



The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets

Deb Richardson-Moore

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A humorous and touching examination of what it means to live out Christ's command to welcome the stranger

Ministry can be messy, complicated, and bewildering. Whether responding to the church alarm mysteriously and repeatedly going off in the middle of the night, firing a kitchen assistant with a habit of buying drugs from parishioners, or interacting with the Chicken-Eatin' Preacher from West Greenville, pastor Deb Richardson-Moore quickly admits that there is a great deal they do not teach you in seminary.

In this frank and engaging account of answering a call later in life, Richardson-Moore brings the reader into the world of her work at the Triune Mercy Center in Greenville, South Carolina. The result is an honest look at the complications and difficulties surrounding her first years of ministry to homeless men and women suffering from mental illness, crack addictions, and alcoholism. At the same time, it is a humorous and deeply touching account of God's grace manifested in the most remarkable of ways, whether in the inadvertent befriending of a mugger or in the unexpected witnessing of an addict tenderly washing another's wounded foot.

In *The Weight of Mercy*, Richardson-Moore weaves a story that is difficult to forget, due both to its engaging characters and also its radical vision of what the Christian church could look like if it truly lived out Christ's command to welcome the stranger.

The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets Details

Date : Published October 2012 by Monarch Books (Kregel Publications) (first published August 24th 2012)
ISBN : 9780857212290
Author : Deb Richardson-Moore
Format : Paperback 288 pages
Genre : Nonfiction, Religion, Faith, Christian, Biography

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From Reader Review The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets for online ebook

Susie Finkbeiner says

Some books are entertaining. They allow the reader to escape the sounds and smells and stresses of life. They harken back to simpler times and places and situations. The reader is left with a calm and easy feeling after reading the last page.

This is not one of those books.

Deb Richardson-Moore's book *The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets* moves the reader, making him or her uncomfortable, causing the reader to see the rugged urban streets as something more than a "bad neighborhood". She makes the reader see the least of these among us. She doesn't allow us to turn our faces away from them.

Deb wrote about drug addiction, prostitution, vandalism, violence, homelessness, crime, discrimination, poverty. She also wrote about redemption, rehabilitation, restoration, forgiveness, extreme joy, worship, education. Deb wrote a very human story. And it is all true.

She wrote skillfully, that's clear. She worked as a journalist for 27 years prior to taking the pastorate at Triune Mercy Center. However, she wrote this book outside the clear cut, detailed work of a journalist. She wrote with heart, compassion, and conviction. She didn't give easy answers. Didn't claim to know everything. Never once took credit for the work God is doing in the inner-city.

This is a book that needs to be read. From the pastor of the inner-city church to the business man living in the suburbs. The stay at home mom to the community organizer. For too long, the Church has misunderstood something vitally important. That the mission field is confined to other countries. That we can only be missionaries in the midst of another race and culture, speaking a different language. Deb's book is a light to shine on the mission fields in our own cities and towns. People living only miles from us or in the house next door need compassion and love. They need us to help them, love them, be a light in their darkness.

This is the weight of mercy.

Kathy Coughlin says

Great insider view of ministry to drug addicts and the homeless. Deb has a heart of gold and love for her parishioners despite what they've been through and what they are still struggling with. Unconditional love for sure.

Andrea says

Dozens of small stories both uplifting and heartbreaking. It's encouraging to see how much is accomplished

in this place. I also appreciate the author's honesty admitting her own faults and failures. It would have been 4 stars but there were so many people and stories I couldn't keep them straight and after a while it seemed more like a list.

Grace says

Brutally honest witness to how discouraging it can be to extend mercy. Love how she depicts her movement towards finding the balance between giving and expecting/holding accountable. Deb's model for ministry is inspiring.

