When the flowers on the altar
Have been delivered to the old folks' home,
When the Easter bunnies and plastic eggs
Are back in the basement,
When the students have returned from the beach parties
Or the mission trips to help the poor,
When the priests and pastors are
Donning new liturgical colors,
When the church shelters are
Closed until next fall,
The work of the Resurrection
Of the cruciformed risen Christ begins:
To practice hospitality to all people,
To fight drones and the death penalty,
To feed the hungry,
To pass restrictive gun controls
By amending the Second Amendment,
To write letters to prisoners and visit in the jails and prisons,
To wash each other's feet and the feet of the poor,
To break the pipeline from schools to prisons and thus:
To end the New Jim Crow,
To cry out against private prisons,
To abolish prison slavery by
An amendment to the Thirteenth Amendment,
To build the Beloved Community of the Unkingdom of God
NOW where you are standing,
To tax the rich into freedom and justice for the poor,
To dance in the feet,
To “make music in the heart,”
To touch tenderly with the tips of fingers.

-- Eduard Nuessner Loring,
after and in gratitude to Howard Thurman

The Work of Easter — Resurrection

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Have been delivered to the old folks' home,
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Tom Watson Must Go! continued from page 1

The plaque on the bronze statue tells us that Watson was an “EDITOR, LAWYER, HISTORIAN, AUTHOR, ORATOR, STATESMAN. AUTHOR OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY. A CHAMPION OF RIGHT WHO NEVER FALTERED IN THE CAUSE.”

It’s bad enough that this gives an incomplete picture of who Watson was, but to call him a “champion of right” is a lie of the biggest proportions. Even in the context of the early 20th century, he was not on the side of what was right but of the systemic oppression of African-Americans, Jews and Catholics.

From 1882 to 1922, Watson served in the Georgia General Assembly, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. In his early career he was known as a liberal. He supported elimination of the state’s convict lease system, favored taxes to support public education and championed the needs of poor farmers and sharecroppers of both races.

But later he emerged as a white supremacist and adopted anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Soon after the turn of the century, he began publishing Watson’s Jeffersonian Magazine, an outlet for his writings filled with increasing racial and religious bigotry. He endorsed the disenfranchisement of Black voters and ran for president in 1908 as a white supremacist, publishing vehemnt diatribes against Black Americans in his magazine. The ideas perpetuated by his writings were a significant contributing factor in the tensions that led to the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and countless other transgressions against the Black people of Georgia.

Watson played a prominent role in the case of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager who was flamed and convicted of murdering 13-year-old Mary Phagan and sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted to life in prison, but he was then taken from his prison cell by a mob and lynched in 1915. Watson, through his newspaper, helped inflame public opinion against Frank, and he both called for and later celebrated the lynching in the pages of Jeffersonian.

We can no longer tolerate the violent and racist presence of Tom Watson at the Georgia Capitol. Those grounds belong to all the people of Georgia. The Open Door Community conducts Good Friday worship there every year during Holy Week. Thousands of schoolchildren visit the Capitol every year to learn about Georgia’s history and how its laws are made. Protests take place frequently outside the Capitol, to demand that justice be carried out for every citizen of Georgia, regardless of skin color or religious belief. What we lift up in bronze on those grounds must be the ideals of equality, justice and love, not hatred and bigotry.

Joeff Davis, a writer and photographer for Atlanta’s Creative Loafing newspaper, has taken up the cause of removing Watson’s statue from the Capitol, and the Open Door fully supports this effort.

“Call me naïve, but I believe the state Capitol is sacred ground,” Davis wrote. “It should be reserved for the heroes who stood up for what turned out to be historically right, rather than those who capitalized on the worst aspects of humanity in the times in which they lived. Clearly, Watson’s statue, which sports a plaque that never mentions the hatred on which he built his influence, is better suited for a museum, with a corrected plaque, than the front of the building where our democracy is carried out and where all Georgians are supposedly represented.” (Creative Loafing, March 20, 2013)

Please go online and sign Davis’ petition to remove this offensive statue. Visit www.change.org and type “Thomas Watson Must Go!” in the search field at the top. What takes only a few moments of your time could have a tremendous impact on whom future generations encounter on the grounds of Georgia’s seat of government.

It’s time for Tom Watson to go. His place is in the history books, not on the grounds of the building where the laws of Georgia are made.

Mary Catherine Johnson is on the staff of the Open Door Community and regularly writes our “Moving Toward Abolition” column, which tracks the fight to end capital punishment. She can be emailed at mcjohnson78@yahoo.com.
Existing in This World, Living for Others

The Church for the World
A Theology of Public Witness

By Jennifer M. McBride

Oxford University Press
320 pages

Reviewed by Carla Simmons

Jennifer McBride comes from privileged middle-class Protestant America. And in The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness, she attempts to provoke that America into a revolutionary understanding of Christ's work and the implications for witnessing to his presence in the world.

Based largely on her close study of the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor-theologian and resister against Nazism, McBride argues that many common assumptions of the church need to be re-examined. Her book pushes us to acknowledge the responsibility that society should take as it relates to the world it surrounds.

She is influenced by Bonhoeffer in three specific ways:

- Bonhoeffer instructs the church to communicate the Word of God concretely in the present moment, she writes. And she responds to this by “construct[ing] a theological account of a redemptive, public, ecumenical witness.”

- Secondly, Bonhoeffer states that “the category of ‘church’ first and foremost signals a theological concept.” Based on this, McBride focuses on “the public witness of the church community as opposed to the individual Christian.”

