



Building Relationships Not Walls

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Recently I had a political conversation with a friend in which we discussed the border wall. We've always held differing political views but have maintained our friendship by 'agreeing to disagree.' At one point, I asked, "What are you afraid of?" to which he struggled to respond, except to recite unfounded information about how undocumented immigrants were causing a multitude of problems. Setting aside my frustration and anger, I realized that in many ways he didn't know what he didn't know. For so long he'd been fed a false narrative laced with fear. My friend has never known an undocumented person, spent time with someone who is undocumented, listened to their story or needed to personally seek employment in a foreign land. The bottom line is that he's not had a personal relationship or experience that revealed to him the humanity in the political discussion.

Thinking more deeply about the root causes of injustice, I believe that fear is the most powerful and destructive. Fear manipulates and divides. It sets the stage for power and greed to take root. It builds a wall preventing truth from reaching the ears of the listener and polarizes relationships by planting seeds of mistrust.

While policies and laws are critical to reshaping inequality and addressing injustices in our communities, they are easily manipulated and circumvented and never fully address the root cause which is fear. Therefore, as Christians we are called to take an additional step, seeking to build true loving relationships with all humanity. It is only through relationships that we will be able to eradicate fear, balance power, and eliminate greed.

Through the Church, we have vehicles for building these relationships and personal experiences that dispel fear. I have been blessed to serve with UCC Disaster Ministries where we've created immersive experiences for faith-formation and relationship-building that deconstruct the barriers

of mistrust, misunderstanding, and fear. When individuals serve at one of our recovery sites they often find themselves serving outside of their comfort zone in marginalized communities where they are able to build relationships with those impacted by greed and prejudice. This type of first-hand encounter is often life-changing and invites us to experience the impact of injustice, our common humanity and Christ's love for all. As Christians we have been charged with living a life without fear. My prayer is that as believers, in a world full of fear, we can be the fearless relationship-builders we've been called to be.

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