Putting Our Bodies Where Our Beliefs Are

By Jennifer McBride

Jenny McBride is Board of Regents Chair in Ethics and Assistant Professor of Religion at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, co-editor of the book “Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Impact for Christian Social Thought” (Fortress Press, 2010), and a former full-time volunteer at the Open Door Community. This is an abridged version of a sermon she preached at Open Door worship on Sunday, June 26, two weeks after Pentecost.

Lectionary readings:
Romans 6:12-23
Matthew 10:40-42

A subject that is central to the theology and practice of the Open Door Community, and that is central, I believe, to the season of Pentecost, is the role of the body in discipleship; or, to say it in a way that more directly links it to Pentecost, the role of the body in personal and social transformation. I was drawn to the work of the Open Door over two years ago in part because of this emphasis on the role of the body in discipleship.

Recently, Eduard Loring reflected powerfully on the call of Scripture, repeated often in this house, “to present our bodies as living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). The lectionary readings for today are not as direct on this subject as that. Or, more accurately, they are rarely used, in my experience, as focus texts on the role of the body in faith and discipleship. Perhaps this is simply because this subject is not one to which privileged North Americans are attuned. But they make references to the body and bodily action.

What I want to share today, with these Scriptures as a frame, are a few of the ways discipleship formation has occurred in me as I have placed my body here in this place with you over these last nine months. These are scenarios that no doubt many of you have experienced as well in both similar and varying ways. I offer my reflections and stories as gratitude for being welcomed into this community and as a testimony and witness to the Spirit’s sanctifying power at work in this place.

The first story I want to share occurred during Holy Week. Holy Week is a time when this community responds to the call to “present your bodies as living sacrifices” in an intentional and concentrated manner as community members vigil on the streets for 24-hour periods in order to gain a glimpse of the hell of homelessness. The most common experience we gain through our bodies is the suffering and bers vigil on the streets for 24-hour periods in order to gain intentional and concentrated manner as community mem to the call to “present your bodies as living sacrifices” in an Week. Holy Week is a time when this community responds work in this place.

The Open Door Community – Hospitality & Resistance in the Catholic Worker Movement

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A Litany on the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Adapted by Murphy Davis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Lead us to embrace the war-torn world;
lead us to present our bodies on the violent streets
to cry out for justice and plant the seeds of peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Hatred spews from radios
and the mouths of so-called leaders.
They say that love is weakness.
Give us the courage of Jesus to sow strong love.

where there is injury, pardon;
So many of us have been injured by poverty, prison,
violence, hunger and homelessness.
Help us to welcome the justice of the Beloved Community
where forgiveness will bring new life.

where there is doubt, faith;
Modern life whizzes
by in a cacophony of noise and images.
Help us to be still and quiet
to know you are the Holy One
and to see you in the face of the poor.

where there is despair, hope;
Our land is awash in the tsunami of despair, O God!
Please reach out your hand
and make a way out of no way.

where there is darkness, light;
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light:
those who dwell in the land
of the shadow of death,
on them the light has shined.
(1Isaiah 9:2)

and where there is sadness, joy.
Oppression dehumanizes us all:
 Oppressed and oppressor alike.
Show us the path to justice
that we might break the chains
and embrace the freedom that brings joy
and abundance for all.

Put your Bodies continued on page 8
A Litany continued on page 10
A Map of Where to Stand

The Cry of the Poor: Cracking White Male Supremacy — An Incendiary and Militant Proposal
By Eduard Loring
The Open Door Press

Reviewed by Mary Catherine Johnson

Father Gregory Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries and fellow traveler with Eduard Loring in the journey of cracking White Male Supremacy, says that life is not about taking the right stand on issues but about “standing in the right place — with the outcast and those relegated to the margins.” With his unflinching and provocative manifesto, “The Cry of the Poor,” Loring has provided a map of where to stand, of how to “reduce the distance” between us and those on the margins, so that we can move toward a radical new consciousness and way of living. It’s not one of those unwieldy, hard-to-read maps with tiny lines and multiple routes. Rather, Loring has drawn big, bold lines all leading to one place: the Welcome Table, where equality and justice are served freely and generously, and peace and love are the most important things on the menu.

The trip through “The Cry of the Poor” is illustrated with some of the most powerful imagery I’ve ever encountered in a book.

The trip through “The Cry of the Poor” is illustrated with some of the most powerful imagery I’ve ever encountered in a book. Through a skillful blend of art and text, drawings, photographs and poetry are interspersed with searing metaphors that jump off the page into the mind’s eye of the reader, ready to spring into recall the moment an offending entity rears its ugly head. Loring does not just tell us that “Gone With the Wind” is a never-ending lie but gives us an image of each page sliding off the press, like a wet weasel slipping down a sewer pipe. “The Cry of the Poor” a holding power in our individual and collective psyches — a lens through which to view the world anew that lasts well after we’ve put the book down, and enduring mental guideposts on its map of where to stand.

