

Many Have been Feeling the Economic Crisis for a Long Time

Siobhain Kemblowski

Many working people struggle to survive on what they earn. When I visited an ABE class for members of 1199SEIU who are employees at the University of Rochester Medical Center, many of them said that they were suffering an “economic crisis” long before Wall Street crashed. “We have been working hard for many years to make ends meet,” said the health care workers. “But no one called it a ‘crisis’ until the ‘crisis’ hit Wall Street.”

There is so much pressure in this country to “keep up with the Joneses,” they explained. Not only do they have to pay for necessities (like rent, food, utilities, and health care), they also have to buy expensive video games and sneakers. Their children say they are embarrassed not to have these things because “all the other children have them.” This group of health care workers said they don’t buy their children everything they want.

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When they say no to certain purchases, they believe they “are doing the right thing, even if it’s the harder thing to do.”

When I asked them about the economic crisis, most of the students expressed feelings of powerlessness over

our current economic situation. But there was a general sense that going back to our roots and enjoying the simple pleasures in life, wise spending, good parenting, and prayer were the best solutions to our nation’s economic problems.

Siobhain Kemblowski works with the 1199SEIU League Training and Upgrading Fund in Rochester, NY.



From Left: Rosemary Colon, Marianela Rivas, Ray Marks (Instructor) Gary Evelyn, Mariama Charm, Hattie Morgan. All five of the students are working parents, age 27-61. They attend class to improve reading and math skills, earn a GED, and/or prepare for college.

Here are ten ways that these students are responding to the economic crisis:

1. Prayer
2. Teaching their children respect and good values
3. Teaching their children to save
4. Paying attention to their credit scores
5. Building retirement savings
6. Buying only the things they need, not buying all the things they want
7. Setting a good example for their children by pursuing an education and a better life
8. Working hard
9. Appreciating the simple things in life
10. Talking to their children about the importance of being responsible