Building Community, Part II

Life Together: Formation for Discipleship

By Murphy Davis

(Editors note: In November 2003, Murphy Davis and Ed Loring traveled to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, for the annual meeting of the European Catholic Worker Communities. Murphy gave the keynote address for the meeting. This is Part II of an adaptation of her talk; Part III will be printed in May’s Catholic Worker Communities. Murphy gave the keynote address for the meeting. This is Part II of an adaptation of her talk; Part III will be printed in May’s Catholic Worker Communities.)

The scriptures teach us that “without a vision the people perish.” And we might add that without a common vision, communities perish. To even begin to form a life together, a vision must be shared at some level. If a community is to survive for any time at all, the vision must be strong enough to sustain us. And we must remember the vision every step of the way.

Many people articulate wanting community—in congregations, in neighborhoods, in different forms of intentional community; but when it comes down to it, we learn that we have to be willing to do the tedious work of building community, striving for it, praying for it, sweating for it, hoping for it (often against all evidence of its being a possibility). W.H. Auden said, “To choose what is difficult all one’s days as if it were easy, that is faith.” No question about it, there is no such thing as building community without a vision or without faith, or without plenty of blood, sweat, and tears.

Several years ago, I met a man named Ron Podlaski. Ron is a Vietnam veteran, a member of the Green Berets, who decided after the war to live in Cambodia and spend his life working with the victims of American landmines among the Khmer people. It was a work of healing and restoration as he fit people with prostheses to replace arms and legs that had been blown away by what he called these “eternal sentinels.”

“Cambodia will be de-mined,” said Ron, “but it will be one leg, one arm, one life at a time for the Khmer people.”

Ron tells the story of a village where people were hungry and poor. The offer was made to the village to stock a fishpond for the people if only they would themselves dig the pond. But there were so many sick and disabled people it seemed like an impossible task.

Until finally the women and men with no legs led the blind who pushed their wheelchairs. And together they dug the pond. And they put fish in it. And they had protein in their diet; and they ate. And everybody got better; and their life together got better.

What a wonderful image of community. We all have a reason that we cannot do what needs to be done. We all have our limitations and our broken places. But where you are weak, the next person might be strong. Where he cannot see, perhaps she can lead, and he will walk with the legs she does not have. Where your sister/brother cannot see the way ahead, you might hold the light to illumine the path.

We know better than to offer our feeble excuses. The time to build Community, cont’d on page 8

A Lenten Reflection

By Diana George

In my life outside The Open Door, I am a Professor of Humanities at Michigan Technological University in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

It is a place with long winters, deep snowfall, and close friendships. So, while I am here in Atlanta, I have been sending reports back to my home parish, St. Anne’s Catholic Church in Chassell, Michigan.

The people at St. Anne’s have responded with warmth and generosity. Even people I didn’t know or barely knew have written to me about the work at The Open Door. When Obie Anglen, a friend from the yard, died in February, I sent this Lenten Report. I share it now with you because we are, all of us, a small circle of friends.

Dear Father Larry and St. Anne’s Parishioners,

On the Monday before Ash Wednesday, we began the morning reflection with a reading from Matthew that most of us have heard every year at the beginning of Lent:

“...”

That reading struck me as especially powerful this morning because I believe it helps me explain why I’ve been so silent since before Christmas. I haven’t written much since then because there are times when I’m not sure what the letters are really about. Doesn’t Jesus tell us to pray privately, fast privately, give privately?

Lent, continued on page 9
Crime and Punishment

By Elizabeth Dede

One story from a friend’s son-in-law has got me thinking about crime and punishment. Tony was still a boy of 16 when he got into some trouble. He was charged with burglary and spent two years locked up. When he was released he still had several years to serve on parole.

While Tony was in prison he was a model of good behavior, and after his release, he served his parole well and completed it successfully. Tony learned from his mistakes and grew up to be a responsible adult and parent.

Two years ago, Tony decided on a career. He went to school to learn how to drive semi trucks. He passed the course with high grades and was ready to get a job as a cross-country truck driver. His interviews for jobs went well, and he was offered several positions. However, after the interviews, a criminal background check was always run on Tony. The job offers were withdrawn. A mistake that Tony made in his youth comes back to haunt him continually.

Since he made several applications with trucking firms and always lost the job possibility as soon as the background check was run, Tony set his sights more locally and applied for a job with Tysons. The same thing happened to him there; he passed the interview process, but when the criminal background check was run, he was not offered a job.

What hope is there for Tony? He is a good man who made a mistake as a child. He paid dearly for that mistake, giving up two years of his youth to prison and living through the strictures of many years of parole. Was that not punishment enough? Why is Tony unable to live as a responsible adult now that he has paid for his crime?

I believe that when Tony successfully completed his parole, the record of his crime should have been expunged. He was already punished. Tony needs to be allowed to be a responsible member of society, working to support his family, paying taxes, and spending his time well as a working adult.

Tony was not given a life sentence because the punishment should fit the crime. However, with burgeoning prison sentencing, our system is creating a permanent underclass of young men who do their time, yet continue to be punished once they are no longer under the sentence of the system. Tony has been punished enough. Clear his record and allow him to work. Set Tony free. ♦

Elizabeth Dede is a Partner at the Open Door Community.