James says

One of the formative experiences of my life was the year I interned at a Christian community development organization working with homeless people. We partnered with a downtown church to offer a worship service, meal, showers and clothing exchange. The organization I worked with was sensitive to making sure that we were helping people and not just enabling people. I was responsible for coordinating and training volunteers and regularly preached and led worship for our homeless congregation. I befriended a number of street people. Sometimes I was able to offer real help to people. Other times I got snookered. I am currently not involved with ministry to the homeless population; however I am grateful to the men and women of the streets who helped shape me and my approach to ministry.

In the *The Weight of Mercy* Deb Richardson-Moore shares her journey as pastor of the Triune Mercy Center, a congregation in Greenville, SC which works with homeless people and families and individuals in transition. When she became their pastor she inherited a mission which fed, clothed and cared for the homeless and destitute. She also inherited a staff riddled with problems. Under her leadership Triune was transformed from a 'mission' which put a band-aid street people's problems to an organization which empowered people to leave the street and addiction. Triune Center works to help addicts walk the road to recovery, help people find housing and help them find employment. Richardson-Moore shares her story of steps and missteps, hope and heartbreak as she works to bring about real transformation in the lives of Greenville homeless.

With too many homeless ministries mercy triumphs over justice in a way that does more harm than help. Well meaning people provide food for the hungry but do not do the hard work of challenging the systems and situations that make people homeless. It is refreshing to read a book by an author who is attentive to how she can bring real change into people's lives. Richardson-Moore is gracious and welcoming of those she serves but is not afraid to issue challenges and call people to take responsibility for their lives. Radical hospitality meets tough love.

This isn't to say she has done everything right. These pages do not just tell stories of ministry successes. Richardson-Moore tells stories of tension with her staff, mistakes in leadership, places she'd been too judgmental or inattentive to those she pastored. She is vulnerable and seeks to love her church well. Richardson-Moore has a good sense about how to care for people but some lessons were learned the hard way.

I really appreciated this book in part because in a small way I have traversed the same ground and pieces of

my story resonate with hers. She also has a vision for ministry with people on the margins which I find deeply compelling and hope that when I am in a pastoral position I can bring the same sensibilities to the table. But I think that any one who is concerned about carrying for the marginalized will be encouraged and challenged by her story. I commend this book to you. It is moving account and well worth reading. It doesn't hurt that Richardson-Moore spent years as a journalist, so writes well. I can't recommend this book enough.

Thank you to Kregel Publications for providing me a copy of this book in exchange for this review.

Christian Fiction Addiction says

The Weight of Mercy recounts the story of "Preacher Debbie", a former journalist for 27 years, who felt God's call to become a pastor. After completing seminary school, she accepted a position at an inner-city church, Triune, a church that seeks to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the poor, the homeless, the addicted, the marginalized. Deb's story displays the many lessons she learned as a pastor, from how to learn who she could trust, how to have boundaries with people with addictions, how to love even in the very difficult times. The book is written with humor and grace as she tells her story of interacting with people from all walks of life.

I found Deb's story to be absolutely absorbing, and though I don't normally read non-fiction books in one sitting, I honestly found this book difficult to put down. I opened it expecting just to dive into a chapter or two, and a day later found I'd finished it already! The author writes with an openness and candor that is completely refreshing, and I loved the countless anecdotes sprinkled throughout the book, allowing us to watch her faith in action as she deals with prostitutes and thieves and people struggling to give up crack. She doesn't come across as a know-it-all, but instead freely admits errors she made or times that she felt she didn't live up to her calling. Her story is drama at it's best, and yet it's true as well, while also being totally convicting without necessarily trying to be. It would be hard to walk away from this book and not re-examine my own attitudes towards the people who are so easy to pass by on the sidewalk without giving them a second glance. I found myself wondering, is my church doing a good job at reaching out to the marginalized and oppressed? Am I, as a member of the church, doing all that God has called me to?

I highly recommend this powerful read, and give it a full 5 out of 5 stars.

Book has been provided courtesy of the publisher, Kregel, for the purposes of this unbiased review.

