
WITNESS for JUSTICE

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Cobbling Together a Purpose

by **Jessie Palatucci**
Online Communications Specialist

I've been thinking a lot about purpose lately; my own purpose in life, but also our collective purpose as Americans and human beings. I'm not sure how it first started. Maybe it was turning 30, which enough to make anyone feel a little reflective. Or perhaps it is natural byproduct of the place in which I live. The District of Columbia is a notoriously ambitious place, where what you do for a living often serves as shorthand for who you are. Undergirding this premise is the belief that some people, and some purposes, are more valuable than others.

Or maybe it's the media. The race for the Presidency has dominated the airwaves for months over a backdrop of global conflict. The result is an endless loop of hyperbole and fear mongering from our aspiring leaders. Sometimes it feels like we are staring at ourselves through a fun-house mirror. (We can't possibly be as hopelessly divided, intolerant, or scared as we're being made to seem, can we?)

The problem with existential questions like this is they are difficult to answer. We look to our faith, our leaders, our mentors, even our enemies to help us define who we are and what we're supposed to be doing, but ultimately we have to decide for ourselves.

Recently while I was thinking about this, a friend shared a video with me from the Salt Project. (It's charming. You should check it out. <https://vimeo.com/143054338>) In this short film author and blogger Glennon Doyle Melton describes the process of "sistering." Sistering, for the uninitiated, is a term that comes from carpentry. As Melton explains it, it is the process through which a joist or support beam is strengthened. When the load becomes too heavy and the beam starts to weaken and sag, the carpenter reinforces it with a sister joist on either side.

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To sister is to strengthen the whole. It is to share the load; to lift and be uplifted depending on your time and place. I was struck by the beauty of this image. What is our purpose? Our purpose is to support, to strengthen and be strengthened – to sister.

This is not a new concept. It's exactly what we were taught in Sunday School. It is our job to take care of one another. If one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. And yet, for all its simplicity, it is a revolutionary idea in a time of increasing fear and isolation.

Just like the boards under our feet and the roofs over our heads, each of us is being held together by supports on our right and out left. We are better and stronger when we chose to stand in solidarity with our brothers and our sisters. And there are lots of ways to do it. We can sister through acts of kindness and informed trips to the voting booth; through service and through advocacy; by marching for the rights of others and by thoughtfully listening when people share their stories of struggle.

The trick I think, is remembering that working to uphold the common good is a thing that can be life defining. Our identity – our purpose –it doesn't come from our paycheck or the things we buy. It comes from how we choose to spend our time, energy and talents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessie Palatucci is an Online Communications Specialist for the United Church of Christ.

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