- Thirdly, like Bonhoeffer, she wishes to develop an “ecclesiology in light of our historical moment” that applies to our pluralistic democracy in this time and place.

For McBride, like Bonhoeffer, triumphalism is an oppressive force with tendencies commonly found in “Christians and church communities in the United States who intentionally and unintentionally maintain and benefit from the status quo.” She seeks a non-triumphal public witness that will break the barriers between people and social groups that are the result of pre-existing social structures, a witness that will cultivate a better world, a world much more like God revealed through the person and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. For McBride, this is possible for the church as a body, through confession unto repentance, a theme that unites her to Bonhoeffer’s connection among Christ, the world and the church.

Bonhoeffer and McBride express repentance as an act of taking responsibility for social sin where those in a position of privilege and power can be held accountable for injustice in society. Repentance is not defined in a way that places blame or points fingers, but instead accepts responsibility, as a confessing church, through repentant action. Following Bonhoeffer, McBride proclaims that to follow Jesus Christ, as the Word became flesh, is to exist completely in this world and to live for others.

From prison, Bonhoeffer argued that a “religionless Christianity” and “non-religious” Christological interpretation of Scripture and biblical concepts should define the mission of the church for the world based on the incarnation of God in the world. That mission is to be a witness to Christ by taking his crucified form, which happens, McBride says, “when churches confess sin and repent.” The church, she says, must participate in a way of being and pattern of speech “characterized by humbly acknowledged complicity in specific sin and injustice and of the church’s inherent interconnectedness in the sin of broader society.”

The illumination in The Church for the World took a great amount of courage. The author is shining a light into the closets of her own community to highlight the problems of neglect and abuse reflected from her church and society that are normally excused or ignored. Her voice serves as a much-needed wake-up call to the comfort of mainstream America. Her claim is provocative but classic. Her language is complex but her message is simple: She is saying, “Hey! We’re wrong, but we can make it better.”

Her position is clear: as Christians we already know that we are sinners, and to look at ourselves in any other light is to misunderstand our faith and cause further damage to the world. What she says is real and beautiful, a real relief from the burden of being “perfect” and the judgment that perfectionism encourages in us.

Using theological language, McBride does an excellent job of unpacking the baggage in assumptions that stifle the thought and action of the church community. “No one is righteous but God,” she writes, “yet the church witnesses to Christ when it casts aside moral certainty and takes the form of Christ’s righteousness . . . the alien form revealed through the cross, characterized by living beyond good and evil, by taking responsibility for sin through repentance.” This reinforces the look of righteousness for the forgiven and what repentance means for the confessing church.

McBride’s position is clear: as Christians we already know that we are sinners, and to look at ourselves in any other light is to misunderstand our faith and cause further damage to the world.

She furthers the concept of prayer, moving away from pious requests to God or transformation of the “others” and into honest acceptance of our fallen humanity and our participation in it. “In my theology of public witness,” she says, “confession of sin correlates to prayer (to the liturgical practice that makes space for a church community to hear God’s judgment and be convicted of its complicity in a specific social sin).” She forces the reader’s perspective away from the privileged self and toward the crucified Christ.

Her argument rests on her understanding of Jesus as a real human being. Brilliantly she states, “In the incarnation God involves Godself in the world and in sinful flesh to such a degree that God really embraces powerlessness. . . . Christ embraces the condition of human guilt in solidarity with real human beings in order to redeem.” This model of redemption challenges Christians to no longer see themselves as the “standardbearers of morality” but more honestly as sinners living in a pluralistic world. This approach puts us in conversation, and on our way to better actions, with one another. It is in this way that we may be boldly and humbly engaged with the world.

The Church for the World has the potential to help us rethink and reform North American Protestant understandings of the work of Jesus Christ and of our role as a witness to him. In turn, it may lead to drastically different conversations and actions than what we are accustomed to hearing from Christians in public space. Exposure to McBride’s work prompts a radical reconsideration of privileged society and lifestyles of North Americans in general. In a fallen world, as a fallen body, the church’s tendency toward dominance and an attitude of moral righteousness must change in order to be a positive agent.

She roots this idea in Jesus, who “took the form of a sufferer” instead of a “moral exemplar.” This understanding of Jesus must be embraced in order for Christians to have a public witness in the world that leads to real change. Jesus took the form of a sufferer, she explains, when he took sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), was baptized with sinners and was convicted and died as a criminal on the cross. The book shows the effect of Jesus’ solidarity with humility and sin and leads the church to “do the same,” through confession unto repentance, pointing us all to the reality that change in our world is possible. McBride gives as examples the Eleutherom Community, an evangelical Episcopal community in Maine, and the Southeast (or “Little”) White House, an inner-city ministry in Washington, D.C., where she worked for two years.

She works with communities, organizations and real human beings like me. As an incarcerated person, I have had the opportunity to know her, learn from her and teach her over the years, through the Theological Certificate Program at Lee Arrendale State Prison. During the summer of 2012, she taught a course on Public Theology with The Church for the World as the text. Although she emphasizes that her intended audience is privileged North American Protestants, her message carries significant weight for all of us who believe.

