Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ’s love.


Why Not Be a Beggar?

By Chuck Harris and Diana George

Blaming poor and homeless people for economic problems is nothing new for Atlanta. Recent history has witnessed the demolition of poor and working class neighborhoods – especially African American neighborhoods – to build sports stadiums, shopping malls, and interstate highways. In the 1990s, even more low cost housing was destroyed to make way for Olympic gold.

More recently, long-vacant lots have been excavated to build high-priced townhouses. Modest homes, that when new cost $15,000-$20,000, now sell for $200,000+. Decent houses have been torn down to build suburban style McMansions. Old factories and warehouses have been remodeled as upscale lofts for those who have grown tired of the commute. None of those destroyed neighborhoods were rebuilt, little of that lower-cost or mid-priced housing has been replaced, and now even more low-income housing projects are being demolished.

A number of our friends from the streets who come to the Open Door breakfast and soup kitchen grew up in the neighborhoods lost in all of that “progress.”

This winter The Atlanta Journal-Constitution carried a story about a couple who, in the wave of what the reporter called a new urban “trend,” bought a 3,000 square foot loft to use primarily on weekends when they attend cultural events in the city or during the week when they are just too tired to drive home after a late day at work. The couple’s primary residence is a 10,000 square foot house in Roswell. (In the 1960s, an average-sized family home ran about 1000 square feet.) The real trend in this city is clear: Destroy affordable housing to make way for city shoppers, then arrest the homeless for living in the streets.

Atlanta has a lot of homeless people – up to 20,000 by some estimates – and so last winter, Mayor Shirley Franklin appointed a commission to study the problem of homelessness. The commission is made up of lawyers, bankers, and a municipal court judge infamous for handing out a lot of jail time to street folk for violating “quality of life” ordinances. There are no homeless people on the commission. There is no one from Food Not Bombs, God’s Favorite People, The Open Door, or other organizations feeding, living among, and working with people from the streets. In Don’t Come Back, continued on page 10

Thoughts on Atlanta’s Plan for (Booting) the Homeless (Out)

God wants us to be our sister’s and brother’s keeper. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to instruct the ignorant, at a personal sacrifice, is what God wants us to do. What we give to the poor for Christ’s sake is what we carry with us when we die. As Jean Jacques Rousseau says: “When you die you carry in your clutched hands only that which you have given away.”

People who are in need and are not afraid to beg give to people not in need the occasion to do good for goodness’ sake. Modern society calls the beggar bum and panhandler and gives her the bum’s rush. The Greeks used to say that people in need are the ambassadors of the gods. We read in the Gospel: “As long as you did it to one of the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it to me.” While modern society calls the beggars bums and panhandlers, they are in fact the Ambassadors of God. To be God’s Ambassador is something to be proud of.

–from Peter Maurin’s Easy Essays (adapted for inclusive language)
By Elizabeth Dede

It is a rare experience in the Americus, GA, city court to observe defendants being represented by attorneys. Almost everyone waives his or her right to an attorney, so I had the unusual experience recently of watching as three separate defendants were represented by lawyers.

Each case was a DUI offense, which carries a sentence of jail time, and in Americus city court the possibility of jail time means that the right to appointed counsel attaches to the case. In these cases, though, the defendants had hired their own attorneys. All three were young white men. The city’s attorney was present to deliver the facts of the case. In each circumstance, a negotiated plea was offered. In two cases, the charge of DUI was reduced to reckless driving, a lesser offense. In the third case, the charge of DUI was not prosecuted. All three defendants were given small fines and their cases were concluded.

Soon after these three cases were heard, an African American man’s case was called. He, too, was charged with DUI. However, he had not hired an attorney, and chose to proceed without an appointed lawyer. The police officer reported the incident and the charge. The man was found guilty of DUI, given a fine of $500, and sentenced to 40 hours of community service.

What I observed was a huge discrepancy in sentences based on the defendant’s ability to hire an attorney. I don’t know why the fourth defendant chose to waive his right to an appointed lawyer. Usually in such cases the defendant simply wants to put an end to the case as quickly as possible. Perhaps he saw the judge’s behavior toward the defendant who could not pay their fines as a sentencer. Instead, defendants who cannot pay their fines are given a sentence with “supervision” by the probation department. Thus, the vast majority of defendants go up against the power and authority of the judge and the police without the benefit of trained and experienced representation.

In court on that day, after the widely divergent sentences were given, the tension in the courtroom was palpable. With the room filled with African American people and only a handful of whites, the racism of our criminal justice system was all too apparent. When the judge gives out such a harsh sentence to an African American man after being lenient to three white men, the prejudice is obvious to everyone.

We need affirmative action in the courtroom. The playing field needs to be leveled so that all people will be treated with justice. The right to an attorney must be respected.

Elizabeth Dede works with The Prison & Jail Project in Americus, GA.

Reason #4 to Oppose the Death Penalty

The Death Penalty is Not a Deterrent to Violent Crime

An FBI study shows that states which have abolished the death penalty averaged lower crime rates than states which have not.

More executions, more murders

Texas moved from its first execution after Furman in 1982 to becoming the national leader in the use of the death penalty. During the same period, the state also experienced a tremendous growth in its violent crime rate. From 1982 to 1991, the national crime rate rose by 5%. In the same period, the Texas crime rate rose by 24%, and the violent crime rate in Texas rose by nearly 46%. In Texas, more people die from gunshot wounds than traffic accidents.

