

Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center
Pastor's Statement

I have often wondered why there are so many churches along Roxbury's mile-long Warren Street corridor between Dudley Square and Grove Hall and still so many lost souls on the streets - the homeless, drug and alcohol addicted, and the mentally ill. That is the reality of our neighborhood and many others that bear more than their share of violence, unemployment, and hopelessness. The problem is not that urban churches aren't trying to meet the needs. We all commit to prayer walks, revivals, turkey giveaways, and door to door evangelism, led by our outreach teams, armed with flyers and bibles, making courteous cold calls at every door... and yet, the stubborn disconnect persists. It has become clear to us that what we see on the streets are symptoms of more profound pain.

The Cory Johnson Program for Post-Traumatic Healing (CJP) is Roxbury Presbyterian Church's way to bring light and air to these collective wounds. Trauma is simply a modern term for the deep suffering that has always been part of the human experience in a fallen world. And, while psychologists and sociologists have tried many strategies in caring for the emotionally and spiritually wounded, we believe Christ's redemptive words ultimately make the real difference, "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15:4).

By abiding and remaining with our wounded neighbors in our weekly trauma events in the church basement, we, like Jesus, welcome them as they are. First, we allow them, without entry requirements or judgment, to enter a circle of love made up of our trauma team, many of whom are healing from their own wounds. After we break bread and listen to music, we encourage them to share their stories in any way they can. Sometimes they speak and sometimes they sit quietly. Our role is to be with them in the darkness, as God is with us. As the psalmist wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...thou art with me" (Psalms 23:4).

In the CJP, we never deny or try to fix someone's suffering. We are there to "witness" through our compassionate silence and deep listening. Our companions provide tissues and tender attention. Our musicians minister with the balm of song. Our trained onsite clinicians provide counseling, if it is requested (the requests are growing). But, mainly, we are there to assure that in the suffering, they are not alone. There is no preaching, no pat answers, no easy redemption plan. We allow God's spirit to move. People return week after week. They bring friends and family members. Strangers come in off the streets. The community grows. God desires us to be in a healing community because when we grow in our relationship with each other, we grow in our relationship with him. As we see the wounds in others, we are confronted with our own. There are no quick fixes, but by admitting our brokenness and struggle we all become more open to God's grace.

Just this year, a dozen participants in the trauma program started attending services at RPC and 8 have joined, a testament to God's healing power. We are humbled to be used in this way.

Reverend Elizabeth Walker