Full disclosure: I am afraid of where Eduard Loring has told me to stand. Fear of failure, of rejection, of losing comforts to which I’ve become accustomed, has frightened me out of my wit’s. Knowing where to stand and having the courage to stand there are two very different things. But Loring gives me — gives all of us — a source of great strength in this book: the names and stories of others who are “sharing the journey on the battlefield of White Male Supremacy.” These are the people, the indelible characters, living and dead, who populate the book and are willing to stand with us, as William Blake says, to “bear the beams of love.” Jesus, Martin Luther King, the residents of the Open Door Community, prisoners on Georgia’s death row, the homeless of Atlanta — they have marked out the best places, the only places, to stand and have made room for the rest of us there with them. “The Cry of the Poor” shows us the path to join them.

Mary Catherine Johnson is a volunteer at the Open Door Community and is on the Boards of Directors of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and of New Hope House.

The Cry of the Poor
Cracking White Male Supremacy — An Incendiary and Militant Proposal
By Eduard Loring
The Open Door Press

Thank you for your fiery gift, “The Cry of the Poor,” even though it tears our souls for the past and even present (even latently) in most of us. Ed and Murphy, you two are authentic and paradigmatic voices of God — Isaiah for the USA.
— Father Tom Francis, Monastery of the Holy Spirit Conyers, Georgia

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Looking Through a Glass Darkly

Random Observations by Eduard Loring

A Cry From Prison

Thony Lee Green, 102340, is our adopted son in prison. Below are two cries from prison:

June 17, 2011

My “M” [Murphy Davis] and I have more than just mom and son in common; we are both struggling for a few more years of life on God’s earth and with our loved ones. . . . it’s been so hot! Here, these days are so hot, and the people in society think that we have it good inside of prison, only if they knew the half, only if they knew that this is a living hell, something I wouldn’t wish on a dog.

June 26

This thing that I am struggling against is very strong. . . . it brings me all the way down. . . . a very hard life. . . . will I get old, sick and die alone in prison. . . . I am tired of just being a number. Dad, I’m trying to get you to see and understand what I live with daily, for you to understand how I feel you would have to be locked up for 30 years with no end in sight. I live with the constant threat of danger, which doesn’t bother me too much because there are times that I feel like making it happen, maybe death is more peaceful than going through this life of prison day in and day out. . . .

This question comes to me as I dream of Thony’s release:

“How can the bird that is born for joy / Sit in a cage and sing?” asks poet William Blake in “The Schoolboy.” I say, “Not all jailbirds can.”

Speaking What Is Right

Another voice from behind bars from a protagonist of mine:

June 22, 2011

Melvin E. Jones, #401754

Ed, in the end . . . in the final scheme of things, right always beats might. These folks (the powers that be) cannot dangle carrots in front of me and say “hush up, boy, and I’ll give you a bite.” All wrongs are worth fighting. Throughout this prison experience, I have always practiced — among all odds — looking these people in the eyes and speaking what is right. Any other mannerisms express accepted slavery and pupperty; neither description fits me.

PS. When the reckoning comes, the chicken will come home to roost!

How Colonel Sanders Lost a Customer

The other day before the calendar popped up midway through the diseased month of July, and flies still buzzed at Gettysburg though vultures like Pickett’s men, shot dead in swoop-fall, someone said (oh weak and deflating memory — though my heart holds fast — what was her name? What is a name?): “I never eat chicken.”

“Ah, not vegetarian when time stood still for two minutes and the sun halted overhead,” she said with a sprout of broccoli lodged fast between cocaine teeth. But “once upon a highway blazing hot and hair askew” (and top of blouse flipping in the exhaust and therein lies a possibility — one in eight women in the usa — of a secret growth hungry for lymph cells to make desolate with chaos one or two breasts). “Upon the silver shaking concrete I beheld an 18-wheeler come furious roun’ the bend at 170 miles per two hours. The ferocious manic truck carried monstrous misery like a motherless child as chickens, squeezed like dough, lay suffocating in small wooden crates, torture chambers really. They could not fuck nor moan their death watch on their way to the beheading chamber, feathers flying like ice stones in hail madness.

“Never, never again will I eat chicken,” she told her courageous God. “I vow it, I won’t. I will not be part of this cruel apathy. I take the Eucharist, but nothing fowl must be decapitated for my next meal. Ever again.”

The Cry of the Poor

This is how things are in America today.

Sitting on the Dock of the Bay

August bends us toward the brutal born and the foul birth of “The Modern Period.”

Where: Bay C.

Diversity: Indian, Latino, Black, white, young, old and dying with little hope and lots of pain. The alive ones, a blessing, bread, miracle, trump card, destiny, born not yet detonated. All suffer. Even the companions — the Blessed ones — can feel a bit of marrow leak.

Please Help!

We need backpacks! and shoes

Thank You!

We need gently used running and walking shoes for our friends from the streets.

Men’s shoes sizes 11-15 are especially helpful.

