to the rise of homelessness within the city. Since 1992 the homeless population has increased by more than 30% and has continued to rise at a rate of 8-12% per year. The city's 2005-06 census of homeless individuals revealed that on any given night there were approximately 6,365 homeless men, women and children on the streets or in shelters, including 2,325 in families. Of this population, families are the fastest growing sector with a 24% increase over the past year. Contrary to the stereotypes about the homeless, the majority of these individuals have at least a high school diploma and at least one working adult in their household. Despite the fact that over half of the homeless in Boston are mothers and young children, most of us perceive the stereotypical homeless person as a male alcoholic or drug addict.

Response Questions

1. How well do you feel like you know the city outside of where you live and work? Do you keep up with what's going on in Boston? Why or why not?
2. How do you usually react to a homeless person on the street? Would that change if you knew their story as to how they became homeless?
3. What examples of injustice do you see on a daily basis in the community around you? Think of your daily commute to work / school - what are some of the most glaring needs you see? How can we prevent ourselves from becoming numb to the injustices we regularly encounter?
4. How has your perception of poverty and homelessness in Boston been challenged by the information provided in this study guide?
5. Read Matthew 25.31-46. Who are "the least of these" in the city of Boston? What does Jesus tell us to do for these people? What can we do to become more like the sheep on Jesus' right?

Prayer

- Pray for the youth of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, many of whom live in constant fear of violence.
- Pray for those in our city who live below the poverty line, and for those who have no permanent roof over their heads.
- Pray that God might open our eyes to the violence, poverty, and homelessness surrounding us, and that we might pay more attention to the needs and injustices in our surrounding communities.
- Pray that God would move in the hearts and minds of the Café community to live active faiths and reflect Christ's love in the communities outside Park Street Church.
- Pray that Park Street Church would be a beacon of Christ's love to the surrounding community.

Additional Information

- Visit the Park Street CityWorks web site: parkstreetcityworks.org/boston.html for additional information, personal stories, and references.

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