

Word on the Street

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Here's Life Inner City in New York City

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A Week in the Life: Matt

If you ask five people what I do for ministry, you'll probably get five different answers. Some people think I teach computer classes. Others believe that I work with inner-city youth. Some people think I work out of my church. Yet others think I'm the tech person at the Here's Life office in Manhattan. All of them have a part of the picture. Life as an urban missionary definitely has many aspects. To give you a better idea of what I do, I wanted to give you a glimpse into a recent week of ministry here in New York:

On **Monday** morning, I headed into Manhattan for an appointment with an executive at a technology firm. He donated some computer equipment to Tech Bridges. We met to talk about how he could introduce me to other technology companies who might be interested in partnering with us. After this appointment, I went to the Manhattan Here's Life Inner City office where I spent about half the day going through the curriculum of an intensive training program for all new Here's Life missionaries.

I spent **Tuesday** at the Here's Life office in Queens. I was finishing up the refurbishment of six computers that I will distribute to after-school programs later in the week. I was loading a variety of programs such as office software, antivirus and Internet filtering, as well as configuring settings for the new computer centers.

Wednesday I was back in the Manhattan office for our weekly team meeting. After our meeting, I worked on putting together individualized training materials for each of the new computer centers I would be setting up later in the week.

I generally work at home on **Thursdays** since I volunteer at our church's after-school in the afternoon. I spent the first part of the morning on administrative items. The later part of the morning I created the curriculum for the computer class I would be teaching later in the day. I make sure to type up the curriculum, as I plan to make these lessons available to other after-school programs I work with. During the afternoon computer class, I had the students editing the song they are creating using a music software program on the computer. They're really enjoying learning about computers by creating music.

Friday was a busy but fun day. I went in early to our Queens office to load up my car with computers that I had been working on. I spent the morning at an inner-city church in Brooklyn helping them set up the computers. After the computers were set up, I trained the leaders on running a computer center safely and effectively. I left after lunch to go to the next after-school program, which happens to be in our neighborhood. I set up a computer center at this after-school program and again trained them on running a computer center.

Race, Class, Gender and Privilege: A Dialogue in Crown Heights: Anna

Over the past few years, Matt and I have spent a lot of time thinking about race, class and gender issues. This is only natural considering the cross-cultural place where God has brought us.

In the past week, we have appreciated how much Americans have been talking about race issues, following "shock jock" Don Imus' remarks regarding the Rutgers womens' basketball team. While the remarks were unfortunate, the resulting dialogue has been encouraging.

God's word makes it clear that all people were created in His image and are of value. The scriptures in Ephesians (Chapter Two) talk about how Christ has destroyed "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Gentiles and Jews. We believe this sets a precedent to tear down the walls of racism and classism that are sadly pervasive in the modern American Christian church. These are man-made barriers that prevent the fullness and richness of the gospel from being realized by believers and hurt our Christian witness to the world.

Here in Crown Heights, we have a microcosm of these race and class issues and we are privileged to be part of a church that is not afraid to address them directly. We are increasingly becoming a multi-racial church where low-income, working class and middle class cultures sometimes collide. Our church reflects the community in which we live. It is a neighborhood that is on the brink of change, as more affluent (and generally white young people) are seeing the neighborhood as an affordable place to rent or buy housing as costs continue to rise in New York City.

In light of these things, our church recently hosted a community event entitled "Race, Class, Gender and Privilege." It was moderated by a member of our local Community Mediation Center and featured guests including our local State Assemblyman, who is also a gifted preacher.

In the past year, I've been increasingly aware of how many privileges I enjoy simply because of the color of my skin. I don't seek out these privileges. They're simply conferred on me because I'm white. Unlike my brothers and sisters of darker skin tones; I don't get followed in retail stores by security guards, I'm not questioned by the police without reason, I'm not interrogated by a potential landlord, and my voice is listened to more respectfully if I'm making a complaint at the local grocery store.

During the event, I listened to my Christian brothers and sisters of color share about entire lifetimes of being treated as suspicious, second-class citizens. It made me wonder how on earth they are not consumed by anger and how they could be part of a church that includes people like myself, who inherently represent the prejudice and pain they've endured. I get angry and fight back when I'm mistreated. How is it that my brothers and sisters have kept from becoming bitter?

I don't know the full answer to this question, but I'm beginning to understand how my brothers and sisters demonstrate the power of Christ in their lives to forgive and extend grace. It is such a blessing to me to see such humility, and it challenges me to extend more grace. I am *privileged* to have these friends and look forward to learning more from them as we continue to worship and serve the Lord together in Crown Heights.

Praise and Prayer

- The next communication you receive from us will likely be a birth announcement. We're just days away from becoming parents! Please continue to pray for good health for mom and baby and for the big transition into parenthood.
- Please join us in praying for our community, which is also in a time of transition. Pray that our church would continue to be a vehicle of truth, hope and light in the community.
- Please continue to pray for all those impacted by the tragedy at Virginia Tech. Tech is Matt's alma matter and we've been praying for God's redemption of the sad events that have occurred there.

Thank you for empowering us to serve in New York City!

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