“While some theologians involved in conversations about public witness want to ground witness in the church’s identity as forgiven sinners, it is unclear how this self-understanding . . . makes evident and intelligible God’s love,” she writes. “This is especially a problem given the quietism and apathy that too readily arises from Christians . . . who are so familiar with the message that we are a forgiven and redeemed people that this good news no longer awakens us to the ways that we remain complicit in sin . . . Under these circumstances the church stands before the world not as forgiven sinners, but as a body needing to confess and repent for things done and left undone.” This means that each Christian must raise a much acknowledged acknowledgment that he or she is part of a giant problem.

People who live in comfort and privilege certainly have more hands to raise and more responsibility to bear, but even as someone in prison and thus vulnerable under an unjust system, I examine myself. I find that too many times I have turned away from issues in this place that “don’t concern me,” where it is easier to remain silent and uninvolved. This especially occurs in my life when the issues arise from a system or structure much larger than my protest. After considering this book, I must rethink my own responsibility to the world regardless of my position in it, and believe that without my own hand raised and my confessions heard, I remain part of the problem, neglecting the world and my membership in the church body, the crucified form of Jesus Christ.

Carla Simmons is a graduate of the Atlanta Theological Association’s Certificate in Theological Studies program at Lee Arrendale State Prison near Alto, where she was taught by Jennifer McBride. McBride is Board of Regents Chair in Ethics and Assistant Professor of Religion at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa; holds a doctorate in philosophical theology from the University of Virginia; was a Postdoctoral Fellow in Religious Practices and Practical Theology at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology; is co-editor of the book Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import.
A Prophetic Witness Against Death

By John Harrison

When I left the Open Door to come to Austin, Texas, I didn't know I'd be spending most of my time raising awareness about the death penalty.

It happened in an instant, but I think that's the only way it can happen, really. When you're new in town and you find out that the decision to kill 20 people a year is made only a mile away, you either cry out or you don't. If you decide not to cry out, the spirit of outrage will leave you and will pass on to someone else.

A basic tenet of Christian faith is that people can change and that their sins can be forgiven. The death penalty is a rejection of these basic claims.

If we don't have mercy in us, we don't have Jesus in us.

I came to Austin because I want to be a pastor, and there is a seminary here that gave me a scholarship. At the Open Door, I learned what kind of pastor I want to become, or, more specifically, what kind of church I want to become a leader in.

It's easy to judge the church for what it's not, but I'm here to remind the church of what it can be. I want to offer a prophetic witness that the church can be better than it is, and that things don't have to be this way. The death penalty is an easy place to start, because it's as simple as black and white, as basic as life and death, and it's an issue the church is absolutely silent about.

The movement to abolish capital punishment faces a simple obstacle in Texas and the rest of the South: our church leaders feel pressure to hide behind our political leaders, and our political leaders find it convenient to hide behind our church leaders. It's easy to forget, however, that even when we hide our position, there's no such thing as a neutral position.

Even in silence, a church can't avoid making a political statement. By the same token, politicians who use their Christian faith to get elected cannot avoid making a theological statement. When the church decides to remain silent about the death penalty, we're allowing politics to define our public theology.

Even when we're silent, that theology speaks for us to say, "I am not my brother's keeper." The church doesn't have to be this way, and in Texas I'm trying to show people what the Open Door showed me. It showed me that the church's job is to witness to the humanity of every single one of God's children.

I didn't always think that witness could be effective. I used to think that the death penalty would never change and that my emotions wouldn't make a difference. When I heard about Daniel Greene, though, I knew I'd been wrong.

Witnessing to someone's humanity can mean the difference between life and death. A year ago in April, Daniel's entire community gathered around him to claim him as one of their own. Their witness saved his life. The state that killed Troy Davis allowed Daniel Greene to live because his community could show that he was still redeemable as a human being.

Is it strange to say that new faith came to me in a stamped envelope with a letter telling me this story? Miracles are possible, and I was wrong to doubt. Even the state of Georgia can have mercy. The church is wrong to doubt too, and we forget in our silence that it's our job to teach, preach and cry out for mercy.

I learned the power of mercy by worshipping at the Open Door. Mercy is what we pray for, and communion is what gives us the strength to keep on praying. The blood of Jesus Christ is our witness that God has mercy, and I can witness that God's mercy has the power to change our lives.

A basic tenet of Christian faith is that people can change and that their sins can be forgiven. The death penalty is a rejection of these basic claims.

If ending capital punishment is a message too radical to take to church, then how on earth will the kingdom ever come?

Whether we know it or not, we talk about the death penalty every time we take communion together. The same meal that proclaims the forgiveness of sins was also Jesus’ last meal before he was executed by the state. We know how to talk about the death penalty, and other seminaries are joining us in Texas and the rest of the South: our church leaders feel pressure to hide behind our political leaders, and our political leaders find it convenient to hide behind our church leaders. It's easy to forget, however, that even when we hide our position, there's no such thing as a neutral position.

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If we don’t have mercy in us, we don’t have Jesus in us.
Georgia Prisoners Fatten State Coffers With Slave Labor

By Janice Buttrum

Most of what is and has been written about prison life in the United States is written by men. While some of it applies, much of it doesn’t touch on those of us who’ve been marginalized within the prison system.

There is such a class. We are the female lifers. We are treated as if we are not part of the mainstream prison population. We are repeatedly denied parole “due to the nature and circumstance of your crime.” We are denied access to most vocational training. We cannot go on work details outside the prison grounds.

I can’t even imagine how much money inmates are making for the state of Georgia. It brings to mind the irony of us, in a different way. I’m not saying that I don’t deserve to be in prison. I took a life that I can never replace. But as my sisters and I age, why not treat us with a modicum of care and consideration?

