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Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

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June 2019

Baltimore A Further Learning: Chilled to the Bone

By Eduard Loring

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.
— Robert Frost

I have learned the wrath of the wind.
Chilled bones. Iced marrow. Bitten flesh. Numb fingers.
Frigid feet.
Yet

My Soul held fast: warm.
My Heart was hot.
Thank you God of Fire who burns the wrath of the wind.
— Ibo Lorinski

The Open Door Community and Newborn Community of Faith Church began serving coffee and a granola bar on January 1, 2018. Elder C.W. Harris; his armor bearer, Troy Martin; and shortly thereafter Deacon Tyrone Cole, along with David and me, were interesting figures behind a table on the sidewalk on Pennsylvania Avenue in Sandtown. The temperature was 19 degrees. We served six people. David and I had a wakeup call that morning, but since then we have served often in the very cold.

Newborn is housed in a wonderful building that is filled with other activities such as art, dance and writing, and the space is rented to groups needing a meeting place. The worship space has no pews! Newborn stands tall and small at the corner of Pressman and Pennsylvania in Sandtown. In years past, the Newborn congregation and neighbors cleaned the corner; the drug and prostitution business had to move elsewhere.

The friends of Black Jesus moved two blocks south to the Upton subway station area. We could see all the activity at The Corner from where we served between 20 and 30 people. David and I decided to follow the crowd. Saddened to leave a comfortable space, but being called to feed the hungry, and needing a jazz, we left our spot and moved to the Upton subway station site. I quickly named the space the Upton Underground Railway. Harriet Tubman is well known and highly honored in Baltimore, like Robert E. Lee in Milledgeville, Georgia. I added the name which is a primary symbol of the

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly The State of the Death Penalty

By Murphy Davis

It's a little confusing these days about whether we should be celebrating the demise of the death penalty in the U.S. or beating fists against the wall at the tenacity of the barbaric practice.

On May 2, our friend Scotty Morrow was killed by toxic drugs deep in the bowels of the Georgia Diagnostic Prison in Jackson. Once again, Georgia pulled a man from his cell and executed the *danse macabre* — the bizarre ritualistic liturgy of death that precedes every state execution. Scotty was, like many we have known, not the young man hauled into G-House years ago after murdering both his former woman friend and her friend, and seriously wounding another of her friends. He spent his time on death row at Jackson in sorrow for what he had done, working to become a better person and deepening his faith. He did just exactly what you would hope a person would do with a prison sentence — he grew, matured and made amends. But that was, of course, not enough. They killed him as an act of revenge by the state. Not to help the families of the victims, but as an act of revenge. The act of vengeance has created a circle of unnecessary suffering for Scotty's children and grandchildren, his elderly mother, other family and many friends.

Scotty's execution will most likely be followed by others. Georgia is not about to let go.

In fact, simultaneous with the preparations for Scotty's execution, Gwinnett County, Georgia, was granting permission to a brain-injured woman to represent herself in a death penalty trial. Tiffany Moss, who allegedly starved her step-daughter to death, sat quietly through most of her trial, declining to present witnesses or cross-examine prosecution witnesses. She offered no opening or closing statements. She was, unsurprisingly, convicted of the horrendous crime and quickly sentenced to death. So, for the first time in five years, Georgia has a new death sentence.

While death sentences and executions have steadily declined in recent years, there is a very strong force in the United States that would keep the barbarism going. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States Supreme Court that has been recently re-shaped by the present occupant of the White House. We knew that Justices Neil Gorsuch and



Calvin Kimbrough

*Vigil for Life at the Execution of Don Johnson on May 16
at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, Nashville, Tennessee.*

Brett Kavanaugh would aggressively pull the court to the right, and now we are watching them at work.

In March, the court rendered its decision not to intervene in another Georgia case, that of Keith "Bo" Tharpe. One of his trial jurors signed an affidavit that "there are two types of black people: 1. Black folks, and 2. N****rs." Bo, in his estimation, was not one of the "good ones." The juror said he also "wondered if black people even have souls." The courts have affirmed up and down the system that the opinions of this juror would not be a sufficient reason to slow the process of killing Bo Tharpe.

On April Fool's Day, the Supreme Court issued its opinion (Neil Gorsuch writing for the majority) in *Bucklew v. Precythe*, which some legal scholars have called "the most significant Eighth Amendment decision of the last several decades and the cruellest in at least as much time." Ignoring many years of development of law and practice and what the court has called "evolving standards of decency," the court granted permission to Missouri to execute Mr. Bucklew even though medical testimony was clear that the execution drugs would probably interact with his serious medical condition to render it a tortuously painful process. Justice Thomas concurred, saying that it was okay as long as they were not inflicting pain for the purpose of inflicting pain. Justice Kavanaugh's concurring opinion suggested that they might consider using a firing squad. In other words, "Y'all go right ahead: Do what you want to them!" Not as though the folks in places like Georgia or Texas ever needed the permission. I guess the new SCOTUS is teaching us about *devolving* standards of decency.

Enough of the bad and the ugly. There is really good news that has emerged in this same time period: an indication of the deep divide that remains among us.

Back in 2014, Washington Governor Jay Inslee declared a moratorium on executions, and in October 2018, the Supreme Court of the state of Washington unanimously struck down the state death penalty law, finding that the death

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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly *continued on page 7*

Introducing Catherine Meeks, Ph.D.

Board Member of the Open Door Community

In 2016, when several elder partners in the Open Door Community “retired,” the decision was made to transition the organization into a much smaller residential community of three people (Ed Loring, Murphy Davis and David Payne) and to relocate from Atlanta to Baltimore. At that time the community also created a new kind of Board of Directors to lead the organization into the future. In the next several editions of Hospitality, we will introduce the ten members of the Open Door’s current Board, offering brief spiritual biographies which point to the gifts and values that each director brings to the ongoing story of the Open Door Community. This edition provides an introduction to Board member Catherine Meeks.

By Lee Carroll

Catherine Meeks is living an extraordinary life!

Following a distinguished career on the faculty of Mercer University (25 years) and Wesleyan College (nine years), she is currently the founding Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta. She has written six books and is a frequent contributor to *Hospitality*, *Huffington Post* and other periodicals. She has three earned degrees: B.A. in Speech Education from Pepperdine University (CA), Master of Social Work from Atlanta University and Ph.D. in Liberal Arts from Emory University (Atlanta). And along the way she has received numerous awards for exceptional service, including Georgia Sociologist of the Year, the DuBois Award for Distinguished Community Service and the NAACP’s Shinnholster Freedom Fund Award.

