
A Tribute to the Georgia Justice Project

Ten years ago, I heard about this guy, Doug Ammar, who was working the streets of the Old Fourth Ward. I made an appointment to come in and meet him. I arrived a little early and, as I was waiting, I watched Doug wind up the appointment before me.

He was with a client.

I don't know what the meeting was about, but at the end of the meeting, I watched Doug get up from behind his desk, and hug his client. It wasn't a hand-grip, shoulder to shoulder, back slap kind of thing. It was a full-on embrace.

I have never forgotten that moment.

The image of Doug standing there with his client, their arms wrapped around each other, has become for me a metaphor for the Georgia Justice Project.

GJP defends poor folks who have been accused of a crime and, win or lose, stands with them as they rebuild their lives.

GJP advocates for them in the courtroom, lobbies for them in the legislature, and gets them the education, counseling, and training they need to live fully.

GJP does this, I think, because it understands that we are all connected. We are all part of one body.

GJP understands that each part of the body has a gift to offer. The eye offers the gift of sight. The ear offers the gift of hearing. The hand offers the gift of touch. The feet offer the gift of motion.

If any of these parts are separated from the body, then the whole body suffers.

You know, I don't think I have ever seen Doug with his arms crossed. I don't think I have ever seen him stand back, and separate himself from need.

I don't think I have ever seen GJP do that either.

The people served by GJP may appear to be the least, the lost, and the last.

But, really, they are us. We are connected to them. We can never be healthy if they are sick. We can never be rich if they are poor. We can never be free if they are incarcerated.

The Georgia Justice Project is a group of lawyers and social workers advocating for poor people in the criminal justice system. But, if you look a little closer, you will see that they are really engaged in the work of healing the body of which we are all a part.

It is sacred work.

--The Rev. George Maxwell

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