Staci says

Reverend Richardson-Moore's story of how she worked as a newspaper reporter her adult life and then at age 50 became a Baptist Pastor was fascinating. This was only a small part of the book, but I found this particular aspect to be my favorite.

The vast majority of the book is about how she ministers at Triune in South Carolina. Triune is a non-denominational church with a heavy emphasis on the homeless. There were so many trials. Readers wanting a feel good story will find little of that in the pages of The Weight of Mercy. The idea of enabling addiction by providing too much vs. serving the least of these is a common struggle for the church. Reverend Richardson-Moore wants her congregation to be self-sufficient and addiction free. This is a worthy aim and

difficult to reach due to the cycles of addiction.

This was an eye opening and thought provoking story. I recommend it.

Linda Hodges says

Great book about Triune Mercy Center in Greenville. Really opens your eyes to the problems and challenges of the homeless. Also the problems and challenges of those who try to help them.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

"Some days... the parade of brokenness is so profound I retreat to my office, stunned and silent."

I picked this book up at the giant used book sale that Greenville Literacy has every year and it sat on my shelf. I did include it in a round of book speed dating that I discussed in Episode 076 of Reading Envy, but that was more from an effort to cycle through book sale books by the end of the year.

This year's Book Riot Read Harder challenge included a book that is set within 100 miles of your location. Deb Richardson-Moore is the pastor and director of Triune Mercy Center in Greenville, which is 8 miles from my house, so I think it counts for the challenge. I've even been there. A few years ago, I was accompanying a clarinetist for a service there and heard her preach. She was powerful, compassionate, and a truth teller, and I remember thinking that if I were still a church person, this would be the place I'd go.

Triune is one of the central places for homeless members of my community, and she started working here right out of divinity school. Before that, she was a journalist for 27 years, something I did not know, and as such was pleasantly surprised that the writing was better than I expected. *The Weight of Mercy* covers her first three years at Triune, although she continues working there now. It chronicles some specific events but also just all the things she had to learn the hard way - coming to terms with the feeling that sometimes helping is doing more harm than good, the importance of rest, how to balance compassion with policies, etc. Possibly most interesting to me is realizing the enormity of mental health challenges and what the implications are.

"Now I realize that privilege can be even more primal - sound mental health being perhaps the greatest of all."

I think you can really see the groundwork being laid for what the church has become in the last decade. Her dream is clear -

"Build up the church. Bring in all kinds of people so we can have role models and mentors. Make Triune a place where an addict can come and see not just other addicts, but people living in ways he can aspire to. Make it a place where affluent Greenvillians worship alongside this invisible population."

I'm glad Richardson-Moore has people in her life pointing out when she needs to take a break, because this

work is all-encompassing and draining, even while rewarding. I'm certain that she has had a great impact on our community.

"Where the love comes in, I think, is this: Showing up. Showing up day after day after day."

Peter Holford says

I nearly always enjoy personal accounts like this. It's not a book of teaching, nor does it recount things we've not heard before, but still, it was enjoyable, challenging and suitably discomfiting. Anyone who has worked or lived with addicts or the homeless will recognise a lot in here, and the reflective nature of the writing is occasionally illuminating. References to 'the parade of brokenness' evident in the people this pastor was ministering to are balanced with her own reflections on the enormous stress and anxiety of the role she placed herself in. In fact, she discovers in the course of the seven years the book mostly concerns, that indeed, we minister best in our own brokenness. We can't use the excuse of waiting till we've got ourselves all together before we commit to helping others. I appreciated a range of the author's other insights in her context:

- * the importance of hospitality and ministering to the stranger (her references to the Rule of St Benedict)
- * the importance of sometimes saying 'no' to addicts and certain other people in need
- * showing up = love
- * the significance of her parenting skills in ministering to those in need: when to give hugs and when to give a 'kick in the pants'

Her concluding remarks, of course, were also important - we should never allow fear to rule our lives or stop us from acting on behalf of the unlovely. In addition, I found the whole cultural context of the southern states of the USA surprising (perhaps shows my naivety): the (limited) role of women in some denominations; the strength and popularity of anti-homosexual sentiments, even at a government level; the shocking poverty so near to affluent middle-class America. A worthy read for anyone interesting in ministering 'on the city streets' or for anyone who is sometimes stirred with a heart of compassion but doesn't know where to start when it comes to taking action.