Recommended Reading

Addicted to War: Why the U.S. Can’t Kick Militarism.
Order from AK Press at www.akpress.org

Addicted to War is a witty and devastating portrait of U.S. military policy, a fine example of art serving society.
-Howard Zinn, Author, A People’s History of the United States
The Circus and the Wilderness

By Lauren Cogswell

It is Easter and we are emerging from the Lenten wilderness journey, ready to sing with Alleluias of the triumph of life over death! Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! Death has lost its sting! Our wilderness journey has been a time of preparation, a time of reformation into the people that God has created us to be. After Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit drove him into the wilderness for 40 days. In the desert wilderness Jesus was tempted to be other people than the Prince of Shalom, the non-violent Anointed One that he was called to be. The wilderness is a place of formation. In the wilderness we find clarity, for there is nowhere to hide in the desert. In the wilderness, we have to come face to face with who we are and where we look for life.

There was a time when the circus was a part of that wilderness journey. Like the Israelites wandering through the desert, the circus would pitch its tents in the wilderness outside of the city walls and invite the city dwellers into a world of parody and eschatological envisioning. These circus performers, sojourners, lived by different rules; they defied the powers of death in their high flying acrobatics and celebrated the diversity of the creatures of the earth. William Stringfellow, street lawyer, theologian, activist, and prophet, loved this circus. He spent a summer traveling with them as a circus theologian and regarded the circus as liturgy, as “an image of the eschatological realm.”

In February, the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus came to Atlanta and I bought tickets and sauntered off to enjoy what they call “The Greatest Show on Earth.” But as the show began, I realized that this circus was no longer a journey into the margins, into the tents of sojourners who somersaulted a vision of victory over death. In a different time I can imagine Stringfellow’s circus, of this parade being a brilliant parody, an eschatological vision of these wayfarers strangers who proclaim transcendence over death. But today’s circus goes on in the heart of the empire. The little group of tent dwellers has been bought by corporate America, by the powers of wealth and capitalism. The big top has been replaced by the national arena. A pit began to grow in my stomach when I recognized the wilderness of empire that I found myself in. This was no circus; this was a war parade.

Walking into Phillips Arena we were surrounded by throngs of people, bright lights, televisions, booths selling dizzying light wands and spinning light toys, all washed down with sweet Coca-Cola. The arena was dark except for spinning lights and the spotlights on the three rings, wherever they wanted to draw our attention. I found the environment to be numbing and distracting. I was unable to keep up with the action going on in all three rings and dizzyed by the whirling lights around me. Spectacle, sensation, sugar, all seemed like ways to distract us from the war education we were about to receive. With all this going on, how could we notice our neighbor on the sidewalk as we left, asking for his share of daily bread?

My friends and I were sitting in the next to last row, way up in the top tier of the arena, like birds perched on a wire. It seemed to be a bit of grace to sit in the back as silent observers to the event that was happening below. The ringmaster warmed up the crowd, “Ladies and Gentleman, Children of all Ages, Welcome to the Greatest Show on Earth…” The crowd clapped when he encouraged them to clap, yelled when he asked them to yell. They were in the palm of his hand. Then the parade began. A scantily clad woman in sequins came into the arena on the back of an elephant, carrying an American flag. The crowd stood up for the singing of the national anthem. And I wondered, what does the circus have to do with our nation? I didn’t come to the circus to participate in the government, to be patriotic or to participate in our national agenda. As the circus unfolded I began to see in the darkness that this circus indeed had everything to do with our nation’s agenda.

First came a parade of animals from around the world: zebras and elephants from the plains of Africa, single and double humped camels from the Middle East, and tigers from Asia. Instead of a majestic parade, I felt ashamed to be looking on this assembly line of merchandise. The elephants came out holding onto each other’s tails with their trunks with their heads slung low; embarrassment. Two of the camels rebelled at the parade, they would not be owned. They pulled at their ropes, they were angry; they backed away from the ring. Quickly they were rushed into the darkness out of sight. My heart rose from the pit of my stomach: Freedom! Resist! Run camels run!

Quickly the rings were filled with jumping dogs, clowning dogs, dogs jumping through hoops, dogs walking on their hind legs like humans. I laughed. I liked the dogs and admired their good training. The horses came in dancing and turning in graceful circles, playing their role as the clowns made us laugh. They too walked on their hind legs. The ringleader’s whip snapped back and forth. The crack of the whip made me cringe. My vision shifted. The horses stopped looking like horses and started looking like clowns, humiliated. Humiliation is a work of war. The audience cheered.

Elephants, zebras, and tigers paraded into the ring. They all had their trials to perform. They were part of comedy routines with the clowns; the audience laughed. We had been warmed up by the dogs and the horses (domesticated animals) so we might be comfortable and prepared for the acts that followed. The works of war were already doing their work. The elephants and the tigers were made to walk on their hind legs like humans; one tiger even hopped like a bunny. They were being humiliated for our entertainment. When the elephants came out, they were surrounded by a group of women in halter-tops and skintight pants. Domination. Humiliation and Domination are works of war. The audience cheered.

I have seen these magnificent animals, zebras and elephants in their homeland, on the plains of southern Africa. They are awe-inspiring, majestic, powerful creatures of God. As I watched them stride across the fields, I prayed, giving thanks to God for the beauty and majesty of Creation. Their wild beauty brought forth faith in my heart of the goodness of our Creator. Now I was watching them again, enslaved and humiliated. I wanted to fall on my knees in repentance, praying for forgiveness for human desire for domination that is denying them the fullness of their life.