A strong case can be made that, rather than decreasing murder, capital punishment actually has a brutalizing effect on society, contributing to an increase in murder.

In the coming months, look for a fifth reason to join the movement to abolish the death penalty. Above text reprinted from Campaign the End the Death Penalty, www.nodeathpenalty.org.

The Importance of Being Represented

By Elizabeth Dede

It is a rare experience in the Americus, GA, city court to observe defendants being represented by attorneys. Almost everyone waives his or her right to an attorney, so I had the unusual experience recently of watching as three separate defendants were represented by lawyers.

Each case was a DUI offense, which carries a sentence of jail time, and in Americus city court the possibility of jail time means that the right to appointed counsel attaches to the case. In these cases, though, the defendants had hired their own attorneys. All three were young white men. The city’s attorney was present to deliver the facts of the case. In each circumstance, a negotiated plea was offered. In two cases, the charge of DUI was reduced to reckless driving, a lesser offense. In the third case, the charge of DUI was not prosecuted. All three defendants were given small fines and their cases were concluded.

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What I observed was a huge discrepancy in sentences based on the defendant’s ability to hire an attorney. I don’t know why the fourth defendant chose to waive his right to an appointed lawyer. Usually in such cases the defendant simply wants to put an end to the case as quickly as possible. Perhaps he saw the judge’s behavior toward the three previous defendants and thought that the judge would be lenient with him as well.

At the Prison & Jail Project, we believe that all defendants deserve the right to an appointed attorney if they cannot afford to hire one. Some city courts throughout southwest Georgia are setting up a public defender in court. As evidenced by my experience in Americus city court, an attorney is able to enter into negotiations to win a lesser charge for a defendant. On their own, defendants have no power or authority to do this.

Unfortunately, the judge and authorities in the city court of Americus have chosen to skirt the Constitution by claiming that the right to a court-appointed attorney only attaches to cases which will result in a jail term. The judge for the city of Americus does not even sentence defendants to probation because a probation violation would result in a jail term. Instead, defendants who cannot pay their fines are given a sentence with “supervision” by the probation department. Thus, the vast majority of defendants go up against the power and authority of the judge and the police without the benefit of trained and experienced representation.

In court on that day, after the widely divergent sentences were given, the tension in the courtroom was palpable. With the room filled with African American people and only a handful of whites, the racism of our criminal justice system was all too apparent. When the judge gives out such a harsh sentence to an African American man after being lenient to three white men, the prejudice is obvious to everyone.

We need affirmative action in the courtroom. The playing field needs to be leveled so that all people will be treated with justice. The right to an attorney must be respected.

Elizabeth Dede works with The Prison & Jail Project in Americus, GA.
Dear Friends,

Our friend Father Daniel Berrigan often says, “If we can, we must, and if we must, we can.” In these violent, war-torn days abroad and at home, it has never been more clear that Dan’s call to action is a matter of life and death. This year, our actions for peace and for the poor have cost us some support -- but many more have joined our struggle. There is a growing hunger for the Beloved Community, and we will continue to respond to Dr. Martin Luther King’s imperative.

In the midst of these serious times, life together in this diverse community is a joy to our hearts. We share good stories and laughter at the supper table. The soup is delicious and the iced tea is sweet. Music seems to flow out of everyone at Sunday worship, when the whole room rocks with song. These are marvelous, holy days, and we are blessed to be here, together with friends and kindred spirits all over the world.

We continue to be transformed by people who join us from the streets, as well as people who turn their backs on money and privilege to embrace community life. Year after year, we re-learn anew what Dorothy Day insisted: The only solution is love, and love comes with community.

We at the Open Door Community are beggars. It is only the generosity of friends and strangers that makes our ministry, work, and life together possible. Your gifts are a blessing to us, showing us once again how overflowing is God’s love. We are grateful. We hope and pray that the work of our community will be, like your kindness, a sign of God’s abundant love.

In solidarity and love,
Finding a Home for Rick

By Heather Bargeron

It had been a typically slow Friday morning on house duty. The community has recently categorized the Friday a.m. house duty rotation as "house sitting" because the Open Door is closed for services to the homeless on Fridays, and ostensibly the only real requirements of the person on house duty are to answer the phone, receive donations, and make sure that the house doesn’t burn down. But just because our door is closed doesn’t mean that the suffering of the poor and homeless ceases, and this particular morning that reality would hit me harder than usual.

At about 11:30 a.m. there was a knock at the front door that changed the course of that Friday dramatically. When I opened the door, I was met by a man who said, with a thick foreign accent, “I have brought a man here to stay.” My first thought was that some guest had arrived whom I had forgotten about or who was not on the weekly schedule. To some extent, that was true.

I followed the man out the door to his vehicle, which I quickly realized was a taxi. He opened the back door and helped a man who was clearly disabled out of the car. The man had a walker, but he struggled to stand or walk even with this apparatus. I stood watching in silence as the two men discussed the fare for the cab ride. The driver told the other man that it would only be $20, but the man insisted on giving him $30.

The driver left, and I asked the man his name and what I could do for him. He told me his name was Rick, and he had stayed in a hotel the night before somewhere in the suburbs of Atlanta. He had visited a Catholic church, and they had told him he could come to the Open Door for housing. He had just arrived in town the day before from Maryland where, as he explained, he had become too much of a burden on his children, who had families of their own. So he came to Atlanta seeking a new life. He had $450 on him. He was willing to work and to pay rent.

