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And the greatest of these is?

Kate Childs Graham | Jul. 15, 2010

Last week, I was driving down New York Avenue in Washington, DC. Sitting at a stoplight, I turned to look at Covenant House, an organization that provides services to homeless youth in the District. The big white building has five storefront windows. And on that day, each window was decorated with a word:

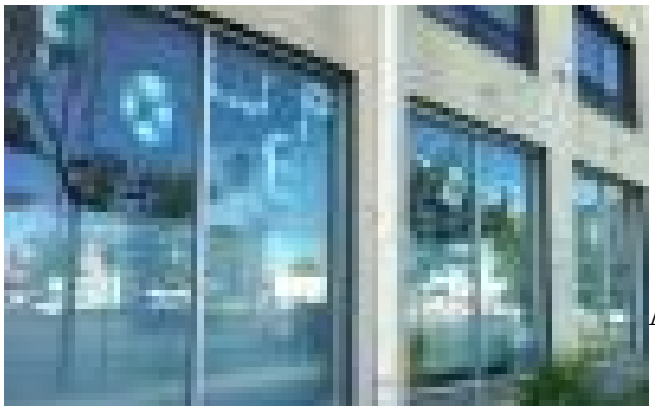
Faith, hope, love, peace, and ? power.

My jaw literally dropped when I saw those words put together. I sat bemused until the car behind me honked to let me know the light was green. I did a quick u-turn, pulled into the building?s front drive and snapped a few photos.

First Corinthians has always had a special place in my heart. It ends:

?There are, in the end, three things that last: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.?

This has been a rule by which I try to live my life. Love God. Love my neighbors. That?s the greatest thing.



As I pulled away from Covenant House, my mind was working to understand the two additions to this mighty trio?peace and power.

First, I thought about peace. Certainly, peace is something we strive for. Whether world peace or inner peace,

peace is important to people today. Is it as lasting, as important as faith, hope and love? I?m not sure. I am sure that it is related to each and all of those three things. I don?t think we can have peace without truly loving one another, having faith in each other and ourselves and hoping for a brighter tomorrow.

Then, my mind turned to power. I must admit that the addition of power is what stopped me in my tracks. What a profound statement here in the middle of the nation?s capital where power means everything and love often takes a back seat to authority and influence.

My first thought was that power had no place among such beautiful and compelling words. It would just mess things up; devalue the faith, hope, love and peace. After all, people abuse power, and power is not always used to promote the common good.

Then, I began to realize how important power is?not to get ahead, but to survive, to thrive, to create change. Maybe I don?t always realize how important power is because as a white, middle class, college-educated woman, I have my fair share of privilege, of power. While I try to be aware of my privilege, I do sometimes forget that it allows me to navigate this world in a way that others can?t.

The writer and social analyst Starhawk puts power into three categories: power-over, power-from-within and power-with. Power-over, she sates, ?motivates through fear? and sees human beings as having ?no inherent worth. Pace e Bene?s nonviolence training suggests that structural violence or oppression is the fusion of prejudice and power-over.

Power-from-within compels us to ?experience and share pleasure, to connect, to create, to see our impact on others and on the world.? And, finally, Starhawk writes:

?Power-with?bridges the value systems of power-from-within and power-over. Power-with sees the world as a pattern of relationships, but its interest is in how that pattern can be shaped, molded, shifted. It values beings, forces, and people according to how they affect others and according to a history based on experience.?
When framed as power-with, maybe power does deserve the billing it got at Covenant House. Only by addressing the misuse of power will we be able to dismantle structures of oppression. We may not use power well, but the same could be said for faith, hope, love and peace.

Perhaps all of these things will remain?faith, hope, love, peace and power. And the greatest of these is?

[Kate Childs Graham writes for **ReligionDispatches.org** [8] and **YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com** [9]. She also serves on the Women?s Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.]

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