

In the heart of Minneapolis is a place that many hungry people go to for food, and where many have also assisted, Saint Stephen's Shelter. The shelter provides temporary housing, and an army of volunteers helps keep it going, much like Sharing and Caring Hands.

For years, among the people who would help there was Cathy Heying, but these days she spends more running a small, non-profit auto service to help low income people have the means to get to work and do their shopping. The thing of it is, it was something she never planned to do at all; rather it was part of surrendering herself to the plans of God.

In her own words, she says you'd think someone who had spent the past 20 years in ministry, who felt called by Matthew 25:40 to serve the most vulnerable, would have no issues trusting God. But the minute she stepped into that cavernous garage one day in June a few years back, she questioned where she was being led. What the heck am I doing here? she asked herself.

Lifts ran down one side of the space. Tools and auto parts hung from the walls, spilled out of cabinets. The air smelled of engine oil and axle grease. The room was a cacophony of male voices. Nothing like the quiet church she was used to working in.

Cathy walked toward the source of the noise, a knot of young men half her age—18, 19 years old. Suddenly everything went quiet. Some 20 pairs of eyes stared at her. "I'm Cathy Heying," she said. "Here to start automotive school."

The burly instructor, Dave DuVal, said, "Join us, Heying!" It was more of an order than a welcome. "First, pair off into lab partners," Mr. DuVal barked like a drill sergeant. "You'll be working together for the next two years."

Two years! She wondered, was I really committing myself for that long? Her mind flew to how she'd ended up here at Dunwoody College of Technology at age 38. Maybe she'd find reassurance in the memory she thought to herself.

Cathy says she had always been sensitive to people's struggles. She got a degree in social work, with a minor in religious studies. Then a master's in pastoral ministry. It seemed natural to work in a church. She started as a youth and young adult minister, then became director of social justice outreach at St. Stephen's in Minneapolis. A job she loved. Nine years of engaging the parishioners on systemic issues that keep people in poverty and reinforce racism.

St. Stephen's actively worked to answer the Gospel question: "When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or a stranger in need?" The neighbors came with their requests. Most memorable to Cathy were the attachments people had to their cars.

They would tell her, "I need my car to get to my job in the suburbs." Or a doctor's appointment. A relative they cared for. Their vehicle was a place to keep their few

possessions, a place to be during the day—or to sleep in at night if they couldn't get a bed at the shelter. Their car was safety and home.

Cathy was ready to offer a shelter bed, a meal from the meal program or access to free clothes, but she had nothing to help with car repairs or maintenance.

Someone should take this on, she thought. She called other social service agencies looking for a place she could refer these clients to. No group—no one—in all of Minneapolis could help. She certainly couldn't. She didn't know a thing about cars. She'd never even changed a tire.

People kept coming into St. Stephen's asking for help with car repairs. God, this is obviously an urgent need, she prayed time and again. Please find someone to step up and do something about it. She listened for his still, small voice. Looked for signs. Finally she heard what she didn't want to acknowledge. God wanted her to take this on.

Cathy had the germ of an idea. What if I opened a nonprofit auto garage that offered affordable repairs she thought. Okay, but who would do the repairs? God's answer was the same.

So now she found herself at Dunwoody College of Technology in the spring of 2008 to ask about its automotive program. She met Mr. DuVal and told him about her idea of starting a garage to serve low-income folks. He nodded and said gruffly, "The program's almost full. If you're serious, I need your application tomorrow."

The cost for the two-year program was some \$40,000. Though she was still paying off student loans from grad school, she knew she had to try to make her idea a reality. She felt she was being called.

All her good intentions didn't mean a thing in the Dunwoody garage on the first day of automotive school. She could tell by the way her teenage classmates tossed around terms like torque and power train that they were gearheads, guys who were totally into how cars worked. She was a middle-aged woman, a social worker and minister with zero mechanical inclination. She was all about feelings, emotional connections. She couldn't have been more out of place.

No surprise that none of the guys rushed to be her lab partner. She ended up paired with a young man who was too shy to look up from his shoes.