A wave of familiar rage swept over me. This was not the first time that a person in need of shelter had been referred to The Open Door by someone who either did not know or did not care that The Open Door is not a shelter. But this was the first time that I had encountered a person who clearly did not have the means or the will to pay for shelter. It was clear that I would have to do the legwork for him. I was angry at the person at the Catholic church who had referred him to The Open Door. And (by way of confession) I was angry at this man standing in front of me because I had no idea how to help.

I explained with futility that The Open Door is not a shelter, and I apologized for the fact that he was given incorrect information. This was all irrelevant, of course. Rick still needed housing. So I asked him to wait for a bit while I went inside to make some phone calls. Surely someone in this city would take him in.

I didn’t know where to start. I could send him down the road to the Clermont or the Ponce Hotel, but he would only be able to stay a week or two on $450. Plus he would need to pay for food, and when he couldn’t make ends meet, he would be back on the street. The only two shelters in Atlanta that I know of where one can enter without a formal referral are the Atlanta Union Mission and the Task Force for the Homeless’ Pine Street Shelter. I have visited both of those facilities and, given the living conditions, I would not recommend them to any person, much less a person with a disability.

Tonnie King suggested that I call the Clifton Presbyterian Church shelter, the shelter out of which The Open Door was born. They have been helpful in the past by taking people in for a short term without too much red tape. They told me that they were already one over their bed capacity for that night. I was frustrated, but I empathized with the constant pressure to “just serve one more.”

Surely someone else would take Rick in. I called the Salvation Army shelter. They were full. I tried to call the Task Force’s hotline just to see if they had any suggestions, but I was put on hold for so long that I finally got aggravated and hung up. I called Welcome House, a place that offers low rent apartments to people with disabilities. The woman there told me that they may have a space for him, but he would have to go through an application process, and it might be a week or more before he would even know if he were approved or not. What was he supposed to do in the meantime? She suggested that I call the Midtown Assistance Center.

Surely they would have a space for Rick. They didn’t, but they did give me the name and direct number of a woman at Crossroads Ministry who might be able to work something out for a disabled person. After an hour of “no,” I was so grateful just to have a person’s name. The woman at Crossroads was very sympathetic and helpful. She knew the owner of a boarding house for people with disabilities. She told me that she would have him call me within the next five minutes. He called and explained that he had a room available for $350 per month including three meals a day. He asked me a few questions about Rick’s condition, and then he agreed to pick Rick up in the next hour. I was ecstatic, and I brought Rick into our living room to wait. After three hours (during which I agonized over whether or not this guy was really going to show or if I would start this whole process all over again), he arrived and Rick left, attempting to pay me for my trouble on his way out the door.

I learned more that day about the housing crisis in Atlanta than I have in the past 18 months of living at the Open Door – because this time I was making the phone calls, getting turned away, waiting on hold for hours, and being asked for a referral or application that would be processed weeks from now. It is quite literally enough to drive a person to drink. And I’m sure that my phone calls were more well-received than those of any homeless person – not because people working in all of the various shelters and homeless ministries around the city do not want to help, but because they are simply overwhelmed by the need for housing as I was on this Friday afternoon.

Yes, homeless people need rehab programs. Yes, they need job assistance programs. Yes, they need temporary shelters. But on Friday Rick needed a home, and he’s not the only one.

Heather Bargeron is a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community.
Sticks and Stones
Language that Kills

By Diana George

Crackheads
Dealers
Beggars
Aggressive Panhandlers
Nut Cases
Con Artists
Bums
Drunks
Thieves
Perverts
Lazy Artists
Vagrants
The Un-housed
The Homeless

When we were kids, our parents taught us not to call each other names, and when others called us names, we were supposed to shake it off: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” That’s what my mother taught, anyway. And, though I continue to think that she was one of the wisest people I will ever know, I am quite sure Mom was wrong on that one.

Words do hurt us. They are, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson wrote over twenty years ago, the metaphors we live by. When we write about homeless men and women, calling them crackheads, beggars, panhandlers, vagrants, or worse, we aren’t just describing people or their activities; we are setting all of the homeless into a category that we have already figured out.

For some time now, Central Atlanta Progress, Atlanta Journal-Constitution columnist Colin Campbell, The Atlanta Neighborhood Association, Mayor Shirley Franklin, and others hoping to make downtown Atlanta a pleasant place to be have been calling names. They have been talking about “cleaning up” downtown and “making sweeps” through the city parks. They have warned “righteous do-gooders” to keep quiet and let the authorities “Do Downtown.” And, for some time now, Atlantans have read and listened to that language just barely aware of its power to shape our responses to the people who live in our streets.

Last Wednesday, as some of us from The Open Door walked through Woodruff Park passing out leaflets and talking to people in the park, one of our group crossed over to Sun Trust Plaza and approached a neatly dressed, attractive young woman who told him not to bother to talk to her about homeless people. “I don’t care what they do with them,” she said. “Get rid of them all. I don’t care if they kill them all. I want them out.”

“I don’t care if they kill them all.” Could she really have said that? Yes. She did say that.

So, who is it she wants out of her sight – even if it means killing “them all”? What language shapes her thinking when she sees across from her concrete bench in Sun Trust Plaza to the people sitting on Woodruff Park benches waiting for a sandwich from the “righteous do-gooders” whom Mayor Franklin also wants to keep out of the parks?

The language we hear from the Journal-Constitution, from Central Atlanta Progress, from the Mayor’s office is language that depicts all homeless men and women as waste. And, quite naturally, it is the city’s business to “clean up” waste.