SOA Watch Vigil

November 18-20

at the gates of Ft. Benning, Georgia

www.soaw.org
The Open Door Community Press

Books

The Cry of the Poor
Cracking White Male Supremacy — An Incendiary and Militant Proposal
By Eduard Loring
Foreword by Nils Storlie
afterword by Melvin Jones
99 pages
Paperback
$10.00 suggested donation

The Festival of Shelters
A Celebration for Love and Justice
By Eduard Loring
with Heather Sangston
Preface by Dick Rutan
66 pages
19 color photographs
Paperback
Free for the asking

Sharing the Bread of Life
Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community
By Peter R. Gathje
272 pages
45 photographs
Paperback
$10.00 suggested donation

A Work of Hospitality
The Open Door Reader
1982 - 2002
Peter R. Gathje, editor
384 pages
Bibliography and Index
Paperback
$15.00 suggested donation

I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door
Writings from Hospitality
By Eduard Loring
Foreword by Rev. Timothy McDonald III
82 pages
21 photographs
available only online at www.opendoorcommunity.org
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Hospitality and Resistance
Stories of Struggle and Triumph
Edited by Murphy Davis
Preface by Julian Bond
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‘Remember to Smile!’
By Ron Chandonia

On Wednesday evening, July 20, the time scheduled for the execution of Andrew DeYoung, the Open Door Community held a vigil at the Georgia Capitol in downtown Atlanta, or we do for every Georgia execution. During the vigil, Ron Chandonia, who with his family had visited regularly with Andrew in prison for 12 years, made the following remarks. Ron is an active member of Pax Christi, a Catholic organization that works for justice, peace and a world without war and violence.

When I come to these execution vigils, I always try to put faces with the names of the men facing death. Some of these men I have met, or at least seen, during the 12 years my family and I have been visitors down in Jackson, and it’s easier for me to focus on those whose faces I recall.

So tonight, as we gather to mark yet another execution, I’d like to start by showing you the face of the man who will die. Here is the face of Andrew DeYoung! [Showing an Afghan in the shape of a smiley emoticon.] When our daughter was very small, the men on death row were still allowed to do crafts, and Andrew crocheted this blanket for her. This smile is his trademark. He signed all his letters with it, and a similar smile was on his face every time we passed through those grim prison walls to visit him.

I suppose some people might ask, “So what did this murderer have to smile about?” In fact, as I often told Andrew, he may be the least sympathetic character on death row. However, he is the face of Andrew DeYoung! [Showing the blanket and smiley emoticon.] When our daughter was very small, he had been invited to lecture on material that baffled his high school teachers.

Yet something was missing in Andrew. It’s as if God had spent so much energy in shaping his brain that He neglected to attend to Andrew’s heart. Andrew lacked the capacity that nearly all of us enjoy to live a rich emotional life, the ability to bond with others so we can form a part of human society. Andrew did not bond. He did not make friends. And he simply did not fit in.

As a teenager, he became more and more aware of how little he fit in, and he grew more and more frustrated by it. He sensed that he did not fit in his church. He did not fit in his neighborhood. Finally, he did not even fit in his own family. And as his frustration grew more intense, Andrew rebelled and lashed out in truly frightening ways, all leading up to the awful night when he tried to destroy the center of that world in which he was such a misfit, the night when he took the lives of his mother and his father and his little sister, and would have killed his brother too if he had not escaped in the nick of time.

Only when this troubled teenager was locked away did he finally take stock of his situation and try to figure out what he needed to do if he wanted to become part of the human family in the time he had left on earth. It was then that Andrew realized that he would have to use his head to do what his heart was simply incapable of doing. He concluded that, while he might not feel great love, he still needed great love, and he would have to earn that love by reaching out to other people.

My family and I were major beneficiaries of that resolution. Over the years we visited him, got letters from him and talked with him over the phone, we were overwhelmed by Andrew’s many acts of kindness and generosity to us.

Even in prison — maybe especially in prison — Andrew read voraciously, and he was constantly on the lookout for tidbits of information and advice he could pass along to us. From his magazine subscriptions, he clipped articles he thought might prove useful and passed them along to us. My wife says that knowing Andrew was like having a clipping service to keep her abreast of the software development field.

Andrew was committed to acquiring new skills and sharing them with us, even skills he himself could not practice. He was constantly updating his understanding of information technology, and he could cite helpful Web addresses to me from memory. If he called me when I was having a computer crisis — a more common experience than you might think — he would tell me to drop down a menu or look inside a folder and click this or that, things he had never actually done himself, and my problem would be resolved.

But most of all, he took to our daughter, now a teenager. When she was very small, he bounced her on his knees, swung her through the air and recited poetry to her. When she needed tips on schoolwork, Andrew was always ready to offer them. After we decided to home-school, Andrew provided bad needed math and especially science support. He read copies we sent of our daughter’s textbooks, corrected the errors he spotted in them, and rewrote whole chapters for us in terms even this old English-teacher dad could understand.

To our lives, Andrew DeYoung brought great love. He bonded with us and earned the deep affection we all feel for him. Tonight at this vigil, one of my sons stands with my wife and my daughter and me. But another of my sons is facing death down in Jackson. We are truly heartbroken, and I thank you for letting me come forward tonight to explain why.

Postscript: After an agonizing night, the Department of Corrections rescheduled Andrew’s execution for the following evening and thereby gave several of us another chance to visit him. Andrew was pleased when I told him about our vigil, especially about my displaying the blanket he had made.