"Everyone, line up facing the wall with the crankshafts," Mr. DuVal said. Cathy's gaze roamed over the engine parts that covered the walls. Any of them could be a crankshaft for all she knew. Her only recourse was to watch her classmates and copy what they did.

Come on, Cathy. She gave myself a pep talk. You're a quick learner. You earned a master's. How hard can this be?

Harder than anything she'd ever done, as it turned out. Automotive school kicked her butt. Every word out of Mr. DuVal's mouth sounded foreign. Pistons. Manifolds. Gudgeon pins. She couldn't connect what she read and reread in the textbook to the cars in lab. She felt uncoordinated, humiliated and inadequate—every single day. The barrage of testosterone-fueled talk, banging tools and rapid-fire instructions threw her off. She studied late into the night while dreading the next morning's class.

Halfway through the semester, they were assigned to flare brake lines, using a tool to cut the end of the tube that carries fluid to the brakes so that it maintains a tight connection. No matter how hard she tried, I couldn't do it.

"Heying, what's taking so long?" Mr. DuVal yelled from across the room. Her hands were shaking so badly, she couldn't hold the tubing steady. Tears of frustration streamed down my cheeks. Her lab partner seemed embarrassed for her. At the end of class, the other students trooped out. Cathy went to Mr. DuVal. "My brain doesn't work this way," she said. "I'm quitting." She was still working part-time at St. Stephen's. God would have to find someone else. Mr. DuVal though, and God, had other plans.

Mr. DuVal glared at her. "Heying, I'm not going to let you quit!" he said, his voice rising.

"I believe in you. I believe in your vision. You can do this. And I'll be there to help you every step of the way. I'm going to watch you walk across that stage as a graduate in two years. Now get over there and flare those brake lines."

Cathy says it felt as if she'd been dropped into one of those inspirational movies with the tough-as-nails coach leading his hapless team to the championship. Except there was no rousing soundtrack. No teammates lifting me up. Just Mr. DuVal. And the knowledge that there was no way out but through.

She trudged back to her workstation. Tried again. And again. On the fourth try, she flared those brake lines. "You'll get there, Heying!" Mr. DuVal said.

Eighteen months and many more tears and after-class sessions with Mr. DuVal later, she graduated in June 2010. There was still so much to learn. She worked mornings at St. Stephen's and got an afternoon job at a Sears service center to keep up her tech skills.

Making connections with anyone who'd listen to her vision, she found a business mentor and wrote a detailed four-year plan for opening her garage, including fundraising and marketing, forming a nonprofit board, dealing with the legal paperwork, searching for a location.

The summer of 2012, she launched a nonprofit called The Lift Garage. Dave DuVal was one of the first board members. Not long afterward, one of her connections called. An

auto shop owner, she was struggling financially and needed some rental income. “I think you should lease one bay from me,” she said.

Cathy laughed. “I don’t have the funding, the tools, the mechanics, nothing.”

A few months later, she called back. Again, she said no. In January 2013, she called a third time. “I really feel like you need to do this,” she said.

Cathy was about to tell her she was nowhere near ready, but something in her tone gave her pause.

In that moment, she heard another voice. Not the still, small voice she’d always tried to listen for, but a loud and demanding one. Honestly, she says, it sounded a lot like Mr. DuVal. Heying! I’m opening the door here. You need to step through!

It was time to let go and let God, she knew.

She went to her board. “I know this is crazy,” she said. “We’re not ready, but I think we need to do this.” The board agreed, and they signed the lease. The first thing they’d need was insurance. Thirteen companies rejected them before they got coverage at a very high cost.

For the next year, The Lift Garage operated out of the single bay one day a week. When she wasn’t doing repair work, she was writing grant proposals and fundraising letters. Almost immediately, she had a full schedule of customers, people who shared the same stories she’d heard at St. Stephen’s. This time, however, she could offer help.

One day, a woman named Kelly came to the garage, hoping she could get her car running again. When she told her she needed a new starter and the charge would be \$100, she burst into tears of relief. She told her that she was in an abusive relationship. “I’ve been trying to save enough money to get my car fixed so I could leave,” she said. “I don’t know how to thank you!”

Seeing how a simple repair would change Kelly’s life was thanks enough.