Such a record might lead one to assume

that Catherine grew up in a privileged setting and that her early life was an easy one. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In fact, she grew up in rural Arkansas, the daughter of an illiterate sharecropper. Her mother was a school teacher who instilled in her a love for learning, but her father was essentially immobilized by the early death of Catherine’s brother, who died before she was born. He died because the local white hospital denied him an appendectomy when he was critically ill. As Catherine watched her father’s ongoing struggles with grief and bitterness, she vowed never to be held hostage by forces beyond her control.

Some years later, after her family relocated to California, Catherine was in college at Pepperdine University when a violent racial incident took place on the campus. A white security guard shot an African American teenager from the neighborhood who had wandered onto the Pepperdine campus. Racial tensions were already high in the wake of the 1965 Watts riots in nearby Los Angeles. Pepperdine students were outraged, and Catherine was drawn into the struggle for racial justice that ensued. This incident led her to make another life-long commitment: a vow always to stand against injustice, even if it cost her life.

Catherine’s life in the years following these two turning points is the story of a woman with a growing passion for social justice and racial healing.

Catherine Meeks is an author, community activist, newspaper and broadcast journalist and champion for marginalized people; but when asked what she considers to be her vocation, she responded simply, “I am a teacher and learner” who focuses on “interrupting negative energy.” To illustrate,

she was recently involved in erecting a large monument outside the Center for Racial Healing with the names of over 600 men and women lynched in Georgia. The purpose of that monument, as Catherine sees it, is “to help us make the connection between the intersection of slavery, lynching, the prison industrial complex, the death penalty

and 21st-century police killings. ... Along with this we create the possibility for healing to occur as we remember and call the names of the lynched and move away from the state of denial that makes healing impossible.”

She describes her teaching and learning as being a “midwife of the soul,” i.e., helping to give birth to parts of our souls that we never realized existed. Accordingly, she teaches that racial healing requires far more than just discussing the evils of racism; it requires creating spaces where liberation and reconciliation can actively take place in our lives — the focus of her current work at the Center for Racial Healing, where she serves as Founding Executive Director.

Dismantling white supremacy in American culture can be stressful work, Catherine acknowledges. Over the years, she has been subjected to numerous personal threats, but true to her earlier vows, she persists. Reflecting back, she says, “I have always lived with a concern about the world not being right,



Greengate Productions

and I have always known that I wanted to stand against injustice.” Beyond threats from critics, she has also had to deal with rheumatoid arthritis for almost 40 years — an illness that she considers to be one of her most important teachers. From her struggles with the disease, she has learned that managing stress and self-care are critical parts of her vocation.

Catherine has long experienced what she calls “a pull toward God.” To be sure, her relationship with God has evolved over the years, but today she sees God as her life companion, her ally, and One who cares about what we do with our days. Above all, she says, “God is faithful! Thus the most important aspect of my life — more important than any achievement — is whether I am being faithful to God.” And for Catherine, faithfulness involves teaching and learning about social justice and racial healing. In an era tainted by narcissism, untruthfulness and polarization, the integrity that Catherine Meeks embodies with her life is cause for hope and action. Extraordinary! ♦

Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community.

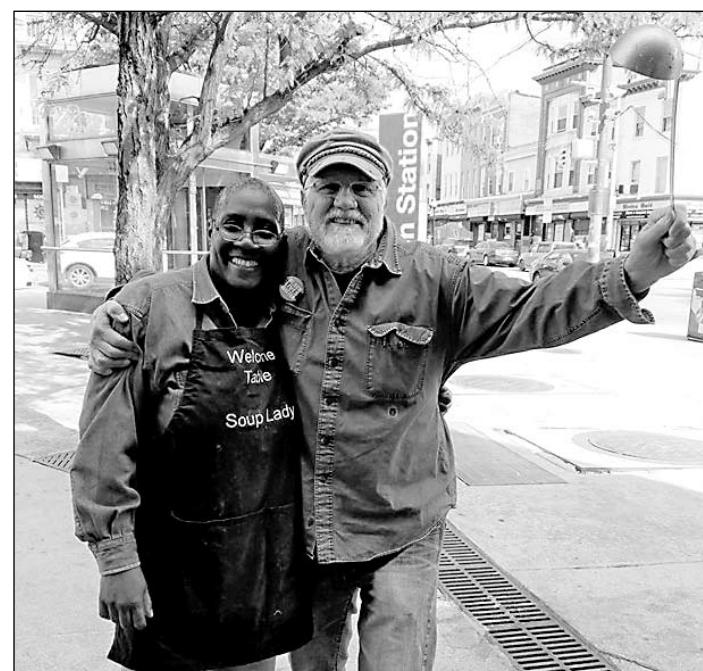
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Open Door Community

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Erica Prettyman and Eduard Loring with the soup ladle at the Welcome Table at Upton Underground Railroad Station.

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Please join us on **Facebook** for the continuing journey of the **Open Door Community** in **Baltimore**. Thank you. David, Eduard and Murphy.

The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power

By Nibs Stroupe

Last month, in writing about the Resurrection, I indicated that I wanted to seek to shift the church's focus from the Cross to the Resurrection, not only in this season of the Resurrection, but in our fundamental emphasis. In these next few months I want to expand what I mean by that — why our focus on the Cross as the central symbol of the church and of the faith needs to be changed, or at least amended and balanced, to add the life and Resurrection of Jesus.

I grew up with the violent, hating, killing God in the segregated, violent, white supremacist South. Because I was raised in a white, segregated, working-class Presbyterian church in Arkansas, I did not know the Andrae Crouch song that is the title of this article. It would take me 36 years to finally hear and learn that song from the Gospel Choir at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Georgia. But if I had heard it in my early days in Arkansas, I would have appropriated it as another song extolling Jesus and God for taking on my

**The Suffering and Subversive God
not only emerges in the Black experience in America,
but is a theme in all liberation theology.**

terrible sins and washing them in the blood of Jesus so that I could stand before God at the end and be welcomed at the feast table of eternal life. I would have heard them as another verse in the song of the killing God, who needed to kill someone in order to love me and all the other sinners who had so violated God's honor.