Spencer Cummins says

The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets by Deb Richardson-Moore

Is she crazy? Has she gone off her rocker? These questions came to mind early on in this wonderful book entitled *The Weight of Mercy* by Deb Richardson-Moore. Going from the limelight of journalism to the grimy, maddening world of ministry to homeless men and women at Triune Mercy Center is quite a change to say the least. Yet, as the story unfolds in the book, Moore is confronted with the widening scope of God's mercy among people who were addicted, abused, and who brought upon themselves much ruin.

Early on in the book, Moore writes, "On most days, I felt I'd stepped into a funhouse. It was a surreal place, in which Butch and Deloris – the two people I most depended on – sniped and whined and, I was sure, spoke disparagingly of me to the homeless people we served" (46). Butch would continually yell at Pastor Moore and want to shorten up the hours for caring for the homeless.

Yet, through all this, Pastor Moore began to gain a dose of wisdom as to the posture of the church's role in the life of the homeless. She writes, "I felt like a lousy pastor. At the root of it, I didn't understand a pastor's role. I thought the best way to help someone was to give him what he asked for. That couldn't have been more misguided: Our people had a lifetime of bad decisions, and here I was expecting the next decision to be a good one" (65). On this account we see the inner turmoil and struggle of wanting to provide for the homeless but not fully knowing the best way. This section reveals a deep humbling of Pastor Moore's spirit, not only in respect to the homeless but also the calling of a pastor. Without these rough patches, I don't think Moore would have realized the right way through in reaching these homeless men and women.

Coming to the realization that without true recovery and rehab the homeless at Mercy would never change their ways, Moore began to embark on this path with the help of other counselors. By firing Butch and putting Alfred in a more prominent role, things began to run more smoothly at Triune. Part of the changes involved those who were receiving aid to help out around the church, giving them a sense of responsibility (93). Two steps in the right direction involved clamping down on rudeness and the hiring of David Gay to oversee rehabilitation and recovery. God was faithful in providing Triune both a grant and funding from certain organizations. David began to research how other rehabilitation centers functioned and started the process of helping the homeless by giving them work and shuttling them to the rehab center. Change took place not in an instant but through a combination of many people helping these men and women with things from job skills to addiction recovery.

A person without a back bone, without thick skin could not minister in these conditions, but Pastor Moore has shown that with God's mercy Triune Mercy Center would flourish. Looking to the Bible and St. Benedict's rule, Triune Mercy Center welcomes the stranger as one who would welcome Christ. I was amazed at the provision of God for the people at Triune but also the gritty determination of Pastor Moore to never let go of sharing God's mercy to those whom others would scorn. This book was powerful in that it pushed the reader to see the ravages of sin and brokenness in the world but also brought forth a vision for ministry that seeks the good of the whole person, addictions and all.

Thanks to Kregel Publications for the review copy of this book in exchange for review.

Vanessa Lynn O'Neill says

such a wonderfully honest depiction of following Jesus

Sarah Bailey says

I have to admit that I did not realize when I requested this book that the author was the minister in the book – I have no idea how that escaped me but it did. That being said at first when I began this book it seemed that the author, Deb, is upset because there are churches who don't allow women to preach especially in regards to the Southern Baptist churches. I really had to look over this (I don't belong to any denomination, so it's not a denominational issue) and get to the meat of the book – since I don't feel it's a position for women to be in and that seemed to be one major hang up in the book.