When police entered the Pine Street Shelter a few weeks ago and offered anybody who’d agree to stay away for five years a free one-way ticket out of town, that was an action prompted by the metaphors we live by. Sweep this town clean of the waste of vagrants and crackheads and lazy bums. Get them out of our sight. Send them somewhere else and let someone else deal with it.

When Colin Campbell supports the proposal of a new multi-million-dollar park to connect mid-town Atlanta to downtown Atlanta, he describes the “two acres of graffiti-covered parking lots, and the troubled shelter for the homeless at Peachtree and Pine” as “reminders that the city’s core still needs help.” It is here that this new stretch of green would be developed.

And where would the shelter go? I suppose it would just be greened over.

And where would the people in it go? Well, if they didn’t take their one-way ticket out of town, I suppose they’ll be walking the streets looking for help.

Where the homeless go doesn’t seem to matter in all of this language because, after all, they are the vagrants, the dealers, the thieves, the drunks, the waste. Surely no one with a job is homeless.

Surely no one free of an addiction is homeless.

“This is America,” a Georgia State student said to me last Wednesday. “You can work and be successful in America. These people are just lazyasses.” I reminded him that a lot of homeless people do have jobs that don’t even pay them enough to keep a room. His response: “Then get another job.”

Several weeks ago, I listened to a homeless woman talk to a group gathered along the steps of City Hall. She said, “I’m homeless. Do you know anything about me? You just call me HOMELESS. What is homeless? I had a job. It got cut. I work when I can and where I can and I can’t afford a place. What do you know about me?”

That woman spoke more profoundly and truthfully about “the homeless” than anyone in any position of power in this city I have heard thus far. So, who are the homeless?

Mothers
Fathers
Sisters
Brothers
Aunts
Uncles
Short order cooks
Maids
Housekeepers
Lift builders
Dishwashers
Waiters
Day laborers
Temps
Keyboardists
Workers
People who need homes
God’s people

Diana George, Professor of Humanities at Michigan Technological University, is a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community.

Welcome to the Spotlight
First Presbyterian Church of Milledgeville

By Tonnie King

The Hardwick Prison Trip happens the third Saturday of each month with the help of many local churches and many, many friends. We gather family members and provide transportation for them to visit their loved ones in prison. After the two-hour trip to Milledgeville, we all need some lunch and refreshment. This is where our friends at First Presbyterian Church of Milledgeville come in! For twenty years, they have been opening up their church and offering us warm hospitality and a wonderful lunch.

I would like to introduce just a few of the people from this loving congregation. I wish I could have taken a picture of each and every one of them. On behalf of all who have partaken of the love shared within this congregation, thank you.

Tonnie King is a Partner at the Open Door Community.
Paul: On Saying Yes and Saying No

By Peter Gathje

(Editors note: On August 3, 2003, Pete Gathje delivered the following sermon at Open Door worship. Pete, a professor at the Christian Brothers University in Memphis, TN, was a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community this past summer.)

Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus, Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen” to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment. (2 Corinthians 1:17b-22)

I came to dwell upon this passage from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians as I reflected on my life at the Open Door this summer. Paul’s opening question from this letter seemed to raise an issue I’ve struggled with here, and some of us in the community have discussed from time to time. “Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’ at the same time?” Paul’s question emerged from the on-again off-again relationship he had with the church in Corinth. The relationship between Paul and the members of this church was sometimes warm and friendly, and sometimes confrontational or angry. It was a relationship that was sometimes “yes” and sometimes “no.”

In this specific instance, Paul had changed his travel plans. He had said to the church in Corinth, “Yes, I’m coming to visit you” and then he had said “No, I’m not coming to see you.” So, once again Paul seemed to confirm what members of the church at Corinth believed about Paul. He was saying, “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time.

Thus Paul was trying to address the criticism that there were contradictions between what he said and what he did. Was he a person who talked out of both sides of his mouth, saying “yes” or “no” according to the convenience of ordinary human standards? Did his words reflect his own preferences rather than a consistent commitment to practice the faith of Jesus Christ? I’ve heard similar questions while I’ve lived here at the Open Door. Like Paul, those of us at the Open Door sometimes say “yes” and sometimes “no.” We say “yes” to serving breakfast or the soup kitchen, or offering showers or clothes, or meeting other needs on certain days and at certain times. But on other days and at other times we say “no.” And the direct responsibility for saying “no” largely falls on the person who is “working the door” or is on “house duty.”

So this summer besides often saying “yes,” I have sometimes said “no.” “No, I can’t let you in because we’re done serving soup kitchen.” “No, I can’t give you a sandwich now because we give those out at 7:00 p.m.”

Are these “no’s” according to ordinary human standards—just our preferences for when we want to say “yes” or “no”? For those of you who hear these “no’s” it may seem like we’re arbitrary in setting days and times for which the Open Door is open or closed and says “yes” or “no” to your needs. I’m not surprised that, sometimes when I say “no,” I get an angry response or questions related to Paul’s question: “Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’ at the same time?”

People who hear the “no’s” point to contradictions in our lives here: “Why is the Open Door closed?” “Isn’t this supposed to be a place where you serve people?” “I know you’ve got food in there, why won’t you give me a sandwich?”

“Why won’t you let me in?” “This is the third time I’ve missed getting on the list for showers. Can’t you just add one more?” “All I want is a t-shirt. Is that too much to ask?” “You aren’t much of a Christian, are you?”

