

# Helping Others Breathe Easier

*The Rev. Monique Ortiz, Associate Night Minister*

*To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.*

I have always loved this poem by Bessie Anderson Stanley (but often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson) perhaps because from the time I was young I have always seen beauty in all people -- and if I could help anyone breathe a little easier by being at their side to help in any way I could, then I was my happiest!

I was born in Mexico City, Mexico from French and Spanish decent and since I was little, I heard a call to love and serve all of God's children especially the poor, the marginalized, those who were suffering or treated unjustly, the abused the oppressed, the sick -- well, I suppose just about everyone.

At the age of 11, my mother who was already an American citizen, born in Galveston, TX, my brother and I moved to the U.S.A. I became very involved in sports and student government in Middle School and High School in Tucson, Arizona. Upon graduating from High School I moved to Paris, France then back to Mexico City, and then back to Arizona. After studying in four Universities in three countries, I finally graduated with a B.A. in Broadcast Journalism from Arizona State University.

Prior to heeding the call to serve God, I was a television news reporter for 11 years in Arizona and the Bay Area.

For nearly five years after leaving the news business, I worked for a non-profit organization helping families whose children were dying or had special needs.

During that time I became very involved with a homeless ministry in San Jose, where my children, family and I reside. I have been a single mother of two precious children for many years. Dominique is now 21 and Alessandro is 16 years old.

In 2006 I graduated from The Graduate Theological Union -- Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley and a year later was ordained a minister in the United Church of Christ. While in seminary, I began to serve as part-time pastor in the First Congregational Church of Pescadero, and with Puente de la Costa Sur ministry to farm workers, also in Pescadero.

In November of 2008, I joined the Night Ministry team as one of three ministers in a two-year fellowship program. When the program ended, I was offered a permanent call to become an Associate Night Minister and pastor in charge of our Open Cathedrals where the hidden and not-so-hidden blessings of a street church are in abundance!

Being a part of the Night Ministry family and loving, serving, and being present to those with whom we are called to walk, is one of the most profound blessings in my life! For, so often, those whom we serve teach us the beauty, resilience and endurance of a human being in the midst of deep hardships; and the preciousness, brokenness and mending of the human heart in the midst of God's love and healing touch.

Through those with whom we walk, we are shown time and time again the silent, almost invisible miracles of God -- that become visible, when one looks through the eyes into the soul of each of God's children. They are alive nevertheless, in their struggles, in their joy or despair, in the midst of crisis, lying on the cold hard pavement of the streets at night -- they will not give up. Something and someone much greater than their own will and human power carries them through the night and into the dawn of a new day. The most difficult part is not knowing if the "dawn of a new day" means our earthly life -- or life eternal.

Inspired by such reality in her encounters with people on the streets, Monique wrote a poem titled, *I See You*. Here is a stanza from that poem. We invite you to go to our website, [www.sfnightministry.org](http://www.sfnightministry.org) to read it in its entirety.

*You call us Night Ministers "Angels in the night"  
You've forgotten, shining brightly, your spirit and your inner light  
I see you as the darkness and pain are chased away  
We part ways as I pray for you -- the dawn of a new day*



## I SEE YOU

I see you through the darkness and bitter cold of night  
I see your beauty and spirit in the midst of your plight  
I see you deep within my heart, eyes and soul  
The streets and the world's judgments have taken their toll

I see you standing in your familiar corner with tin can in hand  
Passersby lower their eyes, treating you as an alien in your own land  
Frail and calloused hands grip a tattered bag with all you own  
Albeit, through your life's journey, there is so much more you have sown

Taste of hunger midst a mouth full of silent screams  
I see you gather your day's meal from garbage bins  
All too common not a helping hand in sight  
Amidst a multitude of people who close their hearts so tight

I see you in the rain becoming one with your tears  
Weary, you struggle against despair, suffering and fears  
Piercing eyes like fireflies penetrate your soul  
This earthly life of yours has surely taken its toll

Like a rushing river, tears wash away with the unceasing rain  
Gushing into the arms of a sea of unbearable pain  
I see you attempt to take shelter from it all  
Still, you smile, ask for a blanket - a request so small

Together we sit, share life stories -- then you ask me to pray  
"Prayer for all -- even those who mistreat me never to end this way"  
We hold hands on this wet, brutal pavement you've tried to befriend  
With a heart filled with love, I say, let us pray my brother and friend

You call us Night Ministers "Angels in the night"  
You've forgotten, shining brightly, your spirit and your inner light  
I see you as the darkness and pain are chased away  
We part ways as I pray for you -- the dawn of a new day

My brother where are you? I look for you at night  
It has been weeks and you are nowhere in sight  
Then early morning you come to me in a dream  
Unbounded and free asking God for all to redeem

"I was never homeless" you whisper in my sleep  
"God called me home at last with a love so deep"  
I miss you I say, yet I see you in life, in me and in others  
The poor with rich hearts, the suffering and lonely sisters and brothers

Still walking at night -- God, Night Ministers and me

In the faces of many it is you I will always see  
And I hear Jesus' words while in my heart you'll forever be  
"What you have done unto the least of these, you have done unto me"

I see you and I feel you  
I know you and I love you  
Simply because...  
I See You!

By The Reverend Monique L. Ortiz  
Associate Night Minister

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