The high-flying trapeze artists swooped across the arena and the tension rose. The ringmaster built up the crowd; “You will witness death-defying leaps…life-risking…never attempted before!” The acrobats flew and flipped, defying death. The audience cheered. The tension continued to rise as the “Globe of Death” rolled onto the floor. The arena grew dark, the band piped out mysterious music. The “Globe of Death” was a metal sphere in which five Hispanic men rode motorcycles around and around. The thrill of tempting death was palpable. Fear... Thrill... Fear... Thrill... Oh the love of violence, the fear of death.

Into the dark arena, a huge cannon was wheeled. The ring master began his battle cry, “Ladies and Gentlemen, hold onto your seats, no man, woman or child has ever witnessed anything like this death-defying….” BOOM! A man all ablaze shot across the arena, landed on an air mattress and triumphantly stood up. His body was wrapped in flames.

Circus, continued on page 9

Spring Appeal 2004

Dear Friends,

The peace of the Risen Christ be with you.

As we welcome spring and the promise of new life, we thank God for the ways you sustain us: through friendship, prayers, and gifts of time, resources, and money. You continually refresh and strengthen us on this journey for justice, and we are ever grateful.

Please continue your generous and life-giving support.

With love and thanks,
The Open Door Community

Hospitality
A Man of Peace, at Age 73, Pays Ridiculous Price

By Will D. Campbell

(Editor's note: This essay was published in The Tennessean [Nashville, TN] on February 9, 2004. Will D. Campbell is a farmer, writer and Baptist minister of the South. He is the author of more than a dozen books and he lives in Mt. Juliet, Will is the founder of Southern Prison Ministry, which continues through the Open Door Community.)

When a nation becomes so insecure that it sends elderly and ill citizens to prison for taking a few steps on native ground, that nation is in danger of losing its soul. Or so it seems to me.

I am referring to an aging prophet named Don Beisswenger, 73, a Nashvillian who has been sentenced to half a year in federal prison and fined a thousand dollars for taking six steps past a No Trespassing sign at Fort Benning, GA.

I could call the Rev. Beisswenger good and righteous, and all those adjectives apply. But a better designation is the strong noun, prophet: one who teaches and lives by biblical authority. However we describe him, he is a man of faith and good deeds.

I have known Don Beisswenger for 40 years. This modest and unassuming man has demonstrated through his teaching in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University, his ministry to the homeless in Nashville and Atlanta and Chicago, his realized vision for the highly respected Penuel Ridge Retreat Center, and his devotion to his wife and life partner, Joyce, so recently departed, that he is a virtuous human being.

But he took six harmless steps over an arbitrary line to bear witness against the teachings of the School of the Americas/West Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHISC) at Fort Benning, GA, and for that, he was arrested, charged, tried, convicted and sentenced in a federal court in Columbus, GA.

There will be no appeal. His sentence will be half a year in federal prison and fined a thousand dollars for taking six steps past a No Trespassing sign at Fort Benning, GA.

Brooding about this travesty, I find myself recalling World War II and the number I wore for three years. I was 18 when I got my dog tag with my serial number on it.

As an ordained Baptist preacher, I was exempt from the draft, but I volunteered to serve and spent three years as an infantryman. I learned to shoot guns and to cut and sew on injured soldiers when there weren't enough doctors and nurses. I didn't know it at the time, but one of the big bombers I saw touch down on a little patch of rock in the South Pacific was the Enola Gay, just returning from its history-changing mission over Hiroshima.

Bad as that time was, we're in a worse one now. This old world is reeling and rocking. We've been lied to and driven into a war of aggression by the leaders of our own government, who justify their actions with slogans: "Destroy their weapons of mass destruction." Not ours, but theirs.

"Destroy the regime of this vicious dictator." Not just any dictator but this particular one.

"Rally the coalition of freedom-loving nations." Meaning us and a few more, against the warning of all the others working through the United Nations.

Young men and women with serial numbers just like mine are doing the bloody deeds their commander-in-chief sent them to do, at risk of their lives (more than 500 dead so far) and the lives of the invaded, evil and innocent alike (tens of thousands of them). Such a waste! How in the name of God can this be justified?

And now Don Beisswenger is going to get his number and enter a prison here in the waning years of his exemplary Christian life.

GREAT GOD! What are we doing? ✤

Don Beisswenger's sentencing statement appeared in the March issue of Hospitality. He will report to Manchester, KY, to begin his prison sentence on April 6.

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Recommended Reading

Ending Poverty as We Know It.


William Quigley blows the lid off the smug insistence that the Protestant work ethic will solve the poverty problem. Simply put, the poor work. They are poor not because they do not work, but because their wages are inadequate. This effectively turns the entire causal logic on its head.

Work is not the solution; it is the problem...[Quigley] is a professor's radical: elegant in his theorizing, careful in his analysis, and breathtaking in his vision.

-Monica Gaughan, Professor of Public Policy, Georgia Tech University

From "Working their Way Down," February 2004 Hospitality

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On Thony Green’s (102340) Rejection for Parole

By Ed Loring

Our train stopped with a jolt on a side track. We waited without a word. We were afraid to ask, for the answer might shift the world in which we seek to have our say before the long and final silence which keeps tapping on our shoulders. Finally an anonymous voice blurted over the sound system that we were returning to LaPlace because the bridge was out in Baton Rouge. It would take another few hours to clear the tracks behind us.