This theme was a part of the Hebrew Scriptural tradition, with the sacrifices in the Temple, but it has also been enhanced in the American Christian tradition — from Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to the "softer" side of Billy Graham's crusades to the "meaner" side of Graham's son, Franklin. But this theme of a killing God being placated by Jesus began much earlier in the tradition. In his fine book, *Constantine's Sword*, on this development in relationship to the Christian persecution of Judaism, James Carroll noted that the death of Jesus had eclipsed everything, including the life, teachings, struggles and the Resurrection of Jesus:

"His death counted for far more than his having been born, having lived his life as a Jew, having preached a gospel of love in the context of Israel's covenant with a loving God, having opposed the imperium of Rome, even having been brought to the new life of the Resurrection. The death obsession of the flagellants was deemed holy, and the blood lust of the crusaders was sanctified. God, too, had blood lust."¹

I had a pastor in Arkansas in my teen years, Harold Jackson, who did not believe in the killing God but rather in the loving and redeeming God. He began to open some doors for me to look on God and the faith in an entirely different way: God and the faith were not confined to the killing God of the violent white supremacist Christianity of Southern and American history. He helped me to understand that there might be ways of understanding God and the Christ event as something other than Jesus being the sacrificial lamb whose death enabled me to be reconciled with an angry God lustful for torture and death. Though he did not make these connections to American history, I later began to understand that the violent, killing God of the blood atonement was intimately

connected with the God of white Europeans who came to America and laid waste to the people living here and laid waste to people from Africa and other lands in order to use slave and cheap labor to build the wealth of the United States — all of it done in the name of the killing God who had saved us and had been reconciled to us in the atoning death of Jesus of Nazareth. It was no accident that the KKK used the burning cross as an instrument and sign of the terror of white supremacy. I came to call this view of God, this view of the Christ event, as the Atoning God — a God unable to overcome his lust for blood, a God who has killing at his heart of hearts, a white God dripping in the blood of Jesus and of "the other," the dark- and olive-skinned folk considered outside the camp. This use of the Atoning God was a way to crucify Jesus in a way that worked. In this system, there would be no Resurrection.

I had begun to give up on the idea of this killing God. My observation was that most white Americans held this belief because it enabled us to preserve an individualism and

experiential truth in our lives, most especially in the lives of those who are oppressed. There is no way around this, and if we are not feeling that it is so, it is because we are numbed up in modern life — too numb and too dumb. We are simply too privileged to know any different.

Being baptized in the waters of white supremacy, I felt how this doctrine of the Suffering God had been twisted to become the Atoning God. If all that God cares about is what happens to us when we die, then it really doesn't matter what happens to us in this life or, more importantly, what we do in this life. It is what we are experiencing in white America in these days: the widening gap between white (especially male) privilege and the life of the "other." It is why Donald Trump was elected president: a longing in the white, male heart to return us to the days of the captivity of God by the white Jesus, to the days where all that counts is the sacrificing work of Jesus. It is why so many white evangelicals support Trump no matter what atrocity he commits or utters: They have abandoned the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth for the white Jesus, the one who atoned for our sins before the killing God. Belief in the white Jesus insures that we will get into heaven when we die and, even more importantly, insures that in this life we can be as unjust and unmerciful and unloving as we want, all the while still calling ourselves followers of white Jesus.

It is these two streams of the Cross that flow through me now, two streams that I want to explore in this and future articles. One stream is that of the white Jesus, the one created by the white, Western tradition. It has enabled us to kill and dominate and exploit people, resources and even the earth itself, all in the name of the Atoning God, the God who has killing in his heart of hearts. We can sing that "the blood will never lose its power," and in this key, we mean that just about anything that we do will be acceptable to God, because we have been reconciled to the killing God by the power of the blood of the white Jesus. It is the stream in which I was raised, and it is the one with which I continue to wrestle.

A second stream is the Black Jesus, a Jesus that I had never considered before my pastorate at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church. Oh, I had thought about it and talked about it, but I had never walked around in it until I became one of the pastors of Oakhurst. There I was invited to move into Black life in America, because half of the church membership was Black. Black Jesus offers a different understanding, singing "the blood will never lose its power" in a different key, singing of a Suffering and Subversive God longing and working to rewrite the notes of the song of the white Jesus. The Suffering and Subversive God not only emerges in the Black experience in America, but is a theme in all liberation theology. I'll be exploring these two streams over the next few months as we seek to find our way on the path of Black Jesus, as we seek to find our way back to the Living and Suffering and Resurrected God whom we meet in Black Jesus. ♦

¹ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p. 582.

*Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door; retired pastor and author of the recently published *Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision*. He and Catherine Meeks are authors of *Passionate Justice*, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time, to be published in September. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)*



The Black Jesus window at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church.

and prepare us for life after death with God, then the importance of this life, the importance of community and justice and love for one another — these were severely diminished. Life in the world, life in the "here and now," life in history were relatively unimportant in relation to the grand prize of individual life after death — a status attained by the power of the blood of Jesus, "shed for me on Calvary," as the Crouch song says. I was beginning to develop this idea and this theory as a young adult, until one of my good friends went through a terrible divorce, of which I was in the middle. He told me during that journey, "You know, Nibs, I had given up the idea of the blood atonement, but now I have come to believe in it again."

It was in this experience that I was invited to consider the blood atonement in another dimension — not the Atoning God but rather the Suffering God. I was invited to understand in a way that I had not previously understood in my white, male privilege: There is suffering at the heart of life, there is suffering in the heart of God. The power of the Cross is found not in its atoning quality, but rather in its representing an

South of the South

By Charley Williams

In 1920, the entire population of the state of Florida was only one million. Hanging off the lower 48 like an appendage in the Gulf of Mexico, Florida has often been described as "south of the South." Things went on here — often of a worse nature than in other sectors of the known South. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has documented over 300 lynchings in the state. Shocking to many, including myself, a Florida-born native.

Orange County, Florida, home to Orlando, has the most lynchings of any county in the state. In 1920, Central Florida, Orange County, had a vibrant citrus industry. Ocoee sits to the west of Orlando near the Lake County line. At the time, it had a population of 795 residents, 244 of which were Black. Thirteen were Black landowners and several served as brokers between Black laborers and white employers.

The Story of the Ocoee 1920 Voting Day Massacre

1920 was also a much-anticipated election year. It was the first time women had the right to exercise their vote at the polls. African American voters in Florida were participating in the grassroots Florida Movement, a voter registration effort that was launched January 19, 1919, Emancipation Day.

Prior to November 2, 1920, the Klan marched on Orange Avenue in downtown Orlando in an effort to intimidate turnout. In Ocoee a Black landowner, Mose Norman, went to the polls to vote. He was denied access because he had not paid his poll tax. In fact, the supervisor of Precinct 10 had purposefully been sent off fishing that day so no tax could be collected. Norman went to downtown Orlando to seek counsel from Judge John Cheney, a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate. Armed with a letter from Cheney, Norman went back to Ocoee. The letter was not honored at the polls. Norman went home, got his shotgun and returned to the polls. A skirmish ensued and Norman fled to the nearby home of his friend, July Perry.

