

### God Illuminates His Truths through Everyday Automatic Car Wash Experience

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As Psalm 31:15 reminds me "My times are in your hands" and a sovereign, wise, all-powerful, and loving God always has the best plans for me. God certainly made this clear to me this past year during some difficult trials, including my husband being laid off from his job, as I held on to the image of his gigantic hand holding up my family, which comes from Isaiah 41:10 - "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."

Letting go and letting the automatic car wash do its job resulted in the return of my shiny, clean vehicle, which at times surprised me when I found it in a parking lot looking so "new." It's the same with our lives -- if we allow God to "work all things out for good" then He can redeem and restore anything that could or would hold us back from becoming all that He created us to be.

Then one day we will look up and around at our circumstances and rejoice as we remember and realize the amazing work of our Creator. And so it was in those few minutes in the automatic car wash that God tapped me on the shoulder to let me know that in my life as Isaiah 40:4-5 says so well He would "Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed...."



Pastor Roger, sick of the criticism, turned the tables.

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# Pastor Jonathan Brooks Speaks at Project URGE's Ninth Annual Presentation and Workshop

By Susan LeDoux

It's not hard to imagine the scenario.

The church leadership at Anytown Community Church just voted to bring some of their resources into the city. They hope to make a difference in a place where poverty, mixed with issues of race and inequality, creates hardships, crime and even death. But where would they begin and what needs could Anytown Community Church address that others haven't addressed before?

At URGE's Ninth Annual Presentation and Workshop held on November 2, 2013 in the Youth for Christ building on Favor Street, visitors found some answers to that question.

Founder of URGE (Urban Revitalization God Experienced), Garry Manuel writes in his welcoming letter, "Often a suburban church will form a team to start something that they feel will impact the city. Most times they know little about the neighborhood and have taken little time, if any, to get to know the people already serving in that area. This typically results in a quick in and out, working as a detriment to progress. A better solution might be to partner with an urban church organization that is already invested in the community. This is how we build community."

Later in the workshop, Pastor Phillip Hounshell of Rochester Bible Baptist Church echoed Manuel's sentiments, commenting that suburban churches should first listen to the people they want to help. Well meaning outsiders tend to bring in resources without assessing the community or getting the input from the people living there. To be successful, Hounshell maintains, it is better to "partner with" than to "help."

The workshop allowed plenty of time for visitors to obtain a wealth of information about agencies already engaged in making a difference for people in Rochester. Spokespersons stood by their displays, ready to answer questions and provide pamphlets and brochures.

URGE nurtures relationships among church-



Pastor Jonathan Brooks

es and organizations by using strategies from the Christian Community Development Association ([www.cdda.org](http://www.cdda.org)) that assist to holistically restore communities "with Christians fully engaged in the process of transformation." CCDA speaker Jonathan Brooks - pastor, educator, community developer from the south side of Chicago - spoke about empowerment in his keynote presentation.

"You don't have the ability to empower anyone," he immediately informed his well meaning audience; and with the skill of a gifted preacher, Brooks elaborated on three aspects of empowerment.

First, everyone is created in God's image. God is creative, so we are creative, and creativity equals ability. All have abilities, including those who are homeless and so he advised people to look for others' abilities and not harp on past errors. What if people judged you by your last decision?

Secondly, God gave mankind power, dominion, and authority. When men and women cannot have authority over something, they cannot live in the image of God. Do we create opportunities for others to have authority, even at the possible expense of our organization? "Allow people to lead even if it is not the way you would do it," Brooks said.



Project URGE presented a "poverty simulation and debriefing" to help people experience poverty from the inside rather than outside.

Third, accountability means we all have work to do. Brooks used the example of God's command to allow part of the harvest to lie on the ground so others may glean the produce. This work of gathering makes people accountable for their well being and is far better than accepting a handout.

Pastor Brooks shared his own journey from ordination to resettlement in his childhood's troubled Southside Chicago neighborhood. Although he felt called to be there, he and his family kept a low profile. A protective father, he would not even allow his children to play outside. Then one evening, after an incident involving the police in the home next door, Brooks ventured out and in conversation with his neighbors learned they already knew he was a pastor and that he and his wife had little children. In fact, they had been looking out for them all along. That's when Brooks learned he could trust his neighbors' authority and ways of doing things. His children now play outside because he knows the neighbors are looking out for them. Living in the neighborhood and among his neighbors had given him a much different perspective than living on its surface.

Since our perspective determines how we view our world, URGE presented a "poverty simulation and debriefing" to help people experience poverty from the inside rather than outside. Twenty people broke into small groups to encounter poverty "up close and personal." Manuel later reported that, "People are still buzzing about how effective the poverty simulation was and two groups want to have it again...two people were stewing about the inner feelings they were still wrestling with after the fact, even today!"

Another way of sharing deeply felt experiences is through the arts. Robert Ricks, an author and playwright, engages teens every Saturday in the craft of creative writing and his *Down in the Dirt Productions* teen cast presented an amazing rap performance.

Jeffrey Telle of Jacob's ladder seeks to disciple and train young people with basic construction skills while helping to revitalize the Beachwood community through neighborhood renovations.

Employment Alliance of Heritage Christian Services matches people with disabilities to employment opportunities. In the same vein, Kingdom Placement Agency, run by Robert and Liz Vazquez, assist with getting one's GED, resume preparation and other employment issues.

Like Community Lutheran Ministry Inc., which has been serving children from its location at 924 Joseph Avenue for 21 years, the dozen agencies represented at the workshop exist to help the whole community.

Each becomes more effective when they join together because no one church, ministry, or organization can, or should, attempt to do everything. Empowered, they share creativity, authority and accountability.

For more information about URGE, go to [www.projecturge.org](http://www.projecturge.org).

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