When he was executed later that Thursday, his final words were, “Remember to smile!”
What I Learned at the Open Door

By Mara Weaver

Mara Weaver is a student at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana. She spent the summer as a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door and became well known among us for her welcoming smile and amazingly delicious Mennonite cooking (especially her homemade pies!). We are grateful to share this reflection on her time with us.

Last year I came to realize that I felt stagnant, in relationships, in my studies, with God. Toward the middle of first semester, wrapped up in my routine and self-pity and selfishness, I realized that I needed to do something really different from my usual activity for the summer. I wanted to immerse myself in a different community and a different lifestyle. I wanted people who would challenge my faith and the comfortable life I live. And I wanted to serve, to completely break off from my normal routine and focus on serving others and looking for the face of God in those around me.

This past summer at the Open Door Community, I was surrounded by people who relentlessly prayed and acted and lived for justice and a better tomorrow for the poor and the mentally ill and the homeless and people of color, and I couldn’t help but catch their fervor.

The changes began after I had been in the house only a few days. I noticed myself scanning the streets of Atlanta for any of our homeless friends, so that I could wave or say hello, because they were becoming just that — my friends, not anonymous recipients of my sympathy or my money or my embarrassment about the great societal and economic divides that I help perpetuate.

I learned to live in an intergenerational, interdenominational, interracial, interclass household.

I learned to live in an intergenerational, interdenominational, interracial, interclass household. I learned to host showers, dip soup with just the right wrist action, cross city interdenominational, interracial, interclass household.

I learned how dehumanizing our prison system really is. While I understand that prison is not supposed to be pleasant, I absolutely do not understand how we can continue to claim that rehabilitation is in any way a goal of our prisons, and I do not understand a world in which we stand silly by and let our brothers and sisters continue to suffer under this abuse. When someone is given three minutes to eat moldy food — no talking, no sharing, little nutrition, no Welcome Table — there is no healing. There will only be more anger, more fuel, to the fire.

Murphy Davis led a memorial service in Comer, Georgia, where we followed two cities in the United States.

I learned, as Ed Loring puts it, to “live with a broken heart” and to feel the true weight of the devastation within the immediate Open Door Community and the community that includes our friends from the streets. When I explained these feelings to my housemate Quiana Hawkins, her response was, “Welcome to the Open Door!”

It broke my heart when my housemate Michael disappeared without a trace, except for the three police officers who came to the door looking for him the next day. It broke my heart to learn that it is illegal to feed people in public places, not only in Atlanta but in many cities in the United States.

A day did not pass that we did not pray for Roy Blankenship and for the abolition of the death penalty. And when his lifeless body was removed from the gurney at Jackson State Prison, it was sent to Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia, where we followed two days later to bury our brother Roy as one of our own.

What I Learned continued on page 9

Living With a Broken Heart

I learned just how dehumanizing our prison system really is. While I understand that prison is not supposed to be pleasant, I absolutely do not understand how we can continue to claim that rehabilitation is in any way a goal of our prisons, and I do not know what is.

Murphy and Ed had visited with Roy one last time on the morning of his execution, and at the memorial service, she shared that the first thing Roy insisted on doing when they arrived was to pray for Murphy, who had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. Roy believed he didn’t need prayer focused on him, because he was ready. He had faith and, because of that faith, did not fear death.

Roy Blankenship was executed for murder. But he did not commit murder. He walked in on a murder and did not stop it — the biggest regret of his life. Three different

Witnesses Against Death

After one such circle, on Thursday, June 23, with the tune of “Down by the Riverside” and the words “Gonna stop that Georgia killing machine, ain’t gonna study death no more,” the community made the short trip from our home to the Georgia Capitol in downtown Atlanta to hold vigil while Roy Willard Blankenship was put to death by the state. Every time there is an execution in Georgia, the Open Door, along with others, gathers on the steps of the Capitol, with anti-death penalty signs and shirts, to protest the continuation of state murder here and elsewhere in the United States and to stand as witnesses for the life, the humanity, of the person dying at the hands of the state.

After one such circle, on Thursday, June 23, with the tune of “Down by the Riverside” and the words “Gonna stop that Georgia killing machine, ain’t gonna study death no
A Resting Place for Roy Blankenship

On June 25, 2011, Roy Blankenship was buried at the Jubilee Community in Comer, Georgia. Roy was executed by the state of Georgia on June 23 (see page 7 of the August-September Hospitality for pictures of the vigil during his execution). Left: His casket is carried by members of the Jubilee Community, New Hope House and the Open Door Community through the woods to the cemetery at the edge of the forest, where a grave had been prepared. This cemetery is the resting place of friends from the streets, from death row and from our several communities.

Above: Musicians from Jubilee and the Open Door lead those assembled in singing some of Roy’s favorite hymns. Right: Al Lawler, from Jubilee, welcomes the congregation. Below: At the end of the service, many hands help to bury Roy with love and dignity.
Summer Picnics

Every year, the Open Door hosts picnics for some 500 of our friends from the streets on Memorial Day, July 4 and Labor Day. We serve hamburgers with all the trimmings, slaw, baked beans, potato chips, watermelon and sweet tea. Memorial Day and July 4 were fine sunny days, and we enjoyed our picnic in the back yard at 910. Right: Open Door resident Jeff Autry grills hamburgers. Below: Elizabeth Neil, one of our weekly volunteers, welcomes a friend to the meal.