United States of America helicopters, black like buzzards, keep coiling around and swooping toward our train cars. The noise hit our hearts like the sudden squeeze of a Heimlich maneuver when we were returning to LaPlace because the bridge was out in Baton Rouge. It would take another few hours to clear the tracks behind us.

After long and painful labor pains among the guts of the unemployed, our train moved backwards, again, over the bayous and alligator-infested black waters. Outside the LaPlace jail stands a statue of John the Baptist. We cannot hear what he is saying. ✤

Ed Loring is a Partner at the Open Door Community.
Waiting for the Health Care Revolution

By Chuck Harris

I have a friend in Michigan who had to put a lien on his house before the private, for-profit hospital would perform necessary surgery. He’s unable to work, but because his condition isn’t the result of a work-related injury, he doesn’t qualify for workman’s compensation. He can’t work, but since he wasn’t laid off, he can’t get unemployment benefits. He could lose his home to pay for necessary medical care.

Here in Atlanta we have a public hospital. Though burdened with debt, Grady continues to provide health care to the poor and the uninsured. Recently, to cut escalating costs, care was limited to residents of Fulton and DeKalb counties which are chartered to fund the hospital.

Here at The Open Door, we have personal reasons for keeping Grady Hospital healthy. Grady saw Murphy Davis through recovery from two bouts of Burkitt’s Lymphoma. Grady doesn’t ask our out-of-work friends on the street to put liens on houses they don’t have and it doesn’t turn them away. Grady is important to us. So, keeping Grady open and its services available to the poor is a part of the activist life of this community. We pray, we picket, we leaflet, and during Holy Week we worship at Grady’s front door (or, as close to the front door as security guards allow).

And yet, though Grady’s services allow Atlanta to claim that health care is available to everyone, that care is not received without struggle. Willie Carter, a resident here in the house, has been trying for two months to get an appointment for the oral surgery doctors tell him he must have to stop the skull-splitting headaches and the infection that rages in his body while he waits just to get an appointment. Over two months ago, he was promised an appointment in six weeks. That still hasn’t happened.

Willie’s case is not unusual, and once he does get his appointment, the road is still a rough one. Advice for anyone headed off to a Grady appointment is to take a lunch and a good book.

A few weeks ago, I sat with Rocky during part of his appointment to pick up diabetes medication at Grady pharmacy. Grady outpatient pharmacy is open 24 hours a day, every day. To get their medication, patients need to make an appointment, and then they show up and wait. They wait to go to a window to turn in their paperwork. Then, they wait to be called to another window to go over the medication with a pharmacist or technician. Often, the waiting has people so frustrated they don’t ask questions or get a clear understanding of the medication they will be taking.

And the pharmacist or technician isn’t the end of the line. There is one final line to wait in. That’s the one for the actual medication itself. Through the entire wait, the patient just hopes that this prescription is free or comes with an affordable co-payment.

The pharmacy waiting area is almost always crowded—often there’s a line that goes into the hall. An auditorium across the hall was opened for additional waiting space with television sets to help pass the time.

While Rocky and I were waiting, all four television sets were on, but their pictures were so badly distorted, it was too irritating to watch. We stayed in the main waiting area, hoping for signs of progress on the other side of the Plexiglas. Now and again a name was called.

A young woman with her arm in a sling and in obvious pain got to the window and took some of her medicine immediately. An older woman salvaged some dignity for all of us by raising a little hell at the window. She got plenty of encouragement from those of us in the chairs, and if she’d chosen to, could have led us in a skirmish toward the health care revolution.

Ten or so years ago, Hillary Clinton tried to legislate some sort of national health insurance. Sadly, husband Bill and Congress were cowed by health care profiteers and the no-more-taxes crowd. Since then, things have gotten worse. Costs are higher, and more and more public hospitals are closing, more and more programs are being cut, and Medicaid and Medicare are increasingly under-funded.

In the suburbs of north Fulton County, there’s a movement to form a new county. This is driven partly by a desire to avoid paying taxes to support Grady and the poor of Atlanta.

As Catholic Workers, we ascribe to what Peter Maurin called “personalism”—that Christians have an obligation to take personal responsibility for the well-being of others. Maurin wrote, “The Sermon on the Mount will become practical when Christians make up their minds to practice it.”

While I maintain hope in that vision, it is clear this country needs a political will to regulate health care costs and provide dignified care to everyone. It is also clear that Maurin’s vision reaches beyond church and into political will. It is not only Christians, not only church folk who must take personal responsibility for the well-being of others. It is this country, this democracy, this world. Health care is a basic human right for which every government has responsibility.

Chuck Harris is a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community.
In, Out, and Around 910
compiled by Murphy Davis

We’re celebrating the arrival of two textbooks by Resident Volunteer Diana George and co-authors—hot off the press! Pearson Longman has published Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing in its fifth edition (and it includes an article from Hospitality!). Picturing Texts is in its first edition from Norton Publishing. Diana describes it as a text that brings visual images into the reading and writing process. Both are used widely as college textbooks. Diana is on a year’s sabbatical from her teaching at Michigan Technical University.

