COMMITTED TO GOD’S VISION: A REFLECTION

By: Eric Rucker

Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment—A.B.L.E.—is a multi-racial, interfaith coalition of congregations that develops and empowers ordinary people to become leaders who affect change in their communities for the common good of all.

I became involved with this group because I want not only to give my effort to direct service, but also to changing the systemic injustices that make direct service necessary.

For example, I want to be committed to serving food to people who are experiencing homelessness and to visiting people in prison. But I must also ask why people are in these positions to begin with. I must recognize that Georgia’s laws often restrict formerly incarcerated people from gaining employment and getting food stamps; two opportunities that are extremely helpful in gaining stability to reenter society. These laws, therefore, often drive formerly incarcerated people back to prison or into homelessness.

So, my faith compels me not only to react by donating food to a food bank, but also to respond strategically with my community to change the laws that perpetuate homelessness and recidivism.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said,

“On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway.”
So, at A.B.L.E meetings people from various communities gather to discuss and be educated about political issues and injustices in Atlanta. We dream about how to respond—through lobbying, registering voters, and rallies. And we encourage each other to take action. My biggest lesson from the work is this: You don’t have to be a Ph.D. or pastor to be politically active and advocate for systemic change. In fact, the belief that only experts can change things is the most dangerous and oppressive lie that threatens our communities.

I joined A.B.L.E because I often feel politically illiterate and uninformed, and by no means do I consider myself an expert. Rather, as a member of my community, and as a Christian committed to God’s vision of the kingdom of God coming on earth, I long to learn and participate in ongoing efforts for systemic mercy and justice. I invite you to join us in learning how to do this, together.

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**WE ASKED. YOU ANSWERED.**

**WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?**

**I AM THANKFUL FOR MY FAMILY WHO CONTINUALLY LOVES AND SUPPORTS ME.**

**BEING 5,000 MILES APART SURE DOESN’T MAKE IT EASY AND THEY ARE ALWAYS CALLING AND MAKING SURE THEY CHECK IN.**

**I AM ALSO GRATEFUL FOR MY JOB IN THE MILITARY. IT HAS PROVIDED A HUGE GROWTH OPPORTUNITY FOR ME PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY.**

**IT’S NOT ALWAYS EASY AND IT CHALLENGES ME EVERYDAY TO DO AND BECOME BETTER.**

—Nicola Baker ’08 (Ft. Wainwright, AK)

I am thankful for a lot of things, but lately, I’m especially thankful for all the support I’ve been given throughout my high school journey and now as I begin applying to colleges.

—Maggie Light ’14 (Suwanee, GA)

**BEING ABLE TO ATTEND COLLEGE TO BETTER MY LIFE.**

—Jeremiah Pugh ’14 (Jacksonville, FL)

I’m grateful for the powerful support system I have who have helped me transition from high school to college.

—Aleia Ringel ’14 (Oxford, GA)

**I AM THANKFUL FOR MY LIFE, MY FAMILY, AND GOD’S GOODNESS!**

—Dr. Francemise Kingsberry ’97 (Youngsville, NC)
I am thankful for YTI because of the community we created and the lifelong friendships I developed back in 1997.

-Dr. Francemise S. Kingsberry ’97 (Youngsville, NC)

I’m thankful for YTI, because it taught me to accept others’ ideologies even though I do not fully understand or agree with them.

Also, the community I grew into has become a part of who I am. I go to Oxford College of Emory University and it’s always really nice that someone knows my name because Beth has told them all about me! Lastly, I have friends that are basically family to me now that I’ve attended YTI. It was all-around an incredibly blessed experience for me.

-Aleia Ringel ’14 (Oxford, GA)

I am thankful for YTI because it has given me spiritual practices that help me get through each week.

-Zach Plants ’15 (Rome, GA)

For being extraordinary and also having to make amazing friends that I will never be forgotten.

-Jeremiah Pugh ’14 (Jacksonville, FL)

Thanks to your impressive generosity and ability to mobilize an entire network of people, YTI received high praise and public recognition by Emory University for its successful crowdfunding campaign. Emory featured YTI in a two-page spread in the My Emory newsletter that is distributed to thousands of Emory faculty and staff campus wide. Not only is this a special way to recognize each of you who participated, but such publicity can positively impact recruiting and further fundraising efforts for YTI. Way to go!

Thank you for making YTI such a transformational experience in the lives of youth. I invite you to continue your financial support through annual or monthly gifts, which can be made securely online or contact jessica.mcdaniel@emory.edu. Thank you.
ANNOUNCEMENT:

YTI at the AAR-SBL Meeting in Atlanta

The annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature will be in Atlanta, November 21-24, 2015. This means lots of YTI alumni and former staff will be in Atlanta!

We invite all YTI alumni and former staff to join us for dinner at Meehan’s Public House, 200 Peachtree Street, NW, on Sunday, November 22, 6:30-8:30pm. Please contact Beth Corrie at ecorrie@emory.edu to RSVP by Friday, November 20th, or RSVP on the Facebook event site.

SPREAD THE WORD:

YTI Summer Academy 2016 will be held June 26-July 16, 2016

Applicants should have a strong academic record, curiosity about the relationship between theology and public issues and a commitment to serving the public good through reflection and action.

We seek theologically curious youth from diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, denominational and religious backgrounds. We welcome youth who have not been formed by specific faith traditions.

Scholarships are available!

The application requirements include several short essays, two recommendations and a high school transcript.

Applications are due March 1, 2016.

If you would like more information, please email yti@emory.edu.

WANT TO BE FEATURED IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER?

Do you have an update, a story, or a reflection to share? Was there an article that resonated or challenged you? We want to hear from you!

Please contact yti.press@gmail.com if you are interested in contributing to our newsletter.