



Finding Our People

Rev. Helms Jarrell, QC Family Tree

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Finally! I'd found my people...

Greg and I have been doing the work of community building for 10 years, rooted in Enderly Park, a West Charlotte neighborhood that bears the wounds of racial oppression and economic injustice. Enderly Park is vibrant and resilient. The rich culture, strong advocacy, commitment to intergenerational leadership, and voice are just some of the reasons that the West Side is so great.

Resilient as we are, ours is also a neighborhood where higher levels of poverty, school segregation, displacement, pollution, and lack of Internet connectivity challenge us. As a result, our community is fragile.

Over the years, we've witnessed a particular story repeat itself over and over. Ambitious and driven young leader, romanced with the idea of helping others and fixing problems, comes in on the scene. Urban pioneer that he is, he carries with him a toolbox full of jargon: "I just wanna love on people." "I am here to bring vibrancy." "I just want to serve." The scene unfolds according to script. He sets up his agenda, calls in his people, imposes his fix-it plan on others. When that doesn't work, he starts taking on a mash-up identity. Trying to make himself like the people he encounters, he puts on a different dialect, changes his wardrobe. Quickly, he becomes disenchanted. Folks aren't responding to his gestures. Things aren't changing in big enough ways or as rapidly as he'd hoped. In no time, his mantra changes: "God is calling me to something else." "I've found another community to serve." The once dreamy fella vanishes like fog, leaving us to grieve over yet another loss, yet another recovery.

Finally, this time, things were different. Realistic yet hopeful, this seasoned mother-activist full of passion and righteous anger comes into view. This one is different. She didn't just show up. She's been here all along, tending the soil, marching to the beat of the justice drum. In tune with the people, her holster is filled with connectivity—resources, encouragement, possibility. Her words are filled with truth; they acknowledge the assets of our community and point the way toward hope. "What we need is here." "Look what treasure I have found here!" "We can do this together!" She is confident and strong. She chooses to be boldly and authentically herself while also acknowledging her deep connection to this place and these people. Her bold truth telling emboldens the communal flame for justice. In the moments of challenge, she pauses to reflect and renew. Rejuvenated, with an inner sense of calm, she is empowered to keep marching. She draws her tribe into relationship. Her listening and observant spirit draw even more into the fold. She is one of us—rooted, kinfolk, freedom fighter.

Finally! We found our people...

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What happens next is surprising and not. The organization that employed our Freedom Fighting Sister made drastic changes in a matter of hours. Without stable income, her housing is threatened. Our progress slows. Now the direction of our work, our fight, has shifted. We scramble to put pieces of healing together, grieving yet another loss of a job. We muster up words of resistance as well as hope.

Collectively, we try to petition the drastic changes. “Don’t you know how your actions affect us? Unanticipated changes cause great damage to our fragile community. We were on the path toward strengthening, and you have caused us a setback. What will we do now?” With no notice, we volunteers now have to shoulder additional responsibilities. Disoriented and full of lament, we do what we can to recover again.

The thing is, and I think I mentioned this before—this time, things are different! Urban pioneer man may have lost the romantic spark, the supporting organization may have left us in the lurch, but our flame is not snuffed out. We are fighters. We will find a way. The rug may have been pulled out from under us, our hearts may be wounded, but our roots are deep, and the possibilities are many. Our Sister’s voice is still loud and clear: “What we need is here. Look what treasure I have found here. We can do this together!”

And so, together, we march on...

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