Today The Lift Garage employs five full-time mechanics and three service writers, doing about 120 repairs a month. By charging for parts at cost and only \$15 an hour for labor, their bills are about 75 percent less than what a for-profit shop would charge. They’ve saved low-income Minnesotans more than two million dollars in car repairs.

There’s always more demand than they can meet. She hears from people across the country who want to follow in their footsteps. Cathy says she could never have pictured any of this happening. But as she closes, Good thing God has a much better imagination.

Indeed he does. And what plans God has for us.

On our part, we have to be open to these plans, remembering that for all we plan for, sometimes things change and that is a good thing. So how can we on our part be like Cathy knowing that when we let go and let God, good things happen?

Jesus knew that planning was important. But if we obsess over it, or it has undue anxiety, it can prevent us from living truly. As our Lord says in Matthew 6: 28-29,31:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these... Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear?

Our Gospel this week gives us a little more insight too into the pros and cons of planning.

Some speak about how the Temple was adorned; Jesus though says the days are coming when there will not be one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down.

The Temple went through meticulous planning. In 20 BC, Herod started a project to rebuild and extend and embellish the Temple. The first one was destroyed by the Babylonians. Herod oversaw much work on it, and it was a ton of planning.

They assumed this Temple would last for hundreds maybe thousands of years. But it doesn't quite work out that way. The Romans destroy it in 70 AD; all that remains is the Western Wall or the "wailing" wall to this day.

With this, Jesus also warns nations will rise against one another and there will be earthquakes and famines and pestilence. Also these things happened too; the Jewish people rose up, and the Romans killed many and caused crops to be burned and the people to be dispersed. There were also persecutions of the early Christians.

So one could take this Gospel and think that Jesus is speaking to his audience and helping them plan for future events that he foresaw but they did not; plan for these troubled times. But rather Jesus has a message that we can plan as much as we like, and it can be a good plan, but much like Cathy, we have to be prepared for the plans to change; life throws us different things and takes us in unexpected places.

Something to consider is how to be open to this so we can truly live life to the fullest, and work with God to make this a better world. For indeed the end times are coming - and we hear much of them in our readings this time of year - but we are not called to wait around for that moment; rather we are called to be engaged in the world as a people of hope like Cathy.

For one, we open up our hearts to God. Being prepared means having a friendship with our God; listening to Him. Not being stubborn and having tunnel vision, but knowing that

God is a God of surprises; and sometimes we may think this is what I need to do or where I need to go, and God says not so fast, I want you to do this. It means listening and having times for silence and meditation, so we can like Jesus say not my will, but your will be done.

Second, it means listening to others too. How do we know what God's will is? For Cathy she certainly is a woman of prayer, and as she says in her story she could hear God saying I want you to take this on and open a garage, but she also heard it in the voices of the people in need. She heard it in her teacher who said I'm not going to let you quit. Maybe people are telling us something like you'd be really good at this, take a chance; or don't be afraid, take that leap. Or perhaps they are saying you need to work harder and believe in yourself. When we listen to these voices, we'll be able to do what God wants us to do.

Third, we persevere. As Paul says to the Thessalonians "in toil and drudgery, night and day, we worked." It's not easy; Cathy worked two long years at Dunwoody, knowing nothing about cars. But she got there. Whatever we do with God, we too have to work hard. There will be setbacks; there will be frustrations. But whether you are raising kids, starting a new job, or a new volunteer, we have to keep our eyes fixed on the end goal, which will be so good for ourselves and one another if only we keep at it.

As I shared at Mass the other day, life can be hard and frustrating. And as we hear these readings this time of year that focus on the end times, perhaps part of us may think yeah, it's pretty bad out there come back Jesus. But remember, when He ascended, it was a pretty rough world. All that he predicted happened with much suffering; but the apostles never gave up, because they had a job to do. So do we. And that job isn't sitting around complaining or waiting, but to go out and change this world for the better, something Cathy does through living out her faith, and something we can do too. So let us be open to trusting the Spirit and the plans God has for us, knowing that when we surrender to His will, we can do so much to change this world for the better; a world we aren't called to escape from, but a world we are called to set afire with the love of God. So, let go, let God, and never forget what amazing things happen when we work together with Him.