

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Celebrate the Adhesives

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I am one of those ministers who always seeks to link the sacred and the civic, and in my home state of Tennessee, it's not hard to see how irony and humor are sometimes the adhesives.

One year while advocating for the rights of the poor in the Tennessee General Assembly, I observed two simultaneous bills about safety: one said that motorcycle riders had the right not to wear helmets and one said that coon dogs had to be tied down in the back of pick-up trucks. Both bills passed, and it was an important lesson in the comparative value of human and animal welfare.

Another year the Nashville *Tennessean* newspaper ran a series of articles about how pilgrimages were being organized to see the face of Jesus reflected on a refrigerator door on the front porch of a house in southern Tennessee. The headline screamed "Face of Jesus on a Major Appliance," but the articles that followed lamented that the journeys were coming to an end. It seems that the woman who owned the trailer next door was tired of pilgrims tracking mud on her kitchen floor to see the reflection of the Savior through the one window where He was visible.

I know that I look constantly look for humor, irony, and joy because so much of the content of ministry is heart-breaking and tragic and I need some comic relief. I work with and try to make known to others the injustices suffered by communities that are the victims of mountaintop removal, environmental racism, and now the newest evil called "fracking" – the pumping of toxic chemicals into the groundwater to get natural gas. I work with the issues of climate change, deforestation, topsoil erosion, toxic waste dumps, loss of fish stocks, and the epidemic of childhood asthma directly traceable to dirty air. These are all life-threatening and disheartening results of our human failure to live within our limits and to understand that the sacred and the civic are related. How we regard Creation stems from either entitlement or gratitude, and the rules we make to govern ourselves come directly from our values of entitlement or gratitude.

I know I look hard for the joyful side of life, and I know many of my UCC friends look for it also. That is why I am so delighted to have run across the folks who have started Transition Towns. It's the best import from England since the Beatles and the movie *Love, Actually*. The Transition folks declare that peak oil and climate change are upon us, but changing the world is not about long faces and dour looks. It's about celebrating at every opportunity the gift of life, the gift of community, and the gift of the Spirit that empowers us to act for inclusion and justice as we build resilience into our communities. My invitation to you is to check them out at www.transitionus.org and get more positive vibes going in your home-place, too.

You see, we can't always count on the Tennessee legislature or revelations on a major appliance to give us a reason to smile. Celebrating community with our neighbors is the best adhesive.

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