Once the reader gets over that, if it's an issue for the reader, once you get into what the book is really about – being a pastor on the city streets and your church is not only filled with 'normal' people but prostitutes, john's, druggies and more – it's trying to help people instead of keeping them in their current state. I shed tears over the couple who were baptized, renounced their former lives, married and then – well I won't tell you so I don't ruin the story, but I shed tears over this couple. If you have a heart for those hurting people on the streets this may just open your eyes as to what you're in for – the author does not beat around the bush even using colorful language – which was something else that I had to ignore as it could have been omitted and still had the effect.

I did enjoy this book, if not because of the issues or the occasional use of language this book was a real eye opener, even for a former social worker, in how the streets work and how hard it is to pull yourself out of that even if you want it more than anything. There were a few other issues that I had however the main message about this book isn't about judging the person's lifestyle but about getting them to know and have a relationship with Christ in the hopes that they will change their lifestyle to represent their Christian choice.

****Disclaimer:** I was given a copy of this book from Kregel Publications in exchange for my honest opinion, no other compensation was given.

Sue Cook says

Very insightful and interesting. Local author in Greenville who made a switch from Newspaper reporter/writer to the ministry. Thoroughly enjoyed this book.

Harold Cameron says

A Novice Pastor on the City Streets

The Weight of Mercy is "a humorous and touching examination of what it means to live out Christ's command to welcome the stranger"

"Ministry can be messy, complicated, and bewildering. Whether responding to the church alarm mysteriously and repeatedly going off in the middle of the night, firing a kitchen assistant with a habit of buying drugs from parishioners, or interacting with the Chicken-Eatin' Preacher from West Greenville, pastor Deb Richardson-Moore quickly admits that there is a great deal they do not teach you in seminary.

In this frank and engaging account of answering a call later in life, Richardson-Moore brings the reader into the world of her work at the Triune Mercy Center in Greenville, South Carolina. The result is an honest look at the complications and difficulties surrounding her first years of ministry to homeless men and women suffering from mental illness, crack addictions, and alcoholism. At the same time, it is a humorous and deeply touching account of God's grace manifested in the most remarkable of ways, whether in the inadvertent befriending of a mugger or in the unexpected witnessing of an addict tenderly washing another's

wounded foot.

In *The Weight of Mercy*, Richardson-Moore weaves a story that is difficult to forget, due both to its engaging characters and also its radical vision of what the Christian church could look like if it truly lived out Christ's command to welcome the stranger." (From the Kregel Publications Website)

About the Author: "For 27 years Deb Moore was a journalist in the Deep South. Then she retrained as a Baptist pastor, and accepted a post at a run-down inner-city church where the homeless gathered. It was a shock.

Gradually she learned whom she could trust - and whom she couldn't. Sometimes the best person to handle a situation was a drug addict. Sometimes Jesus had the face of a prostitute. All were fiercely welcomed into this bewildering church family.

Full of color and incident, Deb's story is a testament to messy grace and the presence of the Spirit in the hard places of the world." (The back cover of the book).

My thoughts about the book: First let me address the potential so called "elephant in the review - (room)" issue and that is my writing a favorable review of a book written by and about the life and ministry of a female Baptist pastor at an inner-city church. I am an Evangelical Christian who holds to the inerrancy, infallibility and truth of the Word of God. I know that for many of professing fundamentalist evangelical Christians the book could be problematic from the start and the reason being what God's Word teaches about the roles and responsibilities of women in the church. And for some the idea of a female pastor-preacher is not only unacceptable but is an out and out rejection of the truth of God's Word as written in the New Testament. Well to those of you who are of that mindset I say "keep your spiritual shorts on" and don't lose sight of who God is, how God works and how God uses different people at different times and blesses them abundantly to accomplish his will. And I believe, though maybe wrongly in the eyes of some, that God has used and blessed and is using and is blessing Pastor Moore at the Triune Mercy Center where she is the pastor. And I am not going to get caught up in a debate with other Christians about the issue. To thine own conscience be true is what I would say and I'll leave it at that. Now as to Pastor Moore's book...