These questions are sometimes laced with a few well-chosen swear words, making hard questions all the more difficult to hear. And no matter how many times I had to say it, I never relished having to say “no.” What I’ve come to realize is that just as with Paul’s situation, the questions or anger directed toward me or other community members comes out of our alternating between “yes” and “no.”

If we at the Open Door always said “yes,” no one would ever point to contradictions and so question our commitment or our consistency. Yet, if we always said “no” we wouldn’t be here. But because we say “yes” and we say “no,” Paul’s question lingers for us who live or volunteer here. “Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’ at the same time?” What does it mean for our lives of Christian discipleship, to say “no” while also saying “yes”?

How might Paul’s relationship with and what he wrote to the church at Corinth help us ponder those questions and seek response to them in our lives of faith? Let me suggest at this point that Paul’s “no’s” to the church in Corinth reflected two elements in his relationship with that church. I’ll discuss a third type of “no” later.

First, his “no” reflected his human limitations. Paul was a limited human being. He couldn’t do everything. He didn’t know everything. He couldn’t be everywhere at once. His travel plans could change due to weather, or unforeseen events like imprisonment or sickness, or because other needs arose to which he had to attend.

Second, Paul’s “no” reflected his sin and that of his society. Paul, like other human beings, was a sinner. Paul wasn’t perfect. He could be short-tempered, self-centered, self-important, and dismissive of others’ concerns. Too, Paul shared in many of the sinful cultural assumptions of his society and struggled with them. Sometimes he, like other human beings, was complicit in the sin of his society.

Like Paul, many of our “no’s” here simply express our human limitations. It is humanly impossible for us to always be open and serving. We need Sabbath. We need rest. We need time for prayer. We need time to relax and to sleep. If we didn’t accept and live within these human limitations, we could not for very long meet any of the needs of the people who come to our door.

But like Paul, beyond our being limited as human beings, some of our “no’s” also reflect our sin. Sometimes we say “no” when we should have said “yes.” We make errors in judgment because our anger or fear, or our own hurt, blur our moral vision. Sometimes we might say “no” because in our pride we tried to deny our human limitations and now just can’t face another person’s need. Sometimes we become... continued on page 7

Join us as a Resident Volunteer

Live in a residential Christian community.

Serve Jesus Christ and the hungry, homeless, and imprisoned.

Join street actions and peaceful demonstrations.

Enjoy regular retreats and meditation time at Dayspring Farm.

Join Bible study and theological reflections from the Base. You might come to the margins and find your center.

Contact: Phil Leonard
For information and application forms, visit www.opendoorcommunity.org
agreement, God’s promise, first with the people of Israel, and then with all the people of the world, is that God is with us always. God will not abandon us to the powers of sin and death.

God liberates us from those powers and their multiple forms of “no”: hunger, homelessness, poverty, prison, injustice, wars, executions, addictions, hatreds, racism, patriarchy, fears, despair, pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, sloth, and gluttony. God is giving us a new heaven and a new earth and will live among us and wipe away every tear. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more (Rev 21:3-4).

These are God’s promises and in Jesus who overcame the powers of sin and death in his life, death, and resurrection every one of these promises of God is a “Yes.” Paul writes, “For this reason it is through Christ that we say the ‘Amen’ to the glory of God” (2 Cor 1:20).

Paul is so absolutely right! How else to respond to this “Yes” to God’s promises in the life of Jesus in which through faith we share, but with shouts of “Alleluia, Amen, Thank You Jesus!!”

But if Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection establishes and affirms “yes” in our lives, then why are we still hungry waiting for supper, not to mention justice and peace? Why do we who live and volunteer here continue to say “no” not merely out of our limitations but

**Yes and No, continued on page 8**

The Beatitudes: An Adaptation of Matthew 5
(with gratitude to Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

By Murphy Davis

**Blessed are those who have renounced everything to follow Jesus, for theirs is the execution chamber and the abundant Resurrection life.**

**Blessed are the sorrows-bearers for they shall be comforted by the one who bears the sorrow of the world.**

**Blessed are the handless and homeless poor who follow in the way of the Vagrant Christ for they shall be full partners in the abundance of the Beloved Community.**

**Blessed are those who have renounced their own honorable reputations for the sake of bearing the shame of the disgraced; for they shall be clothed with the honor of God.**

**Blessed are those who have given up trying to prove their own goodness—those who know that only God’s loving goodness can satisfy; for they shall eat all they want and need of the Bread of Life; and this will keep them hungrily struggling for justice and solidarity.**

**Blessed are those who vote to acquit; All charges against them will be dropped.**

**Blessed are those whose hearts are absorbed by the call of Jesus; their eyes will see God on earth even as she is in heaven.**

**Blessed are those who are engaged in the hard and costly struggle to make peace in the midst of a world of war and hate; for they shall be called daughters and sons of God. Because when they live this way, they are in the spittin’ image of God.**

**Blessed are those who suffer exclusion, and even torture and death because of their action for solidarity and justice; for the Beloved Community is their home. ♦**

*Murphy Davis is a Partner at the Open Door Community.*
We who live in the faith of Christ and thus who try to say “yes” are but a “first installment” of God’s “yes” in Christ. We are still on a journey. The powers of sin and death have been mortally wounded, but they still thrash about in our lives.

In continuing to say “no” because of our limitations and sin, we share in the struggle of the whole of God’s creation, yearning for the fullness of “YES!”