Mardi Gras is a grand occasion to raid the clothes closet for all the glitter and intrigue that’s to be found. Lewis Sinclair prepared his famous seafood gumbo and it was a wonderful party. From left clockwise: Anthony Eunice came dressed as “Columbo,” Gladys Rustay came as a teacher-terrorist from the National Education Association (we can explain it if you happened to miss the news about the Bush Education Secretary labeling the NEA as a terrorist organization!), Chuck Harris and Mary Sinclair can hardly contain their sparkle, and Lena Mandeville came to enjoy the cake with her friend Amy Vosburg.

We joined in the annual Martin Luther King Day march in downtown Atlanta to cry out for Dr. King’s vision of the Beloved Community: housing and justice for all people, the abolition of the death penalty, and an end to our harsh use of prisons and jails. (left) Judy Stapleton and Anne Sayre; (below) Robert Howard, Don Reed, Rocky Brady, and Tony Sinkfield.

In observance of the Feast of the Holy Innocents, Mike Casey was arrested along with five others for crossing the line at the Offutt Air Force Base (Stratcom) in Omaha, Nebraska. The line crossers were released by the police within two hours and issued letters banning them from the base for one year. Stratcom is the nerve center which controls all the nuclear weaponry in the United States arsenal.
The community joined FLOC (Farm Labor Organizing Committee) for a picket and rally in front of our neighborhood Kroger store. We urge the store to take Mt. Olive pickles off their shelves and to promote the boycott because of deadly working conditions for the farm workers who grow the cucumbers for Mt. Olive. (On the upper left) Mike Casey, Rocky Brady, and Anthony Eunice hold the signs high; (upper right) Heather Bargeron and Lauren Cogswell lead the march down Ponce to the store; (lower right) Willie Carter and Aaron Jacobson (lower left, FLOC organizer) take turns with the bullhorn to urge life and dignity for farm workers.

On a beautiful spring day in February, we joined with many other friends of New Hope House to celebrate the 15th anniversary of their hospitality and accompaniment of the families of prisoners on death row. Mary Ruth and Ed Weir (lower left) founded the work after a number of years of living at Koinonia and then Jubilee Partners. Also pictured are (upper right) Chuck Harris, Courtenay Siceloff, and Anthony Eunice, (upper left) Steve Caldwell, and (lower right) Lauren Cogswell and Al Lawler.

We are happy to announce—right here on the society page of Hospitality—the engagement of former Resident Volunteer Mike Casey to Amy Vosburg. Amy is a staff attorney for the Georgia Justice Project and a leader of our Monday morning breakfast. The Casey and Vosburg families (pictured here) gathered from Nebraska, California and Pennsylvania for the celebration of the grand event at the Open Door. A good time was had by all, and an October wedding is planned.
Community, continued from page 1

Communities of hospitality and resistance is always now. The Beloved Community is among you, and we are called and privileged to be co-creators in building a new world in the shell of the old. Jesus said that in following in the way of discipleship, “You shall have life, and have it to the full.” The abundant life is promised for those who make community with others on the journey of love. Dorothy Day always quoted Dostoevskyy from The Brothers Karamazov: “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” That is why a primary discipline for building community is courage. Our dreams of community and love do not sustain us. For most of us, it doesn’t take long at all to run up against our own limitations when it comes to love. We dream of being so good and patient and giving. But day-to-day life together can cure our illusions in a hurry. When the dreams and illusions crash, we are ready to cut our losses and head for the hills. We are ready to blame others and make every excuse in the book. The only way to go on is to find the courage to face ourselves, seek forgiveness, and start again.

This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that community can begin only after our dreams of community die. But this is hard news. It is not the pretty picture we had in mind, and courage is a key issue in considering whether or not to go on. We do not maintain courage alone.

When our illusions die, we can learn that in a very real sense, authentic community is really not “built” at all. It has little or nothing to do with our magnanimous hearts, our long-suffering nature, or the astounding depth of our commitment. Deep authentic community has to do with offering our limited selves to God and praying for the wisdom and willingness to let God’s Spirit form us for Life Together. Though we are the ones who must show willingness to start out on the journey, after a certain point, we have to let go of our plans and allow ourselves to be led and “built into” community.

Sometimes we think that if we had known exactly what all of that was going to mean, we might not have started out on the journey. It is, after all, painful and hard to learn that we are not as good, as loving, as patient as our images of ourselves.

Prayer, solitude, patience, meditation, humility, forgiveness, gratitude: these become the essential disciplines if we are to stay on the journey.

Thomas Merton says that to grow in the spiritual life we must be willing always to be beginners. The same is true for building community. The longer we work on it, the more clear it becomes that we do not know much about what we are doing and we must begin again and again and again. Frankly, this can get very old. Sometimes we wonder: will we ever get to something approximating stability? Will we ever be able to rest from the precarity of our lives? [Precarity, by the way, is—as far as I can tell—a word that Dorothy Day invented. But it’s a good one.] We would like for all of this to be a bit more tidy, but it’s not. We are always beginners. Life abundant is about dying and being reborn: death and Resurrection.

Our 24 years of living with alcoholics and drug addicts has been a tremendous resource for us in understanding the importance of “living one day at a time.” It seems to me a good way of thinking about what it means to “enter by the narrow gate.” The road to destruction sure is wide and easy, and always the most likely choice. But whether our struggle is to stay clean and sober or, more generally, to live a life of maturity and integrity, the practice must be exercised every day: the cross has to be picked up every day. Clarence Jordan’s translation about the narrow gate is, “Approach life through the gate of discipline. For the way that leads to emptiness is wide and easy, and a lot of folks are taking that approach. But the gate into the full life is hard, and the road is bumpy, and only a few take this route” (Matthew 7: 13-14).

