

More on sharing life with the pipeline blockaders

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Recently [I wrote about the tar sands pipeline blockaders](#) who have been coming to our church in Nacogdoches, Texas. Life with these young people is never dull. We're learning to improvise and be light on our feet with them around.

Pipeline construction continues at an alarming pace, and TransCanada has recently been successful in Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation suit against the primary organizations supporting the blockade of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. As a result the blockaders are reevaluating their efforts. They hope to creatively resist the pipeline yet abide by the court's orders.

And they continue to be in church on Sunday mornings. Mostly their numbers have grown to as many as 20, but on occasion many are out of town for meetings and we have as few as two. We've developed a habit of providing potluck soup and bread each Sunday after worship, and we invite whosoever will. So we'll have 15 or 20 blockaders and another dozen or so church folk gathered around tables sharing wonderful soups and stimulating conversation. It's fun, with incredible energy in the room.

One young man, a graduate of Berkeley in biology who has spent the last couple of years in West Virginia opposing mountaintop removal, told me that he hopes someday to go to medical school and return to West Virginia to practice public health medicine. "Families in the mountains will be drinking poisoned well water from the coal slurry runoff, so they'll take their sick children to the doctor," he told me. "It is not uncommon for the doctor to tell the mother, 'I'm referring you to a psychologist because you're obsessing about water.' I want to do something about that."

With several of them having court hearings this winter and next spring, the blockaders' original plan of moving on has been revised. Now they're making Nacogdoches their home base and settling in for the long haul. The adrenalin of direct action and arrests has worn off as they face the harsh reality of felony

charges, hefty fines and lengthy jail time. It's sobering.

As a result our ministry with them is entering a new phase. We're looking at how we can facilitate group counseling for those feeling the heavy anxiety of serious jail time. We're also discovering they are yearning for some "normalcy." They love to share meals in our homes around a dinner table, maybe even with a television on in the other room. They also love to watch classic movies. After a crowd of them watched *Casablanca* at the church one night, I spotted one of the young women walking through the parking lot with a rakish fedora pulled down over one eye. She giggled when I called her Elsa Lazlow.

It's become important to integrate these young pipeline blockaders into our homes, where they wash themselves and their clothes, share meals, watch television and join others in things like board games. Several of them have also approached me about starting a Bible study or spiritual discussion group.

They also love to talk about things they hear in my sermons. A few weeks ago my sermon included a sentence about God's name being a verb in Exodus 3. Our soup lunch that Sunday featured a passionate conversation about what I meant. I chased one theological rabbit after another, at one point talking about Dante and how the deeper one goes into the pit of hell, there is decreasing mobility and movement until at the very bottom there is nothing but fixed frozenness with no change and no hope. Yet as one moves closer to God in the heavens, there is movement, action, music, color and hope of transformation.

While most of them knew who Dante was, these young people had never put together the theological pieces with the Bible and life in the church. I thought to myself, "This is the kind of conversation I've spent my entire life preparing for."