A mob followed and shots were exchanged. Two white men were shot dead; six were wounded. Norman escaped. July Perry was wounded and his house set ablaze. Perry was captured in the cane fields behind the house and taken to the hospital in Orlando, then to jail.

Early in the morning of November 3, Perry was pulled out of jail by a white mob and hanged nearby within sight of Judge Cheney's home. His body was then riddled with bullets. Later that morning, a mob of white citizens from all over Orange County descended upon Ocoee and proceeded to burn two Black churches, a Black fraternal lodge and 25 Black homes. This went on for two days. Residents who tried to escape the flames were shot. Survivors fled. Due to three days of enforced quarantine, losses were hard to account for. Over the next year, the entire Black community of Ocoee would be driven out, forced to abandon or sell land and homes.

In the ensuing weeks, private lands lost in the massacre were re-appropriated among the white population. No Black people lived in Ocoee from 1920 to 1981. Today there is no marker or acknowledgement of this occurrence anywhere in Ocoee. That is about to change.

Fast Forward

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has identified Orange County as having the 7th highest number of racial terror lynchings in the South over a 70-plus year period (1877-1950). This ranking is largely due to the single event of the Ocoee Massacre, in which it is estimated that from six to over 30



Orlando Weekly



Above: A photograph of July Perry.
Left: A painting by Florida folk artist Ruby Williams.

Black people were killed. Our memorial column on display at the Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery details 31 unnamed victims of the Ocoee 1920 fire.

Our work, however, is just beginning. Groveland Four (1949) took place nearby in Lake County. The burning of the town of Rosewood (1923) took place to the north in the Gainesville area. The terrorism bombing of voting rights crusader Harry T. Moore and his wife took place on Christmas Eve (1951) in nearby Mims. These incidents are well known. But many Central Floridians are not familiar with the Ocoee story. There are some bright spots. The all-Black town of Eatonville, future home to Zora Neale Hurston, was incorporated near Maitland in 1887 as a result of actions taken by 27 Black citizens. Earlier, in 1885, two elected positions — that of mayor and marshal in Maitland, were held by Black citizens.

As late as 1950, Orlando conducted the whites-only Democratic primary even though the practice was eliminated in Orange County in 1937. The Florida Supreme Court ruled against white primaries in 1944. Only under threat of lawsuit did the practice finally disappear.

The 1920 Ocoee Voting Day Massacre has been called one of the bloodiest single days in American political history. Why, then, has the significance of the Ocoee incident eluded storytellers and Central Floridians for so long?

Owning our Shadow

Beginning in 2015, concerned citizens in Orange County began to pull together a team of volunteers to work with EJI to clarify the Ocoee story: to separate myth from fact, to start the long process of finding surviving family members and to begin to unify the community under a truth and reconciliation umbrella. It is of course a work in progress not without its challenges and shortcomings as well as its successes. Emotions can run high. In our case, the tension centered around the verification of the actual number of deaths in the massacre. The town was quarantined for three days; citizens fled for their lives. Press accounts varied and eyewitness accounts were scarce. We settled on the language "from six to over thirty" deaths of Black people.

We are still a team, operating under the umbrella of the Truth and Justice Project of Orange County. We are still moving forward. On June 21, 2020, near the 100th anniversary of this racial terror lynching, Central Floridians will unveil an EJI marker to honor the life of July Perry, lynched in Orlando in the Ocoee Massacre. It will be placed in the heart of downtown Orlando in Heritage Square, which fronts our Orange County Regional History Center. One year later, the History Center will launch a 3200-square-foot exhibition on the Ocoee Massacre. Finally, on the 100th anniversary of the massacre, the City of Ocoee will unveil its commemorative marker at the central site of its newly redeveloped lakefront.

We have been fortunate to have the team from the Memphis Lynching Sites project (www.lynningsitesmem.org) come to town and share their work researching up to 33 lynchings in Shelby County, the most in Tennessee. We have partnered with Valencia Community College Peace and Justice Initiative to conduct eight community workshops related to Ocoee, with attendance above 100 at each. We have been the topic of four *Orlando Sentinel* news articles covering forward action by the city council in Ocoee, and remembrance and

soil gathering exercises in relation to honoring July Perry. Our Orlando mayor carried soil from the July Perry remembrance exercise to Montgomery to present to EJI.

Mayor Dyer hopes that Orlando will be one of the first cities to bring the column from the Montgomery Memorial for Peace and Justice to its home county.

We hope to develop a local Central Florida arts track as we approach the 100th anniversary year, 2020, to tell the story of past injustices. The recent 2017 Brooklyn Museum exhibition, "The Legacy of Lynching," was a particularly moving and successful example. Memphis has created a wonderful roadmap for arts investments as well. Healing comes through open windows. It takes time to find a path that speaks to you.

Florida is still at the center of election and voting controversies such as the one that engulfed Ocoee and Orlando in 1920. Until last November, we were one of four remaining states that block felons returning as citizens from voting. That recently changed with the passage of citizen initiative Amendment 4, which restored those rights. (However, our 2019 state legislature is currently working to undo those provisions.) Florida continues as a state with one of the highest rates of mass incarceration. Public education and health care, baselines for success in life, are constant budget-cut targets.

Our challenge is taking the story of the 1920 Ocoee incident, and all that has transpired since, and sitting down at the July Perry marker with a six-year-old child, a 14-year-old teen, or a 23-year-old young adult and trying to explain why and how this happened and continues to manifest in new forms today. What would you say to instill and inspire hope? What tools would you employ to break the cycle of hate? What perceptions take hold at this early age? As generational storytellers, have we faced our shadow? There is work to do, together. ♦

Charley Williams, a native of Florida, lives in Orlando and works with Geotechnical and Environmental Consultants in Central Florida. Since 2015, he has been a founding member of the Truth and Justice Project of Orange County. He is also Murphy Davis' second cousin. We will publish details of the 2020 Memorial events in Orange County as they become available. (cjwilliams@g-e-c.com)

Black Agricultural Resistance

By Nathan Dorris

This article is adapted from a sermon written for a course entitled “A Theopraxis of Land and Food,” taught by Dr. Heber Brown of Baltimore’s Black Church Food Security Network.

In Luke 4:14 we’re told that Jesus returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit.” It’s in this spirit that he enters the synagogue and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. Here we have Jesus directly citing prophetic precedent for his own action in the world; he has grounded himself in the other-than-human wilderness, and now he comes back to the village assuming the vocation of prophet, committed to “proclaim[ing] good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the year of the Lord’s favor.” Significantly, this mission of liberation and freedom extends not only to poor and oppressed *people*, but to the oppressed *land*, as well — the phrase “year of the Lord’s favor” being a reference to the Jubilee year, when land was supposed to have been returned to its owners and given rest, and all debts cancelled and servants or slaves set free. It is a comprehensive plan of liberation for all things from the soil up, and one that radically challenges economic models that tend, in Jesus’ time and our own, toward the hoarding of wealth and resources.