Above right: Hanna Harper, who often visits from Athens with her brother Gabe and father Mark to help us serve our holiday meals, served watermelon slices. Above: Our back yard full of folks enjoying the day. On Labor Day we got much-needed rain, so we served inside. Right: Joe Walsh, who regularly volunteers in our Foot Clinic, cooked baked beans for each of the meals. Below: Serving in our dining room at 910. Bottom: Dorothy Boice, one of our most faithful weekly volunteers, welcomes Chris Murry with hamburgers.
like Quiana’s, demanded basic human decency. “Just until the storm passes?”

With a deeply confused look on his face, as if he now realized we weren’t home- less even though he knew we had been sleeping by the church across the way, the attendant sat back down, without explicitly giving us permission but nevertheless allowing us to stay.

As the rest of our group made their way to the garage, Quiana and I stood there processing what had just happened. To the attendant, we undoubtedly looked homeless as we slept by the church and then raced across the concrete with our dark clothes and cardboard in hand. But in our encounter with him, perhaps we didn’t have the presence of those who are homeless. Instead of hiding from police and security lest we wind up in jail, we had a basic sense of claim to that place — it was raining and we needed shelter, as simple as that.

We become formed in such a way that we no longer have to think twice, nor do we know how not to respond.

What I took immediately from the experience was the different relationship that those who are housed and those who are homeless have to space. For the housed there is some basic sense of belonging, a basic sense of a right to be somewhere. For the homeless, there is experience after experience of exclusion, with the clear message that they do not have that same right to be somewhere.

Recognizing a Human Right

In regard to the human right to be somewhere, or more specifically the right to shelter and housing, I have experienced the renewing of my mind. Here is what I mean.

I am in a profession where knowledge is gained mostly in the classroom, through books, by reading and debating multiple and opposing arguments, many of which can sound quite convincing all at the same time! In a theology or ethics course one may read an author, a prominent ethicist who shares the Open Door commitment to nonviolence, who argues that rights language is detrimental to Christian ethics because the language of rights is the language of democratic liberalism, which this author argues is a totalizing reality that leaves no room for Christian commitments in the public realm. In graduate school, this argument gave me pause. Maybe as a Christian I shouldn’t speak of a human right to such things as housing.

There are other lines of thinking that appeal to realism and argue that, while the notion of human rights may well serve as a common moral language across cultures and faith traditions, not everything, such as housing, can or should count as a human right. We have to be realistic, so the argument goes, about whether and how a society could pay for something like housing if it were deemed a right. “Good point,” I’ve thought in the classroom.

But what I learned through my body that Holy Wednesday night on the streets of downtown Atlanta in a threatening storm is that I believe that shelter is a right. I believe it’s a right for me. When faced with someone who was trying to deny me this, I thought, “Are you kidding?!! You’re not going to let us get shelter in an empty parking garage?” And if I hold this deeply embedded belief in the right to shelter for myself, I must hold it for others. I must work for it for others. Because of that right, now I have no problem claiming unequivocally that it is the will of God that all be housed because housing is a human right. Through my body, my mind has been renewed.

One more scenario.

Those of us who do house duty are trained to answer the doorbell every time it rings. The bell rings, we go to the door, and we welcome a friend or a stranger. I remember that when I first started doing house duty, especially evening duty, I wondered who might be on the other side of the door when I answered it. Would it be a familiar face? Would it be someone asking for something, or demanding something, that I couldn’t give? What if the person is drunk and aggressive and there’s one inside to help should a situation get out of hand? These would be quick, passing thoughts, almost unconscious, but they were there nonetheless.

Relatively soon, though, I became comfortable with the process, because I got lots of practice in a short amount of time — the doorbell kept ringing! It rang so often that it became second nature — a habit — to hear the bell, jump up in response and head to the door with ease. As I would get to the foyer I’d pause, no longer to take a breath before I opened the door, as in those first weeks, but to make sure my attention was fully focused on whoever was standing on the other side. Responding to the doorbell became effortless. It was immediate, “single-minded obedience,” to use a wonderful phrase in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book “Discipleship.” Through the habit of responding to the bell, I became confident in my ability to address the various questions and needs, be it sandwiches, a blanket, mail check or, surprisingly often, simply a cup of water.

My point in all this is that, as I moved my body after time toward that door and responded to the need, often with the tiniest of acts — a cup of water, a sandwich, a blanket, a piece of mail — I underwent formation. There is a process of habituation (the cultivation of a habitus, as Plato called it) that has been taking place in me — taking place in all of us, I believe — that over time shapes how we live and act in the world and how we respond to new and unfolding situations.

The process of habituation is kind of like Pavlov’s dogs. In that famous experiment in behavioral psychology, the dogs learned to associate a ringing bell with food, and so they salivated every time they heard a bell, even if food and the smell of food were absent. They came to respond instinctively to the bell.