Georgia doesn’t pay its inmates, as some other states do. I read in The Angolite, the magazine written and published by inmates of the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana, that field workers there receive four cents an hour. At eight hours a day that’s 32 cents a day, or $1.60 for five days’ work. In North Carolina several years ago, one male educational aide made seven cents a day, or 32 cents a day, or $1.60 for five days’ work.

In the sewing plant at my prison, it’s 150 cents an hour. Industries, you have to meet production daily. I once saw a Georgia Correctional Industries catalog of the products we make, which is sent to every city, county and state office in Georgia and to all the other states and some departments of the federal government. Every item that is manufactured in Georgia prison industries is sold in this catalog: signs, furniture, beds, lockers, uniforms, pajamas, boots, T-shirts, sweatshirts, eyeglass frames, caps, net bags and more. It boggles the mind to try to remember it all. And there is a print shop that makes $10 to $12 million a year. All of this with prison labor.

If this sounds unbelievable, it all can be researched. The print shop is at Phillips State Prison in Buford, Georgia. It was at Metro State Prison in Atlanta. I worked there once until we were pulled off the job because we were lifers working outside the gates. There are sewing factories at Hardwick, Pulaski and Washington, and probably more that I don’t know about.

Hope From ‘Miss Janie’

Meanwhile, the lifer population is growing older. Most of us have already been incarcerated for many years. We get no calcium supplements, no vitamin D, no potassium. Many have artery blockages from the food that’s used to prepare our food. High blood pressure is on the rise also. It is very stressful to have to deal with younger prisoners who think this is a lark. Or there’s the stress of watching a 19-year-old guard who thinks she doesn’t need to give respect to a 63-year-old prisoner who’s sick and needs some Tylenol.

And let’s not forget that as we get older, the families and friends who might have sent us money or packages in the past are becoming older also. They aren’t able to help us as they once did. They aren’t turning away from us, but often their financial situations have changed for the worse and so has their health. But even if we were in a place where we had money in the bank, we would still be messed up. After you’ve paid lawyer’s fees and bought shoes and personal items and maybe a few stamps and a little coffee, the money is gone in no time. Georgia has a lot of very young inmates, especially female ones, from 15 to 21 years old. The state gets federal funding to give them proper nutrients. They receive whole milk in cartons that come from Rogers State Prison, and juice, cheese and real eggs for growing bones and bodies. The rest of us get milk that comes in crates and in the state doesn’t furnish us. We get no salt or pepper to season our food. A 30-cent bar of soap — any of those things — are done or too raw.

Older inmates are susceptible to osteoporosis, but the system has no program for them. One of my greatest fears is being helpless in prison. There was some talk years ago of opening a co-ed prison for handicapped and elderly inmates, and using lifers as aids and helpers. But now, years later, there is still no more word on it. I know several people who need that type of atmosphere.

You don’t see much respect for the elderly in prison. Many of the young prisoners feel that “if they could do the crime, they can do the time” — until you point out to them someone who has done many years and was their age when she came to prison.

As an example I’ll use someone who finally went home, Janie Gibbs. She came to prison when she was in her mid-30s. She went home in her late 60s, in a wheelchair and with Parkinson’s disease. She sent us a picture of her in her wheelchair rolling through the back gates of Washington State Prison, and one of her in her “first real bed in 35 years.”

We called her “Miss Janie.” She gives me hope for freedom. She once told me that she was ready to give up and die. I told her that she gave all the younger ones hope for the future. She laughed at me, but I was serious.

Recently a “baby lifer” told me the same thing. I laughed too. A “baby lifer” is one who’s just come into the prison system. They still believe in “truth, justice and the American way.” They want to believe it until all their appeals are denied and they’ve accepted that even if they are innocent, they’re stuck in the system.

What about the changes we have made in our lives? Are we even the same people who committed a crime so many years ago?

My children still think the state pays me. They think I just want extra money. I can’t tell them that their mother can’t get shampoo, lotion or good soap, deodorant or toothpaste from the state. The state soap has lye in it. I think. The deodorant breaks me out and the toothpaste will remove nail polish from concrete floors.

I know that a lot has changed in society since I was locked up more than 30 years ago. But I truly believe that if I and other lifers were allowed to go to a halfway house before release, we could adapt to society easily. I pray that I might have that opportunity some day.

I hope I’ve opened someone’s eyes to what we see daily. We may be labeled as prisoners, but we are still human beings. We are still women and we are strong women. We have been battered, abused and threatened, but we have learned from our mistakes and maybe someday the Parole Board will decide to give us another chance. Then perhaps we can help make a difference for those who follow behind us.

‘We Are Still Human Beings’

The purpose of this article is to hopefully get someone else to question how the system works. I could tell you about the “Jane Does” who sued over the systemic abuse at the old Georgia Women’s Correctional Institution in Hardwick. I could tell you about the sexual misconduct at Metro State Prison. I could tell you about every woman’s prison that’s been opened in Georgia in recent decades. But I just want to let someone know how we feel when we can’t get the right nutrients, the right care, a tube of Colgate toothpaste from the store, a visit from someone, someone, a letter, shampoo, lotion, a soda, a 30-cent bar of soap — any of those things the state doesn’t furnish us.