Just a couple of chapters later, in Luke 8, Jesus tells the patently agrarian Parable of the Sower. He follows this up with a brief meditation on “hidden things;” the parallel text in Mark reads: “He said to them, ‘Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.’”

I’d like to focus on two things these passages teach us about the tasks of Christian discipleship and the Christian church. First, *following in the Way of Jesus means continuing the prophetic task of proclaiming and enacting comprehensive liberty for both oppressed peoples and the land*; and secondly, *part of this task involves the making known of things that have been hidden*. This includes both the centering of voices and experiences which have been silenced or drowned out by dominant ways of knowing or through systemic repression, as well as the naming of those invisible systems and structures which shape our imaginations and limit our movements in the world, restricting our freedom to be whole, healthful and just creatures with one another and with the good earth. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities in high places. That isn’t to say that individual human beings are never personally involved in the evil actions of the rulers and authorities — we need only look at the current administration to know that the rulers and authorities are themselves individuals who often deal only death. Rather, it is to know and claim that even those individuals are embedded in systems that they perpetuate and, unless those structures of oppression are changed, the faces of those in charge will only be a revolving door, shuffling people in and out of an unjust and diseased edifice.

So as we look at these two responsibilities of Christians, both individually and corporately, I want to name some people and communities who have walked and are walk-

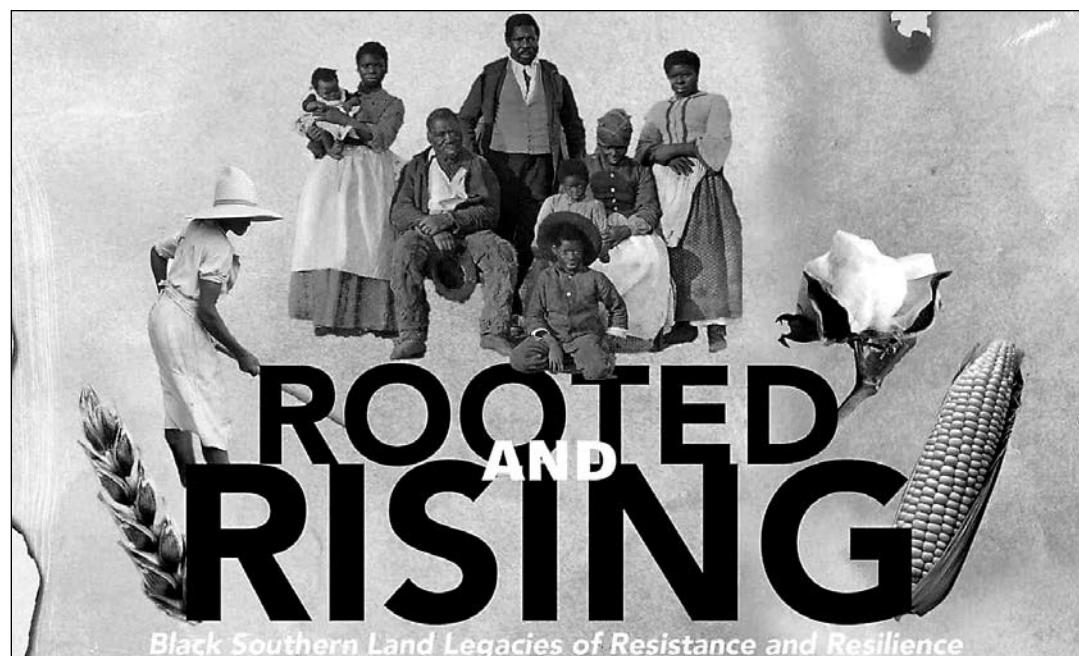
ing out this comprehensive mission and whose efforts have largely been hidden from our sight — namely Black folks, whose histories are foundational to the story of agricultural resistance and community in the United States.

Fannie Lou Hamer — most well known for her voting rights activism — began Freedom Farm Cooperatives in Sunflower County, Mississippi in 1967. Its goal was to provide rural folks in the county with the means to provide for themselves outside of the dominant and oppressive economic system. While this work largely attracted and involved people of color, it was an inter-racial project. It involved not only food production but a pig bank, housing, and job and trade skill training. Hamer’s work was about the liberation of her people from the claws of a racist and classist sharecropping and segregation system, and included land in its vision, as well as the work of unmasking the realities of the lives that she and her people lived, as can be heard in her speech before the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Rather than being a separate issue of organizing, however, Freedom Farm and Hamer’s voting rights work were complementary; all was of a piece in Hamer’s comprehensive vision.

Vernon Johns was the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist in Montgomery, Alabama, who directly preceded Reverend

white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism, but that shine regardless; examples that we need if we are to make our way toward more just communities and selves. They teach us not only that this work is broad in scope and implement, pouring from the fount of Black ingenuity and genius, but also that the Christian tradition has a wealth of wisdom and support to offer us, if we have but ears to hear and eyes to see.

One final note about the disclosure of hidden things, particularly as it relates to whiteness. For those of us who have been raised to think of ourselves and our identities as “white,” it is vital and important work that we critically examine the way that white supremacy works to obscure social realities from us. The security of being in a place of privilege almost necessitates disconnection from the lived realities of those facing oppression and insecurity; further, our roles in perpetuating that system are constantly obscured. Because we are all embedded in these structures, born into a world of powers and principalities who did not consult us, and because those systems seek self-preservation, we must take seriously the task of understanding and naming those invisible structures and the effects they have on the way we live. The consequences of our actions are often hidden from us — and we tend to get defensive when someone points them out. Instead of defensiveness, we ought to approach such interactions with the belief that we need help seeing the invisible bonds that have been placed upon us, restricting our solidarity with others. To help disclose these hidden places, we need to hear and honor the experiences and voices of those who have been repeatedly shoved into hidden places themselves. The voices of women and men of color, of indigenous peoples, of queer folks: All of these voices articulate different ways of seeing and knowing the world; ways that those of us with white, male or other sorts of privilege are often unable to conceive of on our own, but that help paint a much fuller picture of the society in which we live. And perhaps we might add, in an age of industrial agriculture, global capitalism and ecological devastation, the voices of the non-human creatures, and the land itself, to the list of those we must heed if we



The poster for the Black Farmers & Urban Gardeners Conference at Georgia State University in 2017.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities in high places.