Our life together must be a journey toward integrity and the growing maturity of each member. In other words, we need to expect each other to engage the ongoing struggle to be who we say we are. This demands ongoing personal transformation, and it must be expected of each one if a community is to be truly alive. Facing our own deep shadows, brokenness, weakness, vulnerability and fear is demanding and painful, and we need the comfort and encouragement of others to maintain our courage and discipline. The struggle is practically inevitable if we are trying every day to become more loving: to pour out our lives for others; to work on getting the log out of our own eye before we worry about the speck in our neighbor’s eye. But when we face our hearts of stone, we see again the opportunity for transformation, healing, and conversion. We hope always for the day that our prayers will be answered to turn these hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and that we receive the gifts of deeper solidarity with those who cannot hide their brokenness and vulnerability.

Now I want to take a minute to identify three issues that I think need some more reflection and prayer together in Catholic Worker circles: leadership, communication, and prayer and Sabbath.

First of all, I think that there is great ambivalence in our movement about leadership, and this is primarily because of Dorothy Day’s and Peter Maurin’s commitment to the philosophy of anarchy. Let me confess right off that this one is really hard for a Presbyterian. But in defense, I would say that what Dorothy and Peter espoused is far from the popular notion of anarchy that might be confused with little more than total chaos. The Personalist philosophers whose ideas were espoused by the early Workers had a theory of decentralization based on personal responsibility. Are people hungry? Then we are not to seek a solution from “Holy Mother State”: we are to ourselves see that they are fed, etc. There is much more to say about this, but that is not my purpose now.

I do think we have some Community, cont’d on page 10
thought you needed open heart surgery. Why are you here?

“I have to wait to get an appointment. They don’t tell me nothing there.”

For the next several weeks, the nights got colder and wetter. In the evenings when I passed out sandwiches, Obie would be there, still waiting to hear about surgery. He was sleeping in the streets most of that time, in the coldest, wettest, hardest part of the winter. And he needed open heart surgery.

One night when I had to clear the yard, Obie was there bedded down with some others. He needed open heart surgery, and I had to wait while he slowly and with difficulty put his shoes back on and packed up to move on down the street.

I was ashamed of myself.

The doctors told Obie that he needed open heart surgery and sent him out to sleep in the streets.

I knew he needed open heart surgery, and I sent him out to sleep in the streets.

It is good to pray in private, but I believe now that the ashes remind us to act in public.

We live in a country that has some of the best health care in the world, and yet we ask an old man with a life-threatening heart condition to go live in the streets until there’s a place in line for him to get the care he needs.

We live in the wealthiest nation in the world, and yet men and women live in the gutters and under highway overpasses. The CEOs of some of our largest, most prosperous companies make salaries large enough to pay dozens of workers a fair wage, and yet we fight for legislation to guarantee everyone a living wage.

I am ashamed of myself that I have to send sick and dying men and women back into the streets after I have handed them a sandwich, and I am ashamed of a system that makes that necessary.

I am quite sure that the ashes I wear this year will again embarrass me, but I’m going to try to remember what the Sisters taught me. The ashes aren’t for me; they are a reminder that people live in hardship and that I am both a part of that and must have a hand in changing it. We are all responsible for ourselves and for each other.

That is the lesson of the ashes.

Blessings to all of you,
Diana
Community, continued from page 8

genuine confusion putting together anarchist philosophy and an understanding of leadership. It’s funny really, because Dorothy was a very strong leader, to say the least. (Some say she was a tyrant!) Brian Terrell says that it was often said that Dorothy wanted anxiety so that she could be “the Anarch.”

Now, you’re not going to hear me make an argument for hierarchy (especially with all its patriarchal connotations), but I do think that we need to acknowledge the role, the place, the need, the blessing of the gifts of leadership. I believe that we in our community have been blessed with an experience of the African American Church that, generally speaking, nurtures and honors its leadership out of an understanding of the meaning and importance of leadership for the oppressed community. This, of course, cannot be approached without clear acknowledgement of the necessity of accountability and transparency in the practice of leadership. We also need to acknowledge and account for the toll of leadership. It is significant, of course, to note that Dorothy entitled her autobiography The Long Loneliness.

Second, every community must deal with the struggle to communicate. The more diverse our communities are by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity and language, the greater the need is to work on communication. Our daily life should move us toward the discipline of speaking the truth in love: taking the time and finding the balance. Our daily life, just as first world culture offers us few resources for poor and suffering, so it offers few resources for labor and are tired from carrying heavy loads. And I will give you rest.”

But Sabbath rest is not an optional suggestion. It came as a law for our ancient forbears, out of the understanding that rest and worship and prayer are the necessary context to root us in the deepest part of our humanity and the lovingkindness of God. “Come unto me all you who labor and are tired from carrying heavy loads. And I will give you rest.”

One of our faithful volunteers, Horace Tribble, always says that we need to ask God for an “attitude of gratitude.” When our lives are anchored with a spirit of thanksgiving for life and one another, then we are more likely to find our way through the storms.