Since I was locked up more than 30 years ago at Pulaski State Prison, all the lifers had a meeting with Dr. Betty Cooke of the Parole Board. Someone asked her how it was that every lifer could get the same form letter with their denial, and we were told that it was normal procedure. Just explain how the “nature and circumstance” surrounding a murder, armed robbery, rape or kidnapping is ever going to change. Can anyone explain it? I sure can’t. And what about the changes we have made in our lives? Are we even the same people who committed a crime so many years ago?

Janice Buttrum was convicted of murder in Whitfield County, Georgia, in 1981 and sentenced to death, making her the youngest woman ever sentenced to death in the United States. In 1989, her sentence was commuted to life in prison because she was a minor at the time of the crime.
Monday
Grady Memorial Hospital
5:00 p.m.
John 12:1-11
Right: Open Door Partner Dick Rustay leads our worship circle on the sidewalk outside Grady Memorial Hospital. Below right: Resident Volunteer Brian Coldmon shares with the circle his experience of spending 24 hours on the street.

Tuesday
Atlanta City Jail
5:00 p.m.
Luke 22:1-6, 31-34, 54-62
Below: Open Door Novice Emma Stitt proclaims the gospel outside the Atlanta City Jail. Bottom left: Franciscan Brother David Buer (left) from Tucson, Arizona, Rev. Leo Chang (center) from Springfield, Missouri, and Resident Terry Kennedy kept the Vigil on Monday night and Tuesday. David and Leo came to spend Holy Week with us on the streets of Atlanta.

Wednesday
Troy Davis/Woodruff Park
5:00 p.m.
Mark 11:15-19
Right: Brother David Buer leads the circle in worship as Resident Volunteer Zac Crow listens. Above: Each day, those leaving the circle to keep the vigil received a blessing from those gathered.

Holy Week 2013
Maundy Thursday
Atlanta City Hall
5:00 p.m.
Mark 14:12-26
Left: On Maundy Thursday, we gathered at Atlanta City Hall for worship and the Eucharist. Right: Novice John McRae reads the Scripture for the day. Below: Partner Calvin Kimbrough leads singing. Calvin, Murphy Davis and Nathan Dorris led music for our worship every day. Below right: Terry Kennedy receives the Eucharist cup from Ron Santoni, who journeyed from Granville, Ohio, to join us for Holy Week.

Good Friday
Georgia State Capitol
5:00 p.m.
Left: Open Door staffer Mary Catherine Johnson shares images from her time keeping the vigil on Atlanta's streets. Below: In front of the state Capitol, Partner Murphy Davis presents her powerful witness as a member of the Family of the Crucified.
Holy Saturday
Pine Street Shelter
5:00 p.m.
Matthew 27:57-66
Top: The circle gathers in a deserted parking lot behind the Pine Street Shelter. Above right: Partner Nelia Kimbrough leads our worship time, Resident Volunteer Jay Ashmeer welcomes us to the circle, and Leo Chang speaks about his week on the streets. Right: Resident Volunteer Nathan Dorris and Resident Winston Robarts were our drummers for the Litany of the Tombs.

Holy Saturday
Front Yard at 910
6:30 p.m.
The Easter Vigil begins with a fried chicken supper served by Jane Ingols and her friends from the Celebrations Sunday School Class at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. Left: Resident Linda Moore (from left), Andrea Jones, Dub and Alice Anderson, Gail Wilcox and Jane Ingols, all from Peachtree Presbyterian, offered food and smiles to each person as they came through the line.

Easter
Front Yard at 910
8:00 a.m.
John 20:1-18, Mark 16:1-8
Top right: Jim Bingham and Paddy Kenmington volunteer to prepare our Easter Breakfast every year. This year we served ham, scrambled eggs, grits, biscuits, fruit, orange juice and coffee. Above: Following the breakfast, Partner Eduard Loring proclaims the Good News in our front yard: Jesus Christ is risen! The powers of death and oppression are defeated!
**A Prophetic Witness Against Death** continued from page 4

The Texas Capitol Liturgy

Texas executes more people than any other state — 15 in 2012 and 496 since 1982, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. The following liturgy was read by John Harrison and his fellow seminarians on the steps of the Texas state Capitol the week after Easter:

They took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man? And why don’t you judge him yourself?” The mob replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.”

Just as you did it to the least of these,

You did it to me.

As Simon carried his cross, Jesus said to the crowd, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. If you would do these things when I am here, what evil will you do when I am gone?”

Just as you did it to the least of these,

You did it to me.

When they came to the death place, they crucified him, along with two other criminals. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And the guards put his clothes in a box on the street.

Just as you did it to the least of these,

You did it to me.

A criminal hanging beside our Lord said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Just as you did it to the least of these,

You did it to me.

I was addicted to crack, and you gave me no rehab. I was on trial for my life, and you didn’t defend me. I was in prison, and you did not visit me. I’m dead, and you do not mourn me.

Just as you did it to the least of these,

You did it to me.

“Moving Toward Abolition,” usually written by Mary Catherine Johnson, is a regular column that tracks the fight to end capital punishment. John Harrison, a student at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and a former volunteer at the Open Door Community, welcomes poems from people in Georgia prisons or living on the streets in Georgia.

Send submissions to Eduard Loring, Dayspring Farm, 560 West Henry Street, Peachtree Corners, GA 30092. Send submissions to Eduard Loring, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E., Atlanta, GA 30306-4212 or by email to hospitalitypoetrycorner@gmail.com.