Paul writes in Romans, “We know...continued on page 9"
Yes and No, continued from page 8

that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23).

The “no” that comes from limitation and sin reminds us that the fullness of God’s reign—the fulfillment of God’s promises—is not fully in our lives yet. We are still on the journey toward the full installment of God in our lives.

In fact, while we continue this journey, because we struggle against sin, we will even sometimes experience the grace of God as “no” in our lives. This is the third type of “no.” It is the redeeming “no” of gracious accountability that helps us to resist and overcome sin. This “no” holds us accountable for living the Gospel.

Some of Paul’s “nos” to the church in Corinth reflected such gracious accountability necessary for living the Gospel. Paul told the members of the church at Corinth “no” when they tried to exclude the poor from the Eucharistic table. He told them “no” when they tried to base leadership in the church on wealth and power. These “nos” that Paul said were a kind of “tough love” that says “no” in order to affirm a larger “yes.”

This is the gracious “no” of accountability we in the community have to say to each other when we see a person doing something wrong. Here at the Open Door Ronald Williams has often been my instructor in this regard. Once this summer when I was on house duty in the evening I was locked out of the doors of the house. The next morning came gracious accountability as Ronald told me “Don’t lock the doors to the front porch at night. Anthony and I ended up being locked out when we went out to smoke.”

When it’s something more serious in our lives, it’s hard to hear this gracious “no” of Gospel accountability. It is hard to hear that we must say “no” to our addictions, to our prejudices, to our self-pity or to our pride, to our own obstinate way of doing things.

This difficulty in hearing “no” goes beyond our individual lives. It is hard for our society to hear the gracious “no” of accountability; to hear “no” to the death penalty, “no” to war, “no” to harassing and arresting homeless people in parks.

We know the powers find it hard to hear these “nos” and we know that in the face of the powers it is sometimes hard for us to say those “no’s.” We need God’s gracious help to strengthen us to say and to hear such “no’s” of Gospel accountability.

The “no” we say to discipline ourselves thus reminds us, like the other “no’s” we say and hear out of our limitations and sin, that our citizenship is not here, but in the fullness of life of the Beloved Community.

All of these “no”s in our lives remind us that we await full salvation, liberation, and the completing of our lives from a source other than our own works, other than any earthly empire, other than the gods of state violence and economic domination, other than the gods that promise satisfaction for our desires but only deliver self-destructing death.

Thus, in the end it is recognition of the “no” in our lives that strangely brings us to seek after and to hear the “Yes.” The “Yes” that we await a Savior from heaven, Jesus Christ. The “Yes” that our lives only have meaning and purpose when we live simply and share, as Jesus did. The “Yes” that we share in God’s reign every time we gather together to share God’s gifts with each other—food, clothing, ourselves. The “Yes” that we share in God’s reign every time we resist and say “NO” to sin, to death, to war, homelessness, executions, poverty, or injustice of any kind. The “Yes” that we share in God’s reign here when we gather to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we may in our lives be empowered in Christ to be God’s “Yes” to those in need.

This “yes” which is Jesus in our lives helps us to recognize and accept our limitations so that we don’t give up and, in despair, become people who always say “no.” This “yes” which is Jesus in our lives helps us to admit our mistakes and confess our sins, because Jesus heals those who need a physician and not those who see themselves as healthy. This “yes” which is Jesus in our lives helps us to say “no” to the powers even when this is difficult and costly.

We pray in this Eucharist to grow in God’s “Yes” who is Jesus Christ. We pray to grow in the faith of Jesus who teaches us in word and deed that God’s “Yes” means working for the reign of God—the Beloved Community. We pray in this Eucharist to be strengthened in God’s “Yes” so that we will stand in solidarity with the victims of oppression of any kind. We pray in this Eucharist that we may be empowered to practice a discipleship that is costly, that says “no” to systems of domination and death. We pray in this Eucharist that we will say with our lives the “Yes” of Jesus who says with his life, YES to the liberation of the poor! YES to the end of suffering!YES to the Beloved Community in which we all sit down together and enjoy fullness of life with each other in union with God our Creator and Redeemer!

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Ghosts Over the Boiler

By Darrell B. Grayson

A hair flunky informed
The cubical physician
Of a man hanging in his cell.

I lifted my head,
As I was at one the time.
Eventually, a guard walked
To that part of the Row.

Preacher’s death was like the others,
Nope, wasn’t the first time:
It started with a complaint,
The kind fixable.

The guard manages every step,
He takes out his key,
Opens the outer door
Walks to the cell door.

He sees Preacher hanging,
Walks to the cubical,
Calls the operator and mumbles something,
Lights a cigarette, then leans.

Eventually,
A fat nurse climbs the stairs
Another guard passes her,
I continue to mop.

Eventually, they come out with Preacher
On a stretcher with a sheet.
I know he is dead,
It is on his face.

Like ghosts they walk.
The guard and nurse,
They were talking about buying a truck.
Didn’t hear what kind.

Well I told a few guys,
They said:
He was a strange old fellow,
Tried to change cells.

One not over the boiler,
He said he couldn’t take the heat.
I said, yeah,
Those other guys were fed up too.

It was bound to happen again,
But what can you do
When you’re a ghost over the boiler?

Darrell B. Grayson has lived for twenty years on Alabama’s death row. Special thanks to Charlotte Norby for bringing Darrell’s collection of poetry, Quiet Sympatheticus, to our attention.
Don’t Come Back, continued from page 1

continued to create the impression that everyone in the park. Others, they wanted out.

