

path involves trusting the process but not much plotting and planning. That was also how Rev Karen Christensen and I started out in Portland in 2006, to see if the unhoused might need spiritual support.



Of course trusting doesn't mean a smooth road. We made so many mistakes. One of the first was setting up a short prayer service Sunday

afternoons in a garden on Congress Street. After a few weeks we realized we had that all wrong. Instead of thinking people would find us we ditched that idea and went about finding the people where they were.

We were also surprised by the amount of distrust we discovered. Many people had been victims of the religious 'carrot on a stick' experience. *We will give you sustenance but you need to believe what we believe or worship where we worship* was a framework they understood. So many folks asked us where we wanted them to go to church and when we said, *well, right here is fine* they were puzzled. It took time and consistent "being" to develop trust.

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I'd like to share a memory, a miracle of sorts that reveals what the work was like for me. One night, I was outside the shelter and felt drawn down the block to the other side of the street. This was not a spot I frequented since the street lights didn't work and there were fewer people about. As I wandered over I noticed a large garbage bag on the curb in the dark. Nothing else in sight. I stood for a moment wondering what I was here for when the garbage bag metamorphosed into a young woman curled up on herself, sobbing. I didn't recognize her but suddenly she jumped up calling "Pastor" and ran into my arms. We stood hugging until her sobbing ceased and all I was able to say was "I'm sorry, so hard!" She asked for a tissue, and for some reason we laughed as I found some in my pocket. Then she retreated into the darkness. I don't remember seeing her again.

Twenty years later, the pastors of Grace - Street Ministry still wander in Portland – listening, praying, supporting in a myriad of ways those on the edge of society. I feel such gratitude to the innumerable people who have done the work, volunteered, supported us financially and given of themselves in so many ways. And most of all, I am grateful to the amazing people who have let us into their challenged lives, teaching us a deeper way of love.