**Death Row**

It’s so still you could hear
A tear drop,
And the second hand on the wall
Clock . . . three floors down.
Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick.
I wish it would stop . . . it doesn’t.
Waiting . . . not knowing.
Dare not ask.
Maybe they forgot.
Maybe . . . maybe . . . maybe,
I should ask.

Dawn breaks the silence.
Breakfast is served.
Then lunch . . . then supper.
Different foods, same taste.
Same face in my face.

Like me, he’s waiting.
Dusk descends.
It’s so silent you could hear
A tear drop.

Edward Ward was sentenced to death in DeKalb County in 1973. His death sentence was later commuted to a life sentence, which he continues to serve. This poem is read as part of the Haggada at our annual Open Door Community Seder, the ceremonial feast of Passover. The Seder experience is a process of the regeneration of values, and as such Murphy Davis, a founding Partner of the Open Door, created the Haggada Against the Death Penalty in 1978 in collaboration with Rabbi Harvey Winokur. A large interfaith Seder Against the Death Penalty was celebrated for several years at The Temple in Atlanta and then at Temple Sinai. We continue to celebrate it annually at the Open Door. Edward Ward’s poem helps us recall the agony of the prisoner and God’s promise of liberation. Our redemption is bound up with the deliverance from bondage of people everywhere.

— Edward Ward, Georgia death row, 1977

Hospitality welcomes poems from people in Georgia prisons or living on the streets in Georgia.

Send submissions to Eduard Loring, Dayspring Farm, 560 West Henry Street, Peachtree Corners, GA 30092 or by email to hospitalitypoetrycorner@gmail.com.

Join us as a Resident Volunteer

Calvin Kimbrough

Come join the Vagrant Christ in the streets of Atlanta.

**Live in a residential Christian community.** Serve Jesus Christ in the hungry, homeless, and imprisoned.

Join street actions and loud and loving 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!
On Being a Black Gay Man

By Terry Kennedy

Writing this article has been a great challenge for me. To write from the outside looking in can be really easy, but to write something concrete is difficult when you are the subject matter. But, over the years, I have found that the things that make us uncomfortable could liberate someone else. Just the thought of putting these feelings into print for all to see gives me the jitters. I guess the best way to start is to jump right in.

I’m a 50-year-old African-American licensed and ordained minister in the Church of God in Christ, and I’m homosexual.

Now this confession holds some problems for some who call themselves Christians — for those Christians for whom “homosexual” and “minister” can’t be in the same sentence unless it’s to say that a minister can’t be a homosexual.

Come close and let me tell you a secret: the church had me believing the same thing for close to 30 years. In believing that, I have been a miserable, unhappy shell of a man, who has never embraced how special he is in the eyes of God. For all those years, I lived the life that others wanted me to live. I lived a lie and believed the lies that God didn’t love me, that I was an abomination to God, that I would die a cruel and painful death and that God created AIDS as a punishment for my behavior.

Can you imagine being convinced that God does not love you simply because you are homosexual? Don’t even think about preaching the Word, because all you would be doing is spreading that spirit of perversion to the spiritually weak congregants. The coup d’etat is that if I let God deliver me from a life that is not pleasing to God (homosexuality), then and only then can I experience the abundant life that God offers.

Let me rewind my life back to when I was 17, when all I could think about was preaching God’s Word. I had visions of pastoring a “megachurch” before “megachurch” was part of our vocabulary, but I was being told that I was demon-possessed and unworthy of the calling that was on my life. I can feel the hurt and pain of those conversations as if they were happening now. I remember the hatred I felt toward myself and the anger toward God for making me that way. Eventually, I learned that “I wish I was never born” began to set in, and when those thoughts continue to invade your psyche, you do what I did, and that is to try to take your life, to commit suicide.

But a funny thing happened in my attempt to take my life: I didn’t die. And that just pissed me off even more, because it meant that now I had to continue to live this unfulfilled and hell-bound life. After this debacle of an attempt to end it all, I spent years on an emotional roller coaster, not knowing whether homosexuality is a sin, not knowing whether God loves me and not knowing whether I would ever preach.

So what did I do? I lied about who I was. I hid my homosexuality so I could become a preacher. I now take the pulpit quite often, whether it’s bringing the Word, prayer or Scripture readings. The pulpit is where I believe I belong, and I love it there. But now that my true identity is in public print, I wonder how long it will be before those privileges are taken away.

The Open Door is an inclusive community that does not judge or exclude people based on their sexual orientation. We accept all people in their brokenness, and the community has accepted me fully even when I could not accept myself. Realizing that acceptance was one of the greatest moments in my life.

We have a monthly salon where we discuss books that are important to our work and theology, and at the very first salon I attended, I met a married gay couple, Heather and Katie, who are beloved members of the extended Open Door Community. When I saw this couple being accepted and loved by this community, it was the beginning of the healing of my self-hatred for being gay, and I had the courage to come out to my Open Door friends. I have to give a shout-out to Heather and Katie for their love for each other, which showed me that same-gender love is a wonderful thing, nothing to be ashamed of, and that loving myself isn’t a bad thing either.

To be honest, I’m kind of, sort of, wanting the truth to come out and to see where it leads. There is a level of embarrassment and shame on my part that I have for so long let someone else dictate how I live, and in doing so determine my happiness. And when your happiness is predicated on someone else’s standards, you are not happy. There are serious dangers in conforming to others’ standards of acceptable behavior. Anxiety and depression set in, which leads to feelings of unworthiness, which will take you down the path I took of trying to end your life.