Martin Luther King Jr. His Farm & City Enterprises had as its aim the direct challenge of institutional racism by the building of a Black agrarian culture that could sustain itself and exist outside of the white-dominated economic stranglehold.

The Black Church Food Security Network in Baltimore, Maryland, which is active today, stands in this tradition, working toward food sovereignty and local empowerment, its aspiration to make known and challenge the systemic realities of what Karen Washington, founder of Black Urban Growers in New York, calls “food apartheid.” Rather than a fruit-scented band-aid to place over the open wounds of inequality, it seeks self-reliance, self-determination and systemic change. As founder Heber Brown says, “systemic problems require systemic solutions.”

Crucially, all of these efforts involve faith communities (Freedom Farm Cooperative less obviously, but one can be certain that church played a significant role in the functioning of such a project and in the personal lives of its members). These are lights that have been hidden beneath the bowls of

are to work toward God’s comprehensive vision of *shalom* for all of creation.

So brothers, sisters and kin, let us go out into the world heartened by the knowledge that so many have been putting their hands to the plow long before we were a twinkle in our parents’ eyes. The work of Fannie Lou Hamer, Freedom Farm Cooperative, Vernon Johns, the Black Church Food Security Network — all these stand before us in history as a testament to the vision of proclaiming liberation for all of God’s creatures, naming and opposing the unseen structures of food apartheid and white supremacy, and putting into practice alternative and life-giving ways of seeing, knowing and being in the world with one another. Thanks be to God. ♣

Nathan Dorris is a student at Memphis Theological Seminary in their new Doctorate of Ministry track for Land, Food, and Faith Formation. He was a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door Community in Atlanta from 2012-2014.
(nathanandrew2112@gmail.com)



Fritz Eichenberg

Jesus in the Coffee Line

By Peter Gathje

Along with many of his woodcuts, Fritz Eichenberg's "Christ of the Breadlines" is famous in Catholic Worker circles. There, among the people pictured waiting for a meal, stands Jesus, identifiable by a halo around his head and clothing from the first century.

When I entered Manna House this morning after we had shared prayer on the front porch, that image popped into my head. I saw the coffee line already formed. Guests were lined up from the front door to the table at the back of the dining room. Seated next to the coffee pot, James was offering each person a "Good morning!" and a cup of coffee. Charles was busy walking up and down the line serving vitamins to whoever wanted one. With their coffee cups filled, guests moved along the table to put in cream and sugar, and then on to find a place to sit.

The coffee line moved at a steady pace, unhurried, but not slow. After a cold night, a hot cup of coffee helps to warm the insides even as it warms chilled hands. There is usually not much conversation as people stand in line. Conversations begin when guests sit down with their coffee.

The image of "Christ of the Breadlines" inspired an old song tune to come into my head, "Jesus on the Mainline." But I changed the lyrics to "Jesus in the Coffee Line."

"Jesus in the coffee line, give him a cup," I started to sing, repeating that line three times until I added, "Just hand him a cup and fill it up!"

Then I added another verse, "Jesus in the coffee line, sign him up" repeating that line three times until I added, "Just get him a shower and the clothes he wants."

I tested the lyrics with a few of the guests. The focus group seemed happy enough that I may have a new song to sing at Manna House. I will not be surprised if another guest or two helps with developing some additional lyrics.

Behind this version of the song is the ongoing importance of Matthew 25:31-46 for our practice of hospitality at Manna House. Although not on the list of sacraments in any church, I am convinced that Jesus' words, "Whatever you do unto the least of these you do unto me" initiated what should be called "the sacrament of hospitality." In this sacrament, Jesus is present and offered to us in the guests who come to Manna House. As with any sacrament, we are called in faith to recognize in the outward sign of our guests the inward reality of the presence of Christ. And that presence is guaranteed by the Word of Jesus himself.

So when Patsy tells me yet again that she is headed to the hand doctor, I try to hear in her voice the voice of Jesus who healed people. When I hear that "Shorty" had a heart

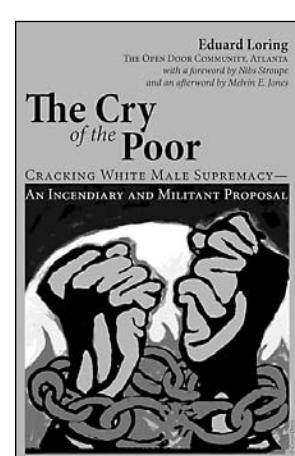
attack, and I do not know Shorty, I listen to the guest who shares the compassion of Christ in describing how Shorty is doing. When I hear that "Old man Chris was hit by a car and he was knocked clean out of his wheelchair," I listen to Christ's judgment when the guest telling me this adds, "Ain't that cold?"

Yet I find this faith in the sacramental presence of Christ in our guests is often tested. Certainly not every guest is Christ-like in his or her demeanor. And just as certainly, the routine of offering what might be called the "liturgy of hospitality" can chip away at the sense of the sacredness of the work. Folding piles of laundry every day, or cleaning showers and bathrooms, can become more burden than blessing.

So, finally, my faith in Christ's presence cannot depend upon the guests or my thoughts and feelings. Thank God. Faith itself is a gift. Faith stands on the graciousness of God. And in this sacrament of hospitality, for me to see Jesus in the coffee line has to always come back to the gracious promise of Jesus that he is among the "least of these."

This means I have to sing another verse, one that is closer to the meaning of the original song that made it plain that Jesus listens and heals and saves us. Yes, I can sing, "Jesus in the coffee line, tell him what you want," and sing it three times before I add, "Just stand with him in line and tell him what you want." ♦

Peter Gathje is Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of Memphis Theological Seminary, and a founder of Manna House, a place of hospitality in Memphis. He wrote Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community (2006) and edited A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982 – 2002.
(pgathje@memphisseminary.edu)



Friends, due to continued interest, The Open Door Press has reprinted Ed's 2010 *The Cry of the Poor*.

If you would like to have a copy, please contact:

David Payne
404-290-2047
davidpayne@opendoorcommunity.org
Open Door Community
PO Box 10980
Baltimore, MD 21234

A Donation would be helpful, but not necessary.
 Thank you,

Dear Ed,

Tomorrow I am mailing a copy of *The Cry of the Poor* to every professor at American Baptist College in Nashville. Dr. Forrest Harris, the president, is a close friend, and he took me to Will Campbell's funeral.