Without drawing too much of a comparison between us and the dogs, I do believe that, through the simple act of responding to the doorbell time and time again, welcoming the stranger and attending to need becomes second nature for us, part of our very being. We become formed in such a way that we no longer have to think twice, nor do we know how not to respond. We become like the French community of Le Chambon, whose members, when asked why they chose to shelter Jews during the Holocaust at risk to themselves, responded that it wasn’t a choice. They already had been formed as a people who protect the vulnerable. Likewise, through the simple act of answering the door and giving a cup of water, we become a people who no longer can do otherwise. Through the daily acts of welcome and embrace, we have become “slaves to right-
What I Learned at the Open Door continued from page 5

ent times during his years on death row, he was offered reduc-
tion of his sentence to life in prison if he would plead guilty
to murder, but each time he declined the offer, refusing to plead
guilty to a murder he did not commit.

I helped cover Roy’s gray casket with red dirt that
appearance after the service, his body was lowered into the
earth and 20 sets of loving hands secured his place in the
cemetery in silence.

Finding a Voice
The first time I helped with soup kitchen at the Open
Door, I was assigned to the position of bag person. Posted
outside the door of the dining room, I helped people bag pea-
nut butter and jelly sandwiches they had made at the table.

Horace Tribble handed out vitamins a few feet away. I
asked him whether he always gave out the vitamins, and he
said he did. As I searched for a response, all I could come up
with was “Well, you must be a real professional, then.”

Immediately after I blurted out this profound insight, the
volunteer working the medical cart quickly leaned over and
corrected me, saying, “Do you mean professional or expert?
Because to be a professional just means you get paid to do
something; you don’t have to know anything about it. It’s an
expert who really knows about something, but may receive
no payment at all.”

“Great,” I thought, “a whole 36 hours into my stay here
and I have already made a fool of myself with my middle-
class bourgeois language.” Luckily no one judged me too
much for it, but from that point on, I was on constant guard
when it came to my use of language.

I am no longer hesitant to strike up a conversation
about a rocky topic, or to sit down and have a chat
with a complete stranger.

As my time at the Open Door came to a close, so did
my fear of speaking, or to be more specific, speaking incor-
rectly. I found my voice, and a large part of that discovery was
learning the vocabulary to articulate why I live the way I live.
I gained the vocabulary for the beliefs and values upon
which I have tried to base my decisions and actions since I
first realized that my life affects the lives of others, and I will
carry that valuable gift of language with me for the remainder
of my years in this world.

I am no longer hesitant to strike up a conversation about
a rocky topic, or to sit down and have a chat with a complete
stranger. I no longer let language barriers or different accents
stand in the way of understanding what someone is trying to
say.

I began my summer in fear, taken aback at my first
soup kitchen, when a small issue, not involving me, arose
and was brought to the table as everyone was eating together
after the soup kitchen. Ed’s immediate response was “name
it”—name the specific issue and the people involved—to
everyone.

Confrontation. On my very first day. Right in front of
me. I was very uncomfortable and dreaded the day someone
would bring up an issue with me for all to hear. But I ended
the summer in confidence, confidence that it is in fact both
helpful and necessary to “name” issues when they come up
in my life, and confidence that it will be more fruitful in trans-
forming relationships, lead to more personal growth, and nip
more issues in the bud if I just address them as they are when
they come up.

Now, in no way am I saying that I enjoyed every minute
of my time at the Open Door. Living in community is hard.
There is give and take, and sometimes it feels like a lot more
give, but the rewards came in due time and often in subtle
ways. As soon as I left, I realized just how accustomed I had
become to being buoyed by the love and care of a supportive
community, and it suddenly seemed impossible to imagine
going the rest of my life without that kind of mutual flotation
device. The challenges of community can be life-giving when
faced with an open heart and an open mind. It takes the work
of all to build the Beloved Community.

I have no doubt that the next decade will test the Open
Door. As the leadership continues to age, they will have to
decide when and how to give up their position at the wheel
and whom to give it to. As a new generation of leaders
emerges, there may well be calls for compromise and change
in the ideology of the community. New leaders may see new
issues and new ways of talking about and dealing with them.
If the house is going to continue to serve in some way, there
is no option but to pass decision making to people who never
took part in the Civil Rights Movement, who know about Jim
CROW from history and not personal experience. But the new
leaders will have passion. They will have direction. And they
will create change. I stand with full conviction that the Open
Door Community is too precious to just let die.

Changed Forever
Because of the alternative lifestyle I was welcomed into
this summer, I will never be the same. I will forever be fol-
lowed by, and seek out, the now familiar smell of homelessness
—not only the actual smell of stale urine, days or weeks of
sweat, and often cigarettes or alcohol, but also the stink
of the entire political system, the hate, the ignorance and the
weight that surrounds the institution of homelessness.
I still struggle each day to implement, and even to fully
understand and articulate, what I learned this summer. It will
probably take a lifetime to process everything I witnessed,
but I am okay with that because it will allow me to continue
to grow, to fight the stagnation of middle-class America and
mainstream Christianity, and to be vigilant for hatred and
injustice in my own actions and those of people around me.
Perhaps there is no “movement” among young people
today, but people ARE moving, and I intend to do all I can,
with the help and guidance of God, to add to that momentum
until we tumble right into the Beloved Community.