While it is true that a few people did enjoy the music, surely the main objective of “Let’s Do Downtown” was to keep the homeless out. One Wednesday an enthusiastic officer was successful in keeping the large grassy area of Woodruff (the “park” part) clear of anyone wanting to sit, stand, or lounge on the grass on a summer afternoon. (In late August, when Georgia State University classes began, it suddenly didn’t seem to matter when people were on the grass. We watched police ignore one well-dressed woman tossing a ball for an unleashed dog. And, of course, there is a leash law.)

We’ve heard from police who are tired of this pressure. They are tired of telling people that they can’t give food to the hungry. They are tired of waking bleary-eyed, ragged men and women in the middle of the night or early in the morning just to keep them out of sight. Police go into the parks with orders to wake anyone lying down or sleeping on a public bench in Atlanta. (The short-lived law against sleeping on a park bench was rescinded in 1993.) They are ordered to just keep people moving. Far from cheering, “Let’s Do Downtown” has generated tension, anger, and fear.

One Hundred Days to Do Downtown is culminating in statements from Mayor Franklin, from C.A.P., and from the Atlanta Downtown Neighborhood Association calling for an end to distributing food to the homeless in the parks. There’s been a proposal to ban begging. And, with a push to “clean up” the parks (meaning, “get the homeless out of our sight”), he conferred with others, and just generally harass anyone who looks like they’ve been living on the streets is severe.

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People come to our breakfast and soup kitchen worn out from being continuously rousted out of resting spots. We place our own names on our meals for the Atlanta shelter as many as 20,000? Probably not. Today, Atlanta can shelter maybe 1000 on any given night in the summer. Where are the rest supposed to go?

Police sweeps in various parts of the city have become all too common. Frequent guests at our house disappear for weeks or months when they receive long sentences for violation of so-called “quality of life ordinances” (vagrancy, public urination, carrying an open bottle of beer on a public sidewalk, jaywalking, etc.). But locking people up for six months on such charges does not solve the problem. Homeless people need homes.

Most Wednesdays, several of us from The Open Door and friends of the Community spend the noon hour in Woodruff Park. We carry signs and pass out leaflets and copies of Hospitality and Loring Street preaches. Often, we circle up for some singing, prayer, and poetry reading. We offer support to the Kashi Yoga group when they come to pass out sandwiches. What’s striking about these Wednesdays is that the most friendly and courteous people in the park are often the homeless. Many businessmen and business women would sooner walk right over us as accept a free newspaper or have a conversation.

The Open Door Community tries to live in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Peter Maurin. King envisioned a Beloved Community. Day and Maurin talked of “building a new world within the shell of the old.” In one of his Easy Essays, Peter Maurin wrote:

The world would be better off
If people tried to become better.
And people would become better
If they stopped trying to become better off.

Making a better world means rejecting the idea of prosperity through wealth and nonstop entertainment, with lots of police and military to keep us “safe.” Making a better world means taking some responsibility for the way homeless people are treated. And, for Christians, if we take discipleship seriously, making a better world ought to mean raising a voice of outrage. 

Chuck Harris and Diana George are Resident Volunteers at the Open Door Community.
Dear Murphy,

I just took my breath to read your article (“Who Killed the Baby?”, August 2003, vol. 22, no. 8). You really are a great writer, Murphy, not only because you wrote with vibrant sentences but because your style is very moving, you write with words that came from a heart full of compassion and who wants justice for the poor. Thank you so much.

For some reason the Hospitality bulletin came late this time. I was missing that. So I didn’t want to wait until the end of the week when I will be visiting the Open Door Community to tell you what I think about your article.

It is a pity, and in the Mennonite Church where I am worshipping these days, we are talking about the Olympia Church who is so alive and well, in the United States and in other parts of the world where the number of the poor are increasing because the blindness of rich people. Thank you for working so hard for justice and praying for peace. Our dear world needs more people courageous like you with this deep commitment to follow Jesus and His gospel teachings.

Thank you again, I will continue to pray for you and your mission, while I ask forgiveness to God, and pray that God will help me to be part of the solution for the problems of the world.

In God’s service.
Luz Mestas-Nunez
Habitat for Humanity International
Americus, GA

Dear Ed,

I want to thank you and the Open Door Community for being there. Reading each issue of Hospitality feeds me; it brings me more insights, understanding and “clarification.”

With all best wishes and love,
Muriel Lokey
Atlanta, GA

I send gratitude for your ministry and a pledge of hope for its future. I’m personally grateful for the many times your monthly newspaper has brightened my spiritual life, directing my path in dark times. The biblically-based articles have also found their way into my teaching of “The Bible As Literature” at Rutgers University in Newark.

Thank you for more than just words.
In solidarity,
Janet Larson
Hoboken, NJ

Dear Murphy, Ed, et al.

Thanks so much for keeping me on your mailing list. I love your newspaper and read it from front to back.

Your work is very important to Atlanta and the rest of this county. I have been inside of lots of jails in this state and the federal prison system. All of them are dehumanizing—not just the inmates but visitors too. There is no respect for human beings.

My prayers are with you all. Keep up the good work you do.
Affectionately,
B.J. Morris
Decatur, GA

This donation in honor of Jerry Robinett—an actual living, breathing, still alive and fighting 81 year old saint—he had a birthday recently. We particularly liked “God Bless America (and Nobody Else)” (Ed Loring, Hospitality, May 2003, vol. 22, no. 5). Please keep agitating.