Lots of hope,
 Wendell Wentz
 Rockwall, Texas

poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

Mr. Roosevelt Regrets (Detroit Riot, 1943)

Upon reading newspaper's account of Mr. Roosevelt's statement on the recent race clashes: *"I share your feeling that the recent outbreaks of violence in widely spread parts of the country endanger our national unity and comfort our enemies. I am sure that every true American regrets this."*

What'd you get, black boy,
 When they knocked you down in the
 gutter,
 And they kicked your teeth out,
 And they broke your skull with clubs
 And they bashed your stomach in?
 What'd you get when the police shot
 you in the back,
 And they chained you to the beds
 While they wiped the blood off?
 What'd you get when you cried out to
 the Top Man?
 When you called on the man next to
 God, so you thought,
 And asked him to speak out to save
 you?
 What'd the Top Man say, black boy?
 "Mr. Roosevelt regrets."

— Pauli Murray

Anna Pauline "Pauli" Murray (1910–1985) was an American civil rights activist who became a lawyer, a women's rights activist and author. Drawn to the ministry, in 1977 Murray was the first African American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest, in the first year that any women were ordained by that church.

Baltimore A Further Learning: Chilled to the Bone *continued from page 1*

Beloved Community and the establishment of the Peaceable Kingdom: The Welcome Table. Put them together and what have you got? Welcome Table at Upton Underground Railroad Station. Remember, we tabernacle. That is, we set up, serve, breakdown and clean up outside.

A turning point of mountainous magnitude occurred as we were relocating. First, Deacon Cole decided to go with us. He is a balm in Gilead and a fast friend. Ty is he whom I love and treasure. Secondly, one morning during worship at Newborn I asked for volunteers. Immediately, Erica Prettyman jumped to her feet and proclaimed, "I will. I will." She is our soul and spirit. She is the one who transformed our Welcome Table. Erica volunteered, "I will cook soup." Well, let me tell you. She is famous for her soup. She is The Soup Lady. When we arrive, the hungry are waiting. She and Ty don't miss a serving. If ever you are within a 50-mile radius of Baltimore, come and eat with us. Your ride will be worth it. Dorothy Day taught us that there is "nothing too good for the poor." I am not committing the sin of pride when I declare, "We serve the best soup in Baltimore." Well, as good as Viva House, the Baltimore Catholic Worker, anyway.

We are blessed by the glory.
 "Oh, one day when the war is won
 We will be sure, we will be sure
 Oh glory (Glory, glory)
 Oh (Glory, glory)

— **Glory** by John Roger Stephens / Lonnie Rashid Lynn

In January 2019 we were a year old and well known on The Corner where the Black Jesus regularly appears in the flesh of the poor, bewildered, strong, joyful and Blessed — "He got me up this morning." One morning as we left the Open Door Community, our home, to drive to The Corner, our community meteorologist, David Payne, announced, "Twelve degrees!" Okay. We can do that. David did not notice the wind speed was 20 mph and wilder in her gusty

thrusts. Until that day, we did not pay attention to the power of the wind where wrath and truth are written. Now we do.

Even our mentors, Deacon Ty and Sister Erica, were not prepared for that morning. We set up and the line began to move one by one, singing praises for soup, loving the coffee with an occasional "Where is the sugar?" (Three full cups for 100 cups of coffee — can't please everybody.) Yesterday, a young woman of the streets proclaimed the coffee was "nasty." "What's wrong?" asked I. "No sugar." Ty says heroin users crave sugar.

Out of everywhere and nowhere the wind exploded. Erupted. Whacked. Bashed. Walloped. Whirled. Napkins flew like snow. The tops of the soup pots clashed like cymbals, belted the concrete, went rolling toward the street. Unfilled cups flew into the street and our corn-based soup spoons danced to the howling riffs as the wind turned corners and whistled among the tree limbs.

The Human Beings: Most of our guests went running into the subway entrance. Others flew to nearby stores. Some folk tightly hugged the walls of the market behind our table. We all began to freeze. With the wind chill factor at minus three degrees, the wind pierced us. Amidst the gusts and blows of the gale we picked up our napkins, cups, spoons and lids and served the hungriest and bravest guests who came to eat and drink anyway. At points the wind simply made us stop and wait her out.

We began to suffer. I have never known anything like the pain of this cold, of serving in minus three degrees and offering Hospitality while being blown about. Robert Frost is correct: Ice will suffice. Icy weather hurts like hell. Finally, finis not telos, finally the time came to pack up and go home. Each step I took brought electric pain through my feet to my buttocks. My hands would not, could not, do what I pleaded with them to do. I got to the car and, fumbling and hurting, got the key in the door and sat down in the driver's seat. Groaning and grumping, I got the key into the ignition. But I could not turn the key. My hands were numb. I pulled myself

out of the car after losing my struggle to turn the key. Went to David and asked him to come start the car. Almost as frozen as I, he was able to get the engine running. We loaded the serving items — holy objects really — and headed home.

Immediately, I went to bed with extra covers. Murphy prepared a hot mug of tea. I spent over two hours warming. That night as we cut out the light my fingertips were still numb.

So, what? I have learned from the experience of the poor what I named long ago the Cry of the Poor, that 'Baby It's Cold Outside' and "I Hear You Knocking but You Can't Come In." We who live in houses, homes even, cannot know of the suffering of the poor without visiting them on their turf. Body learning — human experience, like God's incarnation in Jesus. Jesus came because the words of the Prophets and the teaching of the Torah did not accomplish God's will. God was born in Jesus so she could find out what life in a body is really like. Why do not words alone work? Why is human experience such a threat to some thinkers and writers? Jesus came in the flesh of the poor and died all but abandoned on the Place of the Skull. Jesus came to learn and then to give witness to the truth of what it means to be human. I give witness to and a minority report on the suffering of the homeless poor and prisoners, which I believe is the suffering of God. The farther we move from the poor the farther we are from God. I am sometimes called self-righteous for putting it that way. I am giving witness to what I have been taught and what I am still, slowly, learning from God in Jesus Christ in the lives, experiences and bodies of the castaways.

Thank you. May the joy the world cannot give and the world cannot take away nest in your hearts. And let us sing with Sam Cooke, "A Change is Gonna Come." ♣

*Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/Advocate/Ally at the Open Door Community in Baltimore.
 (edloring@opendoorcommunity.org)*

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly The State of the Death Penalty *continued from page 1*

penalty "is imposed in an arbitrary and racially biased manner." In the recent past, the Republican prosecutor of King County (Seattle) had partnered with Democratic Attorney General Bob Ferguson to support bipartisan legislation to abolish Washington's death penalty. Prosecutor Satterberg said, "I think the criminal justice system will be stronger without capital punishment."