Of all the things I have learned over the years, one of the most important is that if I accept the love that God has for me and understand that there is nothing I can do to make God love me less — that God offers me agape love, an unconditional love, beyond what any human can — then I can make it through whatever situation I find myself in.

A piece of advice I can offer is to be dependent upon God, but remember that you have a responsibility to do what you have to do for yourself. Life is about choices, and one choice I have decided to make is to embrace my homosexuality, to embrace God’s love for me and to embrace the love I have for myself.

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Life is about choices, and one choice I have decided to make is to embrace my homosexuality, to embrace God’s love for me and to embrace the love I have for myself. Finally, I can be a voice for the homeless, for the incarcerated, for the marginalized, but now at this moment I choose to be a voice for myself and all my LGBTQ brothers and sisters who struggle with the church and its closed-mindedness. The time to stand idly by and do nothing is over. SHALOM!!!!!!

Terry Kennedy is a Resident at the Open Door Community.
That Scandalous Book of James

By Anne Sayre

Anne Sayre is a longtime friend and volunteer at the Open Door Community. She delivered this message this past winter on a Tuesday morning, when residents and outside volunteers gather every week for study, reflection and prayer preceding our Tuesday Soup Kitchen. For several weeks, our subject was the Book of James.

Elsa Tamez, author of the book The Scandalous Message of James, is Mexican by birth, received her doctorate in theology from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and is a professor at the Bible University of Costa Rica. She is a feminist liberation theologian. These words from her book Women Take the Word give insight into who she is:

The first time I said to a great theologian, a friend, "you are wrong," I scared myself and thought it wasn’t who spoke. He blinked like he was also scared. It wasn’t the first time I had thought differently from him over some aspects of theology, but I had never dared to say it out loud. I had made a big jump in my life. He said contentedly, "You may be right." That day I felt very satisfied. Not because he was wrong this time or I was right, but because a real dialogue had been initiated. I had gone from being an echo to being a voice.

Elsa Tamez had found her voice, and she has been using it effectively ever since that moment. In all her books, she concentrates on those who are oppressed and have no voice — mainly the poor and women.

In her book The Bible of the Oppressed, she argues that oppression is the basic cause of poverty. The principal motive of oppression is the eagerness to pile up wealth, and this desire is connected to the fact that the oppressor is an idolator. She also says that there is an almost complete absence of the theme of oppression in European and North American theology. But ask someone from Latin America or Africa, in countries that have suffered from the advance of colonialism, about the theme of oppression in their theology, and you will hear a different story. That oppression is still going on in countries such as Guatemala and Honduras. After being "banana republics" for decades, they now are being devastated by mining companies from Canada and the United States, all for profit.

With that introduction, let’s turn now to Tamez’s The Scandalous Message of James. James is a book that Martin Luther put at the very back of his version of the Bible and really would have liked to take out of the canon. He felt that James contradicted his core teaching that we are saved by faith through grace. One of the themes of James is that "faith without works is dead." We will see later on, however, that James has nothing to do with "works righteousness," which was one of Luther’s problems with the Catholic Church of his day.

So why is James such a scandal? Basically because the book offers hope and reassurance to the poor, while the message to the rich is to weep and wail. The scandal of James, to Tamez, is that he has promised to those who love him? The word "beloved" does not God chosen the poor in from or whether we have a bed to sleep in. It is difficult to preach from James when most of us in the pews don’t have to worry about where our next meal comes or whether we have a bed to sleep in.

An important theme in the book is God’s preferential option for the poor. Verse 2:5 admonishes, "Listen my beloved brothers and sisters, has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?" The word "poor" in the New Testament is used for those without economic wealth and also without power. It refers to the oppression by those in control of religion, economics, politics and the household that causes poverty — that is, the rich and powerful cause poverty.

James calls us in Chapter 2 to act on our faith, to not accept the world as it is but to help reverse the order of privilege. He demands that the poor be treated equally with the rich. Another theme in James is that we must choose God or the world. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. James calls us to choose that which is God’s riches or God’s Mammon. Conversion means we give up the adulterer of having two masters: God and the world. Tamez says, "Cleaning our hands requires giving up the corruption that has made us rich, turning away from the values of society toward the values of God."

A third theme in James relates to Luther’s problem with it. James 2:14 says that faith without works is dead — probably the most famous passage in the book. James calls the Christian community to action, or praxis. It is not "works righteousness," but faith brought to completion by works. Tamez points out that Abraham is a good example of this in that his strong faith in God made him willing to sacrifice his son: faith equals action. Tamez finds the theme of hope for the future implicit in James’ choice to open his book with a call to "rejoice." He offers hope in the form of blessings from God on the poor and the coming judgment of the rich. The poor and oppressed can be hopeful because the kingdom of God is theirs. James calls on the rich to how over the misfortunes that are coming upon them soon because of exploitation, robbery and death. The rich are called to choose that which is God’s riches.

But they have the opportunity to turn away from the world and toward the way of God to find their humble place in Christian community. The message is not to send the rich away, but to not give them privileges because of their wealth. They are called to be humble, and the congregation is reminded to treat everyone equally.

And finally, there is the theme of patience. Traditionally that word has been understood to signify a passive, subservient attitude. This interpretation has been prejudicial for the lives of Christians and their communities, because it encourages resignation, a lack of commitment to concrete realities, and a subjection to the governing authorities.

