

Be a leader, find the light

Ending poverty in California
starts with shared vision

BY YVONNE R. WALKER
PRESIDENT, SEIU LOCAL 1000

The purpose of SEIU Local 1000 is to have the power necessary to give our members — and all Californians — the opportunity to have a good life, live in sustainable communities and enjoy the fruits of social, economic and environmental justice.

But to achieve this, we need to engage and develop our members by creating strategic alliances with key leaders and organizations who share our purpose and values.

It won't be easy. And we can't do this alone. In order to achieve a California for all, it will take hundreds of thousands of people sharing a vision about ending poverty, providing shelter for all, eradicating institutionalized racism embedded in our fabric, and creating a health care system where health care is truly affordable.

I feel fortunate to have spent so much time talking to other leaders who are on a similar path, working to create opportunities for people to step into their leadership, solve problems and create a better society.

One such leader is Father Greg Boyle, a Catholic priest in Los Angeles, who spoke at a Sacramento ACT breakfast a few years ago. Father Boyle is known for founding Homeboy Industries, a non-profit that provides job training and employment opportunities for former gang members. His stories about spending time with former gang members resonated then and have continued to stay with me ever since, but one in particular stands out.

In this particular story, Father Boyle talked about mistakenly trying to save young men and women trapped in gang life. However, over time, he realized that wanting

a young person to have a different life would never be the same as the gang member wanting a different life.

He further recounted a dream told to him by one of the young men who was in rehab. The young man told him about the dream while they were on their way to the funeral of the teen's brother, who had shot himself. In the dream, the young man and Father Boyle were in a pitch black room together, at which point Father Boyle shined a thin light on the light switch. When the young man flipped it on, the room was bathed in light.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

— HELEN KELLER

At Local 1000, we're on never-ending journey to shine a light with our members — and to serve as a beacon to draw non-members in. We're constantly searching for new ways to be the flashlight that helps people find their own light switches and guides them through the darkness.

And we're constantly exploring how to give state workers the opportunities to envision themselves in the role of change makers within their worksites and their communities alike.

There is a scourge of homelessness in Sacramento, and it will take many of us fighting in order to commit precious resources to shelters, to point the way so others may see the light, and to finally see people off the streets and onto a healthier path.

We have a new saying: Because I lead, California can. Can what? Anything!

Because I lead, California can end poverty.

Because I lead, California can have thousands of state workers who invest in their union.

Because I lead, California will have thousands more people represented by a union with better wages, benefits and a voice at work.

Because I lead, California can have a brighter, better future for all.

As we wind down this year and think about the year ahead, ask yourself: What does your leadership look like? Take a look in the mirror. That person staring back at you; that's the face of leadership.

We have the power within all of us to step up and lead. I encourage you to find the leadership in yourself and to join me in working to create a California for all.



Yvonne R. Walker
President
SEIU Local 1000