On March 13, Governor Gavin Newsom of California announced that his state would have no executions as long as he is governor. Going even farther, he ordered that the execution chamber at San Quentin be disassembled. Newsom estimates that the abolition of the death penalty would save the state of California \$170 million per year.

New Hampshire has been the only remaining state in New England to maintain the death penalty, even though there has not been an execution there since 1939, and there is currently one man on death row. The legislature, with the tireless leadership of State Rep. Renny Cushing (D-Rockingham), whose own father and brother-in-law were murdered, once again passed bills to abolish the death penalty. The difference is that this year the bills passed with a veto-proof majority. Republican Governor Sununu has indeed vetoed the bill, but we hope that later in the session, the votes will be assembled to override the Governor's veto and finally abolish the death penalty in New Hampshire. This will bring the number of abolition states to 21.

I must say that after nearly 50 years of living in Georgia, it is wonderful to be in a state (Maryland) that has abolished the death penalty. In 2013, the Maryland General Assembly,

with significant leadership from Ben Jealous, Director of the N.A.A.C.P. and Governor Martin O'Malley, abolished the death penalty; and O'Malley commuted the sentences of the several men remaining on death row. There are *plenty* of problems here, but the death penalty is not one of them.

The division remains. The states of the old slaveocracy and a few others have dug in their heels and continue to carry out executions. Texas leads the way. It costs millions of dollars each year to maintain this harmful and violent institution in a time that healthcare, nutrition programs, education and other needs of the human community are being strangled. And wherever it is used, the death penalty is infused with poison of white supremacy, hatred of the poor and a disregard for the truth. This is affirmed again in the decisions of the Washington Supreme Court and the unending stream of exonerations of those who have been death sentenced or threatened with a death sentence as a way to extract a confession or plea bargain (a not-so-unusual practice by prosecutors). Careful examination of how death penalty trials are conducted will turn you forever against the institution. The truth is the first casualty.

The death penalty brings out the worst in everybody. It's long past time for it to go. We cannot wait on the courts: the right-wing majority on the U.S. Supreme Court is frighteningly young. The lower courts are being quickly packed with pro-death penalty ideologues. It must happen one case, one jurisdiction, one state at a time. If everyone who opposes the death penalty were to stand up, the practice would end. Actually, if just the people of faith who oppose it would stand up, it

26th Annual Starvin' for Justice Fast and Vigil to abolish the death penalty



June 29 - July 2, 2019
 The Supreme Court
 Washington, DC

www.abolition.org

would end. It is long past time that we do this. ♣

Murphy Davis is an Activist Pastor and writer with the Open Door Community in Baltimore. (murphydavis@bellsouth.net)

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Rev. Hedges,

Thank you for "turning me on" to Rev. Cone [Rev. Chris Hedges, "The Heresy of White Christianity" in the February *Hospitality*]. I love theology.

I've been requesting a hard copy of the "Medicare for All" bill. The little bit I've heard sounds like the true revolution we all need and have been craving.

My daughters are partly Maidu, Native, indigenous, American. The races are so intermingled — most of us are, or will be "rainbow people."

"You've got to endure rain to get the rainbow."

Rev. Joe Major (U.M.C.-CA)
Pinehurst, California

Dear Murphy and Ed,

Thanks for the April issue of *Hospitality*. It is always interesting, with a good message. This time I was especially interested in the article on the front page by Catherine Meeks, "Calling Their Names," because I was fortunate enough to be one of the 175 people who attended the service in the chapel at the Absalom Jones Center on Nov. 2. I think she was correct when she said that "We interrupted the negative energy that flows so freely across this land." It was a very special occasion.

Much Love,

Llewellyn Bell
Atlanta, Georgia

Please keep sending me *Hospitality*. It is a life-kit in today's world.

Bernhard Classen
Monchengladbach, Germany

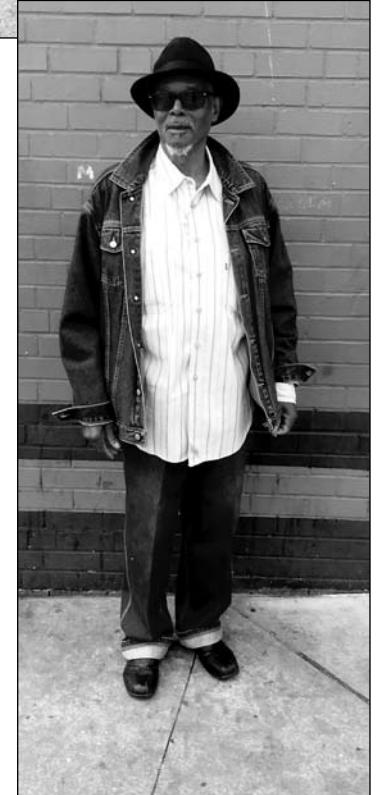


Above: Terry Reed

Right: Tyrone Cole



ODC/Baltimore
Photographs by
Eduard Loring



Right: *A message from Uncle Lee.*

Below: *Another Brother goes down.*



A Prayer of Thanksgiving after the Welcome Table at Upton Underground Railroad Station.



Open Door Community Needs:

- Granola bars
- Stamps to write prisoners
- Prisoner support and prisoner family support
- The Hardwick Prison Trip: hosts, drivers, cars and vans in the Atlanta area.

And now the great warm and hot weather needs:

- Tee shirts Sm/med/large/1X/2X. Lots and lots of them. We recently received a box from a partner-in-mission who went from thrift store to thrift store purchasing tee shirts for our guests. Thank you.
- White crew socks are particularly popular.
- Soon we will reduce the coffee and add iced tea and lemonade. One-gallon jugs are our need. In the summer we can serve up to 12 gallons a week.
- We always need financial support. Without you, the Open Door Community would not exist.

If you'd like to help,
Murphy, David, Ed, Simon, Erica and Tyrone thank you all.

Praying Through Loneliness

Today, O Lord, I feel the loneliness of anonymity. No one in this city knows me and no one cares. At least it seems that way. So I am left to myself and my own thoughts.

My loneliness, of course, is quite comfortable. It is not the loneliness of the truly abandoned. But perhaps it can help me enter more fully into their feelings of abandonment. O Lord, may my small experience of loneliness teach me to have fellowship with all those who are marginalized:

When I eat alone, help me pray for those who have nothing to eat;

When I walk the streets alone, help me remember those who do not have the strength to walk;

When I feel on the outside of every conversation, help me see the nameless people to whom no one pays attention.

When I speak and am ignored, help me hear those whose voices fall on deaf ears.

And whenever my circumstances are devoid of familiar voices may I always be able to hear the voice of the true Shepherd.

Amen

— Richard Foster