Finally, all of our disciplines for building community are for the larger purpose of helping us to grow in Christian discipleship: to grow in love and maturity. Every day we must pick up the cross of resistance against the world of war and violence; every day we must choose life and love and nonviolence. When we choose life, the choice is expressed in the love we show to others; and loving others re-members Jesus: it makes him present.

To grow in love and maturity is to bring our word and deed together, to love out of the unconditional love of God, which means a particular solidarity with the exploited and insignificant peoples of the world.

And of course we know, because we have been promised, that when we struggle to pour ourselves out among the poor and suffering, we will finally look up and know that Jesus, who comes in the guise of the stranger, was with us all along. ♦

shallow consumerism, all of us have a hard time not living our lives at a frenetic pace. Busyness and the problem of never having enough time seem to plague most people, except those who are condemned to idleness by prison sentences or chronic unemployment (and the resulting maladies that grow from having nothing useful to do need to be addressed as well). I really can’t think of many people inside or outside of intentional community who are managing this very well.

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Holy Week and Easter with the Homeless

We invite you to join us for worship with our friends on the street during Holy Week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palm Sunday</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>Open Door Community, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>Grady Hospital, Jessie Hill, Jr, Dr, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>City Jail, Peachtree St, SW, 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>Woodruff Park, Five Points, 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maundy Thursday</td>
<td>April 8</td>
<td>City Hall, Trinity Avenue, 5pm (with celebration of the Eucharist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Friday</td>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>State Capitol, Washington Street, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Saturday</td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>Pine Street Shelter, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Morning</td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>Breakfast with our homeless friends, followed by worship and celebration of Life Over Death and oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hospitality April 2004

Recommended Reading

Beyond the Burning Bus: The Civil Rights Revolution in a Southern Town.


Phil Noble has given us a view of struggle in places like Anniston that are rarely seen and yet are invaluable to understanding the depth and scope of the struggle to apply the moral imperatives of our faith to social, economic, and political challenges.

The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, former president, Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Dear Murphy Davis,

I am a condemned man on Connecticut’s death row. I am helping to promote a book drive for our prison library. We really need more books. All kinds are welcome – new or used, hardcover or softcover – but no magazines. Please send any donations to:

Mark Suse – Counselor Supervisor
Northern C.I. Library Donations
287 Hilton Road
Somers, CT 06071

If you have any questions, you can call Counselor Supervisor, Mark Suse at (860) 763-8731. Thank you for your help.

May peace be with you,
A friend in prison

Hospitality April 2004

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May peace be with you,
A friend in prison
Dear Diana,

Your Lenten letter [see page 1] was a very powerful one. I hope all who read it will try to do something about the poor and homeless this Lent. I also read your newspaper, Hospitality. It is a real eye opener to what is going on in our world today and so many of us don’t even know about or don’t want to know about.

Have a good Lent. You are on my prayer list. Much success in your work!

Sister Silveria
O’Fallon, MI

Sister Silveria Fricke is a member of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. She lives at the Mother House in O’Fallon, Missouri. She was Diana George’s first grade teacher at St. Anthony’s Elementary School in High Ridge, Missouri.

Dear Ed,

Just read your latest “fiery” Hospitality issue. I swear, instead of following the laws of entropy (which all creation follows: the wearing down of energy), you are moving in the opposite direction. The more prophetic energy you release, the higher the next BLAST is. Not even Einstein can follow what Spirit-thermo-dynamic system you are operating with. BUT WE DO!!! It’s called THE HOLY AND DIVINE SPIRIT, breathing through a vessel of clay, named Ed Loring.

Father Tom Francis
Monastery of the Holy Spirit
Conyers, GA

Dear Ed,

I just finished teaching a class tonight on the Life of Jesus. The responses of the students were amazing. We made many comparisons between the life of Jesus and the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. And we strongly emphasized the need to discover Jesus in the poor today. The students embraced this radical vision of Jesus with enthusiasm, adding their own insightful perspectives to a very rich discussion.

And, as always, that brings me back to being thankful to you and Murphy and everyone who is a part of the witness of the Open Door. My ability to learn Jesus in this way and to share with others who are learning Jesus would be impossible without what you all do for me and so many others.

I have many fine books of liberation theology and biblical studies, all of which have enriched me and shaped me. But all of that would be empty head-knowledge without the incarnated witness of the Open Door.

Jesus can only be learned in part in books, in part in classrooms, in part in sanctuaries—in part in the pages of the Scriptures. The Jesus we follow is still on the move in the world today, so many of us don’t even know about or don’t want to know about.

Edison’s quote: “There will appear in history books until the 1960s.”

Dear Open Door:

I was fascinated by the recent article on William Sheppard.

Can Diana George, or someone, tell me if the three sources she mentioned are available locally?

Keep up the good work!

Warmly,

Bill Crosland
Central Presbyterian Church
Atlanta, GA

Diana responds: Adam Hochschild’s King Leopold’s Ghost is available in paperback at bookstores. It’s a good read and a great place to start.

Dear Murphy,

…I am hoping that this year’s legislative session will find some bills being passed that are beneficial to prisoners, as something needs to change. The prisons are overcrowded. Here at [my prison] they have (once again) turned the TV rooms into dormitories. Also, because of the budgetary problems a lot of services have been cut back.

In prison, when government cuts the budget, it results in a number of changes. For the most part, medical services are reduced and counseling services are scaled back. The result is those needing treatment for an assortment of maladies find themselves untreated.