After the usual introductory pages found in every book along with the dedication and author's notes, Pastor Moore 1st shares a scripture, Mathew 23:23, and then after that a provocative and true quote, "Once you've see things, you can't un-see them." (Elaine Knocks - A Triune Center Member). I got the sense as I started reading the book that when Pastor Moore accepted the role as the pastor of the Triune Mercy Center she believed that she had experienced and seen quite a lot because of her work as a journalist at the Greenville News. However, I saw that she quickly realized that she hadn't really seen all that much in life and was not as experienced at shepherding the kind of people who attended the Triune Center as she thought she would be after completing her training. But in the 36 chapters of her book she reveals to us what she did not know at the beginning of her ministry but has since learned through her years of serving the addicted, afflicted, homeless, the poor the spiritually/physically needy marginalized people in the city of Greenville South Carolina as a pastor of the Triune Mercy Center.

When she began her position of pastor of the center she did so with three rules planted in her mind by the former pastor. The three rules were, "Never give money. Never give cigarettes. Never give rides." Shortly after the first message she preached at the center she violated the first two rules...she gave money and her husband gave a ride to someone who appeared to be in real dire need of assistance It turned out that he was a scam artist. She would learn in her years of ministry as she shares in her sometimes heart-wrenching, sometimes provocative, but never boring book that there are a lot of professional scam artists out there in the

world and there is a right way and a wrong way to minister to them.

Her experiences as a pastor have been a real spiritual eye opener to her and are the same for us who read the book because most of us live in nice homes with money in our pocket, food to eat and someone to love us.

In her book you will read about everything from alcoholism and its devastating effect in people's lives, to prostitution and how that so demoralizes a woman that she loses all self respect and usually any sense of respect for others and about crimes committed at the church - break ins and robberies. But through it all Pastor Moore has kept on keeping on in her thankless ministry serving those who need ministry the most - loving those who society sees as unlovely and who feel unloved.

She writes about preaching to and praying for people living in a community where violence, abuse, rape, neglect, and the total dehumanization of people was an every day occurrence. And she did not and has not quit. I wonder how many men would endure what she has and stick it out for as long as she has at the Center?

And I really like the story she shares at the end of her book about a man named Kent who was trying to find his daughter. So, he ends up at the Triune Mercy Center meeting Pastor Moore. She took him up to her office and used her computer - looking for his daughter on Facebook and ultimately finding her. And father and daughter were reunited once again as a result. But what is touching is what Kent said to Pastor Moore...that she trusted him enough to take him alone up to her office...that she was not afraid. And she writes about her reason for not living in fear - it was a lesson she had learned from her father...and that was "that fear should never rule our lives." She writes, "What a simple thing, I now recognized. I was able to help another dad connect with his daughter because my dad taught me to live unafraid." And that is how she has lived and still lives today...with faith in God and no fear of man or what might happen to her when she is ministering to someone in need.

I am reminded of the Scripture found in I John 4:18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." I realize that Scripture refers to our relationship with God and His Son and that because we are in Christ we need not fear because we are fully loved and accepted in Him (Christ) and need not fear "punishment" from God. But it is also possible to live out a perfected or a complete love that flows out of our relationship with the Lord and is enabled by the Holy Spirit causing us to fear no one or nothing; but rather, to "boldly go where no man has gone before," and minister to people facing the hardest of life's circumstances in the most dangerous and potentially deadly of places. And that is what the love of Christ has constrained Pastor Moore to do and should also compel us to do.

I give this book a "Rave" review deeming it worthy of reading for in the reading of it you will learn about what it means to serve the least and truly love the unloved in our society.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Kregel Publications for the purpose of reviewing it. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."