Editor’s note: We neglected to acknowledge that Jenny
McBride’s book review in the August-September issue of
Hospitality was first printed in Fellowship, Vol. 77, No. 1-3,
Spring 2011. For a copy of this issue, “Transformation of/in
Prisons,” see http://forusa.org/content/fellowship-magazine.

Join us as a
Resident Volunteer

Emma Sitt began a year of Resident Volunteer work at
the Open Door Community in July. Before coming to us,
she was a volunteer at Jubilee Partners.

Live in a residential Christian community.
Serve Jesus Christ
in the hungry, homeless, and imprisoned.
Join street actions and loudandloving
nonviolent 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: Sarah Humphrey
at opendoorcomm@bellsouth.net
or 770.246.7618
For information and application forms visit
www.opendoorcommunity.org

Please Help!
The Open Door needs 2,000
sandwiches to
serve each week!
We need
meat with cheese
sandwiches
(no bologna, pb&j or
white bread, please)
individually wrapped
on whole wheat bread.
Thank You!
A Litany on the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi  continued from page 1

O Divine Leader,  
You are the Holy One.  
Only you can show us how to throw off  
the system of domination and Empire.  
Yours is the Beloved Community.

grant that we may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they shall be comforted.  
(Matthew 5:4)

to be understood as to understand;  
Give us ears to hear and hearts to understand.  
to be loved as to love;  
And now faith, hope and love abide, these three;  
and the greatest of these is love.  
(1st Corinthians 12:13)

— John Updike
(From “Americana and Other Poems,” © 2001 Alfred A. Knopf)

John Updike (1932-2009) was a novelist, poet, short story writer and critic. In 1997, the Jesuit magazine America awarded Updike, a lifelong  
churchoer and student of Christian theology, its Campion Award as a  
distinguished Christian person of letters.”

Slum Lords

The superrich make lousy neighbors —  
they buy a house and tear it down  
and build another, twice as big, and leave.  
They’re never there; they own so many  
other houses, each demands a visit.  
Entire neighborhoods called fashionable,  
bustling with servants and masters, such as  
Louisburg Square in Boston or Bel Air in L.A.,  
are districts now like Wall Street after dark  
or Tombstone once the silver boom went bust.  
The essence of superrich is absence.  
They like to demonstrate they can afford  
to be elsewhere. Don’t let them in.  
Their riches form a kind of poverty.

— John Updike
(From “Americana and Other Poems,” © 2001 Alfred A. Knopf)

Hospitality welcomes poems from people in Georgia prisons or living on the streets in Georgia.  
Send submissions to  
Eduard Loring, Open Door Community, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E., Atlanta, GA 30306-4212  
or by email to hospitalitypoetrycorner@gmail.com.
Grace and Peaces of Mail

Thanks for sharing the beautiful article “Open Door Protests Killing of bin Laden,” in June.

What a beautiful group of people live at the Open Door Community. They have more common sense and love of God and of people than many of our government leaders have. There is now so much misinformation in our public media that people have the wrong kind of fear. And applaud the immortal heroes.

Capital punishment is wrong. Let us not become the evil we deplore. War is a crime against humanity. It’s insane.

Mary Bonaccorisi-Herzel
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Ed,

Thanks for the thought-filled article “Three Little Words and the Mystery of Faith” in the July Hospitality. It is a wonderful testimony to the faith that has sustained you for the past 16 years. It gives praise to those whose faith was added to yours in an ongoing paean of praise.

Thanking God for every being — Ed, Hannah, the brothers and sisters of the community and me too.

Love,
Roger Cooper
Lady Lake, Florida

Hi Dick and Gladys,

I just got through reading one of the best books. It’s called “The Last Days of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.” This is an awesome book. I know you have one of the rooms there at 910 named after him. It really does make me appreciate more what the Open Door does. I’ve been knowing you all for 23 years, and it makes me really appreciate that you do fight against the death penalty.

Love you all,
Quentin McCormick
(via voice mail)
Atlanta, Georgia

Dearest Murphy,

Peace, grace and healing! Bob and I have you in our prayers daily. We hope that your surgery and subsequent treatment is a channel of God’s healing power for you — body, mind and spirit.

Your sermon in the July Hospitality is a wonderful testimony. ... Your positive attitude is an inspiration to us.

I too am a grammar nut, and I loved your teaching on verbs and language in general, especially in the sermon to us.

You advised us to know the Bible and to find excellent teachers. On that first point, I had recently come to the conclusion that the Bible wasn’t that relevant. After completing the Pentateuch, I just saw Moses as a spiritual man who ended his career as a political leader overseeing the strengthening of the Israeli military machine that would one day, under Joshua’s leadership, conquer the promised land. There are so many contradictions in the book that you have to bring your own interpretation to it, and that’s what people do. It justifies everything from peace to war and all points in between.

Then a few days ago, in my daily meditation, I read Quaker theologian Michael Birkel, who wrote how finding our story in the Scriptures brings us a “richness of the inward life and a profound sense of connectedness.” And so I’ll give it a try by looking for my story in the book, and I’ll take your added advice on how we must engage Scripture with a commentary in hand.