Warmly,

A friend in prison

Dear Editor:

I am a Protestant pastor. Here are the five reasons I will not be going to see the Mel Gibson film, “The Passion of Christ.”

1. I read the book and movies are seldom as good as the book.

2. I’ve seen many an Anglo portray Jesus so I’ll wait until a Middle Eastern Jew is cast in his part.

3. I already know that the Romans brutally executed Jesus. Two hours of graphic, gratuitous violence is something I try to avoid in films.

4. My theology is not grounded in Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion but rather in his ministry and resurrection. I don’t want Hollywood images planted in my brain to hold my spirituality hostage.

5. I don’t need to contribute my $9 to Mel Gibson in what is clearly a highly commercial venture.

So I’ll take a pass this time.

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune
Founder/Senior Analyst, FaithTrust Institute
Seattle, Washington

Marie, a friend of the Open Door Community, sent this letter to the editor of her local paper.

Dear Ms. George,

I was pleased to read your article in Hospitality about Dr. William Sheppard (“William Sheppard, 1865-1927: Missionary, Explorer, Human Rights Activist,” Hospitality, January 2004, vol. 23, no. 1). My parents were missionaries in Congo from 1912 to 1947. I was born in Congo and returned as a missionary myself from 1949 until 1986.

It is unfortunate that, except for a few years in the early 1900s, little was known or recorded about this remarkable man. Henry Stanley became well known because he was a reporter and prolific writer and was able to tout his own work. Dr. Sheppard, like many other pioneer missionaries, did not write much for publication or see publicity outside of church circles.

Dr. Sheppard was honored in his lifetime: he was the first man of African descent to address and become a member of the Royal Geographic Society of Great Britain, he addressed the U.S. Congress, and he was decorated later by the Belgian government for his work and investigations in Congo. Dr. Sheppard was honored and esteemed by his fellow missionaries and Africans alike.

As you mentioned, there are beginning to appear, in recent years, a number of books and articles about him. May I comment about one sentence in your article: “For his troubles, Sheppard was sued, defamed, and dismissed from his position in Congo.”

For their troubles, Sheppard and Morrison were sued by those responsible for the atrocities, but were entirely acquitted by the Congo Free State court.

Dr. Sheppard’s departure from the Congo Mission did not come from his human rights activism. His acknowledged earlier improprieties with several African women compromised his work and witness as a missionary. He returned to the U.S. and, like the man that he was, confessed before the church court and accepted the discipline imposed. He was later restored to the ministry and served as pastor of a church in Louisville, Kentucky, until his death. (There was a similar case a few years before involving a white missionary by the name of Verner. He too had been acquitted.)

During Dr. Sheppard’s years in Louisville, many of his missionary colleagues and friends stopped by to visit him. I remember the time I (age 6) was with my parents in his home shortly before his death in 1927.

Let me thank you again for the article you wrote, reminding us of the life and work of William Sheppard.

Sincerely,

Bill Washburn
Chamblee, GA

Diana responds below:

Dear Mr. Washburn,

Thank you so much for your recollections of William Sheppard. Your letter is a welcome addition to our little piece on Sheppard’s life. According to biographer Pagan Kennedy, after Sheppard left the Congo, the Foreign Missions Board began actively discouraging African American missionaries to Africa. As you remind us, Sheppard was well-known at the time, but, as Kennedy writes, “Sheppard’s fame would fade almost as quickly as the sprays of camellias that perfumed the air beside his grave.”

It was an era when history books only recorded the doings of white men, when mainstream newspapers ignored or reviled people of color, when black American culture happened in the margins and on the sidelines. And so Sheppard fell into obscurity. Aside from manuscripts published by the Presbyterian Church, he did not begin to appear in history books until the 1960s.”

It is a pleasure to have heard from someone who actually met William Sheppard and carries that memory with him and to all of us.

Diana George
Open Door Community Ministries

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

We are open...

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

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

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

Join Us in Worship!

We gather for worship and Eucharist at 5 p.m. each Sunday, followed by supper together.
Our worship space is limited, so if you are considering bringing a group to worship,
please contact us at 404-246-7621.

April 4  Palm Sunday Worship at 910
April 11 Easter Breakfast and Worship
          in the front yard at 8 a.m.
          No evening Worship
April 18 Eucharist at 910
April 23-25 Spring Retreat at Dayspring Farm
          No Worship at 910

Plan now to join us on the
streets for our annual Holy
Week with the Homeless, April
4-10, and for Easter Breakfast
and Worship, 8:00 a.m. on
Sunday, April 11.

See details on page 10.

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

Needs of the Community

JEANS
men’s work shirts
underwear for men
women’s underwear
men’s belts
socks
men’s shoes (all sizes)
EYEGGLASSES
BLANKETS
WALKING SHOES (9 ½ and up)
LARGE and X-LARGE T-SHIRTS
hams and turkeys for our Soup Kitchen
sandwiches
quick grits
cheese
coffee
multi-vitamins
MARTA tokens
postage stamps
MINIVAN IN GOOD RUNNING CONDITION
two mountain bikes for Dayspring Farm
disposable razors
deoarant
vaseline
combs
toothbrushes
lip balm
SOAP (any size)
SHAMPOO (travel size)
alarm clocks
REFRIGERATOR

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