Peace and love,
Brian Flagg
Casa Maria Catholic Worker
Tucson, AZ

Dear Open Door Community (especially Murphy Davis and Ed Loring),

I am so grateful and supportive of the work you are doing. Thank you so much for your vital ministry, both with the homeless and those in prison. I pray for you often.

Sincerely,
Toni White
West Columbia, SC

P.S. I read the monthly publication cover to cover.

Dear Mary,

Thank you for sending along the article, “Lift Every Voice” (Nils Strooge, Hospitality, July 2003, vol. 22, no. 7). I will pass it along to the Syracuse Community Choir and others who will enjoy reading it. Please pass along a thank you to Phil as well.

I have traveled a bit through the Northeast and Midwest, visiting Catholic Worker communities. Perhaps someday I will make it to the Open Door.

You might receive our newsletter from the Jail Ministry Office, here in Syracuse, a grassroots, visiting-advocacy group that has daily contact in the local jail, with trained visitor-advocates to work one-to-one with inmates, and a small bakery.

Be well,
Paul Frazier
Syracuse, NY

Many thanks for keeping us on your mailing list since the days of the Campbell Scholar’s Seminar at Columbia in the Fall of 2000. We’ll long remember the evening baptismal service for the Smith-Saunders’ little girl.

Warm wishes to any who may remember us, with special love to Murphy. We eagerly look at each new issue of Hospitality for news of her medical progress.

Rhoda and Doug Hall
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

Dear Mary and Murphy,

I wanted to tell you how powerful the August issue is, both in content and presentation. As most always, good proportions of the local and the global and connections between the two.

Somewhere we get four copies sent to our house by various names -- please do not correct this as we give them all away.

It is 10 degrees hotter here than in Atlanta (I looked at the weather map) and awfully dry. Grasshoppers thrive (this may be my heat addled imagination) laugh at us as they suck the moisture out of our tomatoes. The goats are as short tempered as we are.

Anyway, I am happy not to be in jail, despite all best guesses that I would be. Betsy sends greetings. We think of you all lots.

God bless.
Brian Terrell
Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker Farm
Maloy, Iowa
Open Door Community Ministries

Soup Kitchen: Wednesday and Thursday, 11 a.m. – noon.
Weekday Breakfast: Monday and Tuesday, 6:45 a.m.
Showers: Thursday, 8 a.m.
Use of Phone: Monday – Tuesday, 6:45 a.m. – 7:45 a.m.,
Wednesday – Thursday, 9 a.m. – noon.
Harriet Tubman Free Medical Clinic and Soul Foot Care
Clinic: Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.
Clarification Meetings: Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9 p.m.
Weekend Retreats: Four times each year (for our household,
volunteers and supporters).
Prison Ministry: Monthly trip to prisons in Hardwick, GA, in
partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Milledgeville;
The Jackson (Death Row) Trip

We are open...

Monday through Saturday: We answer telephones from 9:00
a.m. until noon, and from 2:00 until 6:00 p.m. The building is open from
9:00 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. (We do not an-
swer phone and door during our noon prayers and lunch break from
12:30 until 2:00.) Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come
at other times.

On Sunday we invite you to worship with us at 5 p.m. and join us,
following worship, for a delicious supper.

Our Hospitality Ministries also include visitation and letter writing to
prisoners, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless,
daily worship and weekly Eucharist.

Join Us in Worship!

We gather for worship and Eucharist at 5 p.m. each Sunday, followed by supper together.
Our worship space is limited, so if you are considering bringing a group to worship, please
contact Phil Leonard at pleon2000@mindspring.com or 404-874-4906.

October 5  Worship at 9:10
October 12 Worship at 9:10
October 19 Worship at 9:10
October 26 Worship at 9:10

Please check www.opendoorcommunity.org
or call us for the most up-to-date worship schedule.

Clarification Meetings at the Open Door

We will meet for clarification on selected
Tuesday evenings in October, from 7:30-9 pm.
Plan to join us for
discussion and reflection!

For the latest information and
scheduled topics, please call
404-874-9652
or see
www.opendoorcommunity.org.

Needs of the Community

JEANS
men’s work shirts
underwear for men
women’s underwear
men’s belts
socks
men’s shoes (all sizes)
EYEGLASSES
BASEBALL CAPS

hams and turkeys for our Soup Kitchen
sandwiches
quick grits
cheese
coffee
multi-vitamins
MARTA tokens
postage stamps
HEAVY DUTY GAS LAWN MOWER
MINIVAN IN GOOD RUNNING CONDITION
two mountain bikes for Dayspring Farm
WASHING MACHINE FOR DAYSPRING FARM
child and baby safety seats (for Hardwick Trip Vans)
disposable razors
deoarant
vaseline
combs
toothbrushes
lip balm
SOAP (any size)
SHAMPOO (travel size)
alarm clocks
used or new french horn

We are also looking
for volunteers to
staff our Soul Foot
Care Clinic!

nail files
ibuprofen
SUDAFED
latex gloves
lubriderm lotion
COUGH DROPS
tenail clippers (large)
medicated foot powder
antibiotic cream or ointment
antifungal cream (Tolfanate)
non-drowsy allergy medication
COLD MEDICINE (alcohol free)

From 11am ‘til 1:30pm, Wednesday and Thursday, our attention is focused on serving
the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this
is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11 or after 1:30, it
would be helpful. THANK YOU!