

OUR COMMUNITY

From Callousness to Consciousness

(continued from front page) lots, semi-wooded embankments and people's "homes."

It was then that I realized how closed my eyes had been. We spent the night before in our sleeping bags on trash bags under the stars as part of the simulation, and suddenly I was seeing how unrealistic that comparison is for some of Asheville's homeless. We walked through a steep embankment scattered with beer bottles, trash, and a few sparse trees and weeds. On the ground lie their sleeping places—a couple of soggy thin blankets on a muddy trash bag tucked up against some of the brush, and my heart break set-in. Yes, some homeless people do stay at the Mission, some in housing and others in tents, but to believe all homeless have the opportunity to get inside at night is pure ignorance. There are only so many slots open at shelters at night and without ID even those are not available to you. For others, like my friend Dewey, to go into the Mission is to give up, to release independence and surrender to his current place in life. As I prompted him for better alternatives, he offered the idea of a work program where homeless people can come and earn their keep by doing various jobs and in turn become a resource for the community

to come and find skilled laborers and other help. Nobody seems to be able to follow through with getting it up and running, he said. I made the agreeable gesture toward Dewey's optimistic alternative by saying, "Yeah, everyone wants to be able to earn what they have, to work," a statement to which the other homeless men grievously nodded their head to.

I'd like to offer a few realizations I made during my time sitting with the homeless and fellowshipping with them. First, not all homeless individuals have made poor choices in their lives to lead them there. A large percentage of the homeless population are mentally ill and unable to afford proper treatment or medication. Imagine you lose your job, can't find another one, can't pay for your medicine anymore, and suddenly you find yourself wandering the streets looking for your next meal and a place to sleep while others look at you, a person helpless to their medical condition, with ignorant judgment. As Raven Blue Tear, an acquaintance I made at the B-B-Q, told me, "It's the looks that kill you—people see you walking toward them across the street and they purposefully walk the other way. I don't mind it too much when it hap-

pens, 'cause then I got the whole street to myself." Just because the homeless don't have a shower and a home to get cleaned up in doesn't make them oblivious to painful glares and the feeling of being a circus attraction. Secondly, I was given the beautiful opportunity to be treated as a homeless person by people of my own Christian faith and see what I look like when I am interacting with the least of these. It was a sobering, rare opportunity to be removed from my commonality with the church and be treated as one coming from the outside.

May I say first that I am one hundred percent in wholehearted support of ministries who open their doors to offer a meal and a hand as I was the blessed recipient of an end to my hunger because of such a willing church body. The fact that they even offered us homemade dessert made me feel so normal and human, like the distinction between me as a homeless person and the way they would serve each other at a church potluck was very small. The reason I say small is because there was something different in being served by a group of people all dressed up nice in their church clothes acting as waiters and waitresses at our table. Their clothing alone made me hyper-aware of my

own dirtiness, but more than that was the sad realization that not one of them ever sat down with me. We can serve and serve and holler out an invitation to our service as people leave the door, but if we never sit down and commune with them as Jesus did, if we never take down barriers of difference, we have only offered a nice meal. Jesus did not break bread and wine with his disciples to offer them a "God bless you" and a meal, he did it to offer his body, his whole self, to be in communion with them, and he did so in a simple garment with worn sandals and body odor. One does not need to be an overseas missionary to start being culturally sensitive. We can start today with those around us who are in need and who do not have the luxury of wearing the right clothes to our club. Let's be seen by our love and willingness to spend time with the broken, not by our church clothes and sometimes open doors.

Statistics:

- 13% of Americans are homeless
- 28% said they sometimes or often do not get enough to eat.
- 66% of the homeless have problems with alcohol, drug abuse, or mental illness.
- 30% have been homeless for more than two years.

Tips:

- Gather non-perishable items and keep them in your car to give out when you are in the city.
- Leave time in your day to be able to stop and pray or talk with people.
- Address their humanity with a handshake and looking them in the eyes.
- Think of offering more than food by actually finding out their trials and how their heart is. When it came time to think of begging for lunch and I asked the other team who had already been begging what I should say if someone asked me my story. They told me, "They don't want to know your story, nobody will stop and talk to you, don't worry."
- Be sensitive to the needs present and listen to the Lord if you are led to give money.

"Therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." Ephesians 4:1-2

Seeds Represents Montreat at Carolinas Power Shift 2009

Lee Elliott

At Carolinas Power Shift 2009 this past weekend, Aaryn, Heather, Leah and I, along with close to 300 students from universities and colleges all over the Carolinas, met for a summit to discuss climate change, and what we can do to stop it. Man, was it a trip to remember.

The summit was part of a series going on during the same weekend in 11 regions of the U.S., and allowed the groups around the country to focus on issues specific to their region, while still showing solidarity with the national climate change movement. It was a great opportunity for our budding environmental group to meet-

and-greet, network, and learn with other students from a diverse array of area schools.

The summit included breakout sessions on a sundry of different topics, all focused around the environment, with large group meetings, speakers, and live music following the day's sessions. I took part in many of these throughout the weekend, and it would be hard for me to pick my favorite. From a session focused around keeping the environmental activist healthy in mind and body, to talks on Colony Collapse Disorder affecting bee populations, to sessions built around learning how to advocate for our cause

—every session was productive, informative, and fun. My favorite event of the weekend was a panel on the expansion of Duke Power's Cliffside coal-fired power plant led by Betty Robinson, an 87 year old lady who has been an environmental activist since 1936 and is still active in stopping Mountaintop Removal!

As amazing as all the breakout sessions were, the speakers were equally good. On Saturday night, the summit's sponsor, the Energy Action Coalition, rented the spectacular Memorial Hall on UNC Chapel Hill's campus for an evening of keynote speakers. Here are just a few

people who spoke: Dr. Dee Eggers, of UNC Asheville's environmental program, spoke on her work on bio-char and micro-algae fuels; George Friday, an amazing lady, spoke of Justice (with a capital J) for all races; and Carrboro Mayor, Mark Chilton, who gave an extremely inspiring speech about the time being ripe for change.

But above all, what I enjoyed most about the summit, more than the inspiring speeches and informative breakout sessions, was the networking for our Seeds group here on the UNC campus. I can't tell you how many times I introduced myself and was met with, "Montreat?

Where's that?!" It was beyond cool to connect with all of the amazing students and activists that showed up, and even cooler to network with the ones from W.N.C. on future events on our campus and theirs.

All in all, it was a great first field trip for Seeds, and I hope my little summary here gets you all out to a Seeds meeting to see what we're about. Right now, the club and its members are in a momentous position to affect change on campus and in the community. Generally we meet Thursdays at 6pm in the side conference room in Howerton Cafeteria. We would love to see you there.

Please direct any questions or comments about articles to the editor in chief at mcwhetstone@gmail.com

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