I remember when most people thought and voiced the opinion to Martin Luther King Jr. that he should have more patience. It was another way of saying, "Let’s keep the status quo of 250 years of second-class citizenship for African-Americans." Tamez says that James is not talking about this kind of patience. He calls for a militant patience, a very active, heroic patience, one that watches for the propitious moment. It means to persevere, to resist, to be constant, unbreakable, immovable.

I end with this quote from Elsa Tamez that I hope will spur us to righteous impatience and action:

God remains silent so that men and women may speak, protest and struggle. God remains silent so that people may really become people. When God is silent and men and women cry, God cries in solidarity with them but doesn’t intervene. God waits for the shouts of protest. God is listening for our cries and action against all forms of oppression. Let’s scandalize our part of the world by following the teachings of James, who is following the teachings of Jesus. ✩

Daniel Nichols

Celebrating 80 Years continued from page 1

In 1977, Ed and I visited Grailville, a Catholic laywomen’s community in Loveland, Ohio, in and with which I had worked and lived for several periods a few years earlier. In their bookstore, we bought a paperback titled A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker by William Miller. We were captivated and knew we had to learn more. Ed has a Ph.D. in American church history and I had done graduate work in the same subject, but we knew nothing about Dorothy Day. All we knew about the Catholic Worker was that they had a soup line in the Bowery in New York.

When we visited Maryhouse, the New York Catholic Worker, in January 1979, we felt at so home that I wept through much of the visit. Mike Haranik gave us copies of several of Dorothy’s books, and Ed stayed up all night on the train back to Atlanta reading her autobiography, The Long Loneliness, sharing it with me as he read. By the time we reached home, you might say that we had been transformed from Protestants in search of a useable past to Protestant Catholic Workers in search of a useable future.

Dorothy became our mentor, our teacher, our guide, and we began to plan visits to other CW communities to learn from them. Our first stay at the New York houses made clear that we must strive to copy some of their praxis and, at the same time, create something very different.

Carolyn and Rob Johnson and their daughter Christina, and Ed and I with our daughter Hannah, stayed at Joseph House. Carolyn and I shared two single beds with our two 18-month-old girls; Ed and Rob slept on the tables in the newspaper office. We left New York looking for real beds, but we were confirmed in our new identity. We would open such a house, but it would need to be perhaps a bit more adapted to children and family life. The rest, as they say, is history.

The movement has been glorious and welcoming to us. I believe it was Jeff and Catherine at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker who began to refer to us as “the Protestant Worker house,” and we were honored to be included. At the 50th-anniversary celebration of the CW in 1983, we found our new kinfolk. And every time we gather with sister houses in the United States or Europe, we feel as if we’re at a family reunion.

We serve food, showers, medical care and hospitality to the homeless poor. We ask why the poor are homeless and hungry. We visit the prisoner and fight to end the death penalty. We strive to resist war and violence. We struggle day by day to build community — a new world in the shell of the old. We are blessed to have so many sisters and brothers and such a “great cloud of witnesses” from this 80-year history.

Happy Birthday, Catholic Worker family!! ✩

Murphy Davis is a Partner at the Open Door Community. For more on the Catholic Worker movement and some of our sister houses, see www.catholicworker.org, www.lacatholicworker.org or www.brot-und-rosen.de, where you’ll also find links to others.

Flickr/Jim Forest
Open Door Community Ministries

Soup Kitchen: Tuesday, 10:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
                  Wednesday, 11 a.m. – 12 noon
Men’s Showers: Tuesday, 10:15 a.m.
Trusted Friends Showers & Sandwiches: Thursday, 10 a.m.
Women’s Showers: Wednesday, 3 p.m.
Harriet Tubman Free Women’s Clinic: 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.

Join Us for Worship!

We gather for worship and Eucharist at 4 p.m. each Sunday, followed by supper together.
If you are considering bringing a group please contact us at 770.246.7628.
Please visit www.opendoorcommunity.org or call us for the most up-to-date worship schedule.

Sunday: We invite you to join us for Worship at 4 p.m. and for supper following worship.

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.

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

Needs of the Community

Living Needs
- jeans 30-34 waist and 46-60 x 32 long
- short & long sleeve shirts with collars
- belts (34” & up)
- men’s underwear
- women’s underwear
- socks
- reading glasses
- walking shoes
- T-shirts especially sizes 11-15
- XL through 5XL
- baseball caps
- trash bags (30 gallon, .85 mil)
- pill containers: Your generosity has supplied us with enough pill containers for the next several months. We ask that you NOT send any more until we again request them. Thank You!

Personal Needs
- shampoo (all sizes)
- lotion (all sizes)
- toothpaste (all sizes)
- lip balm
- soap (all sizes)
- disposable razors
- food needs
- fresh fruits & vegetables
- turkeys/chicken
- hams
- sandwiches: meat with cheese on whole wheat bread
- personal hygiene: deodorant; hair gel

Special Needs
- backpacks
- MARTA cards
- blankets
- postage stamps
- a conga or djembe drum
- prayers for the Abolition of the Death Penalty

Medical Needs List

Harriet Tubman Medical Clinic
- ibuprofen
- acetaminophen
- Lubriderm lotion
- cough drops
- non-drowsy allergy tablets
- cough medicine (alcohol free)

Foot Care Clinic
- Epsom salts
- anti-bacterial soap
- foot powder (medicated)
- foot soap
- cuticle clippers
- latex gloves
- nail files (large)
- toenail clippers (large)
- medicated foot powder
- antifungal cream (Tolfanate)

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