

1/18/12

Greetings and Happy New Year to the Grace Church community from the south side of Chicago. The snow has finally fallen and is covering the perpetual ivy on the beautiful gothic style buildings of University of Chicago's campus. I am spending a lot of time walking the frozen path from the Lutheran School of Theology's campus to University of Chicago this year as I started my second quarter of classes at the School of Social Administration at U of C three short weeks ago. Though I still live in LSTC housing with two lovely LSTC students and am able to run into friends, professors and neighbors along the way, I am living and breathing social work in all facets this year. I am keeping up contact with LSTC and my candidacy committee as best I can through attending events, email and popping up for the occasional chapel service when my schedule permits. Thankfully, I was recently officially endorsed by the Metro Chicago Synod to go on internship year through the seminary when I am back to LSTC and have completed the requirements for internship.

One of the realities of this dual degree program is that I am out of sync with my LSTC classmates and on the shorter, more intense, quarter system as opposed to the LSTC semester system. Both my roommates are away on their respective J-term (January term) class excursions, in fact one of them is on the trip to Israel-Palestine. I hope to be able to take part in this trip the next time it is offered through LSTC but for now I am looking forward to the travelers' return and the stories they will have to share this time around.

The quarter system leaves precious little time for connecting with LSTC friends but has opened up opportunities for me to get to know a whole new batch of like-minded folks at SSA. I have a group of classmates that I have most of my courses with this year at SSA called my "cohort," made up of 30 students in their first year at SSA together. It is a fiercely intelligent group of people with all types of backgrounds and experiences that they bring to the table. I am thoroughly enjoying getting to know everyone and learning from their perspectives in regards to politics, social problems, and our field placements and how we view the material we are reading as it relates to our own experiences.

I am taking three courses this quarter and am placed in a two day a week field placement with a seminar component that continues throughout the year. Two of the classes I am taking this quarter are carried over from the last quarter, namely: "Social Intervention: Progress and Policy" and "Social Work: Direct Practice." I am also taking a class entitled "Social Intervention: Research and Evaluation" that is new to me this quarter. I took a class last quarter that particularly interested me since I am trying to learn more about what it could be like to pursue hospice chaplaincy with a social worker's skill set. The class was entitled "Death, Loss and Grief Across the Life Course." I'm glad I took that class because I had just finished my CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) unit at Vitas hospice and had a lot of experience to integrate the material with and inform my learning.

My interest in hospice chaplaincy was greatly influenced by my CPE experience this past summer with Vitas Innovative Hospice Care. I am still feeling called to this path for ministry and am very grateful I got to be a part of a functioning interdisciplinary team during my time with Vitas as a chaplain intern. I saw the social worker and the chaplain interacting and complementing each other well as a part of the sub-

team that addressed the psycho-social needs of the patient and families in hospice care with Vitas. There is a good deal of crossover in terms of support that the social worker and chaplain are able to provide the families and patients involved in hospice care and it is beneficial to know what framework the social worker and the chaplain are operating from.

As I write this update, I am on the Red Line el to meet up with a new friend from SSA for a dinner party. I am spending more time on the north side of Chicago for another reason altogether; I am placed for my first year field placement as a case manager intern at Lincoln Park Community Shelter so I travel to Lincoln Park twice a week for that. I have been given a case load of 5 clients (or as the organization calls clients "guests" ) who I see once a week to give them support and help them realize their potential as they work through the stages for getting back on their feet and finding employment and housing. I am enormously challenged by my classes and field placement this year, but I am learning a great deal about clinical social work and the myriad of obstacles that adult men and women who are homeless face on a daily basis. This work continues to inform my social work lens as well as my ministerial lens and helps me to see the mission and ministry of Jesus' social justice as the common thread that binds our professions together.

We just honored Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy on Monday and this day always reminds me to keep my life and work in perspective. It was MLK Jr. who held a mirror up to the complacent as the civil rights movement flowed across the country in the 1960s. After taking the Theology of Martin Luther King Jr. class with Dr. Pete Pero at LSTC last year, I am reminded today as I work with formerly homeless men and women at the shelter that as Dr. King once stated in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." This work is important and there is merit to working for social justice in big and small ways, in congregations or through social service agencies, in jail cells or classrooms, in hospitals or community shelters. This year on the Sunday before MLK Jr. Day, I participated in a remembrance and community forum entitled "Occupy the Dream" in Uptown. It was an incredible turn-out of roughly 1200 people passionately working together to translate MLK Jr.'s dream of social equality for all onto the present economic struggles that affect many and benefit the few powerful people in society. On MLK Jr. Day, I attended a service of remembrance that helped remind me that we are asked not just to participate in social justice but rather "do justice," as servants of the Lord.

In the New Year, I have made a commitment to do more social justice actions and also reflect on this process of discernment more. I have started working with a spiritual director with a zeal for social justice who is involved in a number of social justice avenues. I will participate in spiritual direction in order to gain some perspective and listen to what God is calling me to do in the next steps in my ministry. I may also start a blog or an ongoing journal to chronicle how the field placement and my classes are shaping my path. Often times I feel like I'm swimming upstream by pursuing a degree in ministry and a degree in social work simultaneously. I have gathered advice from others who have gone before me and they remind me to be patient and take my time while discerning the future. What I do know is that God has placed me here for a reason and I have been given all that I need. I am constantly amazed at the people of Grace's generosity and faith in me as I continue to discern what God is calling me to do. I am able to explore God's plan for me in social work and ministry through the incredible support the people of

Grace have offered me. I am able to stay in LSTC housing due to your support which keeps me connected to the seminary in vital ways; I am able to take advantage of all the resources that LSTC and University of Chicago provide for students with your generous support. I am overflowing with thanks to Grace for this faith-filled rich opportunity to find my way in God's world.

Thank you for all that you do and for believing in me.

With mounds of gratitude,

Amy Gillespie