On your second bit of advice, I find a great dearth of mentors. Those retired from my field of the mental health profession don’t want to face the political realities threatening the care of those they once served. Instead of working toward social change, they’re too busy taking elaborate vacations, playing golf or watching cable TV. Whatever happened to the lost art of eldering?

I also recently listened to Murphy’s “Iconocast” interview. She spoke about how she learned how not to fear by being given a death sentence (cancer) and experiencing the support of her community. The experience of living in a supportive community negated any sense of fear.

I have struggled with how to avoid fear. There’s so much to fear in my world — the rise of gangs in our city, the increasing graffiti (“tagging”) on my street and in our neighborhood, the oil spills, mountaintop removal, wars, small splinter groups of well funded, well publicized, violent political movements. The list goes on. I thought about how if I only had the faith of a mustard seed, I could conquer such fear. Your statement exposed my individualized, self-made-man approach to right living.

Last I heard Murphy was recovering well from her surgery. Hope you all are doing well. You and the ODC stay in my prayers.

Michael Galovic
Asheville, North Carolina
Michael Galovic is a clinical psychologist and a former Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community.

Thanking God for every being — Ed, Hannah, the brothers and sisters of the community and me too.

Love,
Roger Cooper
Lady Lake, Florida

Dear Murphy,

I have just read your “Three Little Words and the Mystery of Faith” in the July Hospitality and I weep. I remember 16 years ago when you were so powerfully lifted up passionately in prayer by friends in all your communities. And now again you are borne up by your near and far-flung community.

Thank you for this message and the Scripture reading. It is an inspiration to be part of your community — and always of the great community of witnesses.

Sincerely,
Ruth Maier
Haworth, New Jersey

Dearest Murphy,

Peace, grace and healing! Bob and I have you in our prayers daily. We hope that your surgery and subsequent treatment is a channel of God’s healing power for you — body, mind and spirit.

Your sermon in the July Hospitality is a wonderful testimony. ... Your positive attitude is an inspiration to us.

I too am a grammar nut, and I loved your teaching on verbs and language in general, especially in the sacrament of the Welcome Table. I have always been impressed by the quality of the writing, editing and proofreading in Hospitality — it gladdens an English teacher’s heart!

We continue to pray for all our old friends at the Open Door. May God bless you and heal you in a powerful way.

Lots of love,
Phoebe (and Bob) Smith
Daytona Beach, Florida

Willa Bickham

Turkeys & Hams
The Open Door Community needs turkeys and hams to serve for our holiday meals for our friends from the streets!

turkeys for our
Thanksgiving Meal
Friday, November 25
Christmas Meal
Monday, December 26
Turkey already cooked and sliced are most helpful.

hams for our
New Year’s Day Meal
contact Sarah Humphrey at opendoorcomm@bellsouth.net or 770.246.7618
Open Door Community Ministries

Hospitality  page 12  October 2011

Soup Kitchen: Tuesday and Wednesday, 11 a.m. – 12 noon
Men’s Showers: Tuesday, 10:45 a.m.
Trusted Friends Showers & Sandwiches: Thursday, 10 a.m.
Women’s Showers: by appointment

Harriet Tubman Free Women’s Clinic:
1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 7 p.m.
Harriet Tubman Medical and Foot Care Clinics:
Wednesday, 7 p.m.
Mail Check: Tuesday – Wednesday, during Soup Kitchen
Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 1 p.m.
Use of Phone: Tuesday – Thursday, during services
Retreats: Five times each year for our household, volunteers
and supporters.

Prison Ministry: Monthly trip to prisons in Hardwick, Georgia,
in partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Milledgeville;
monthly Jackson (Death Row) Trip; pastoral visits in various
jails and prisons.

Needs of the Community

- Living Needs
  - jeans
  - work shirts
  - short & long sleeve shirts with collars
  - belts (34” & up)
  - men’s underwear
  - women’s underwear
  - socks
  - reading glasses
  - walking shoes
  - (especially sizes 11-15)
- T-shirts
  - (L, XL, 2XL-5XL)
- baseball caps
- trash bags
  - (30 gallon, .85 mil)

- Personal Needs
  - shampoo (all sizes)
  - lotion (all sizes)
  - toothpaste (all sizes)
  - lip balm
  - soap (small sizes)
  - disposable razors

- Food Needs
  - fresh fruits & vegetables
  - turkeys/chickens
  - hams
  - sandwiches:
    - meat with cheese
    - on whole wheat bread

- Special Needs
  - backpacks
  - MARTA cards
  - postage stamps
  - futon sofa
  - single bed - box springs & mattress
  - goose-neck floor lamp for our clinic
  - scale for our medical clinic
  - cross trainer
  - exercise machine

- We gratefully accept donations at these times.
  - Sunday: 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.
  - Monday: 8:30 a.m. until 8:30 p.m.
  - Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday: 8:30 until 9:30 a.m.
  - and 2 until 8:30 p.m.

- Friday and Saturday: We are closed. We are not able to
  offer hospitality or accept donations on these days.

- We also need volunteers to help staff our Foot Care Clinic
  on Wednesday evenings
  - from 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.!