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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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Olivia Pascal / Facing South

The South Is Always In Us Why We Must Have Black History Month

By Nibs Stroupe

She got on a train in Chicago one hundred years ago, returning South for the first time in almost 30 years. She traveled as herself until she reached the Mason-Dixon line; then she put on a disguise as an old Black woman, having learned from her forebear Harriet Tubman, whom she had met in the late 1890s. She had been exiled from the South since 1892, when her newspaper offices were blown up in Memphis and a price was put on her head. The reason for this violence and terrorism: She had indicated that the South was always with us, that 30 years after the end of the Civil War, the forces of white supremacy were regaining strength and were using lynchings as part of the reign of terror.

Ida Wells returned South 30 years after she had been exiled to investigate another lynching, a lynching of such magnitude that it boggles the mind. At the end of September 1919, over 200 African Americans had been slaughtered in my home county, Phillips County, Arkansas. The white folk in power indicated that the killing was rooted in a Black rebellion, and thus it was called the "Elaine Race Riot." Having studied lynchings for so long, Ida Wells knew better — she knew that the slaughter was rooted in what it has always been rooted in: in American history, and especially the South. It was a terroristic tool of white supremacy. Her investigative journalism revealed the truth, and it became the impetus for the NAACP and a courageous lawyer named Scipio Africanus Jones to take on the cases, taking them all the way to the Supreme Court to seek to overturn the death penalty for 12 African American men convicted of defending themselves. It is a tribute to all of their work that the SCOTUS voted 6-2 in

1923 to overturn the convictions in *Moore v. Dempsey*.

When I use the term "the South," I do not mean the geography or the homeland for many diverse peoples in American history. I was moved by Bishop Robert Wright's powerful article/poem "The American South Is Our Holy Land," in Catherine Meeks' fine book *Living Into God's Dream*.¹ In it, he joined many other African Americans in reclaiming the geography and the history of the south. No, when I say "the South," I mean it as it has been portrayed in our history: the home of white supremacy, a demonic disease that permeates all of our national life. The South contorted the freedom found in the Constitution and made slavery an inherent part of the nation. The South cost us 700,000 lives in the Civil War; the South crushed the nascent freedoms and dignity gained in Reconstruction; the South re-established neo-slavery; the South eviscerated the Voting Rights Act; the South lives in the weapons of the police and mass shooters to terrorize people of color, especially those classified as African American; the South now reigns in the presidency of Donald Trump. The South is always in us. Racism and slavery and white supremacy, at the heart of the idea of the South, are not unfortunate blots on our national character — they are fundamental to our national character. They are not only at the heart of the idea of the South — they are at the heart of the idea of America.

Ida Wells knew this as she rode the train south in 1920. Caroline and I knew it as we drove last fall across north Alabama, then headed down to the Mississippi River Delta, crossing the river at my hometown of Helena, Arkansas,

The South Is Always In Us *continued on page 6*

Murphy Update

By Eduard Loring

God is with us.
Ho, People of Faith and Justice,
The Holy One who created you says,
Do not be afraid — I will save you.
I have called you by name — you are mine.
My daughter Murphy Davis,
When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you;
Your troubles will not overwhelm you.
When you pass through fire, you will not be burned;
The hard trials that come will not hurt you.
For I am The One who is love
The God of dance and healing hopes,
Who is with you always.
Because you are precious to me
And because I love you and give you honor.
Do not be afraid — I am with you!
— Isaiah 43:1-5, *Good News Bible*, Adapted

Our Friends and Readers,
Today is the day our Creator is making
And asking us to help make the day one of justice
And Peace.

This letter to you is a follow up from the Open Door Community's Christmas letter. For the sake of Junior McGee I will repeat the paragraph in our Christmas letter about our Murphy. "Our priority for 2020 is prayer for health for Murphy Davis. We had a setback. Forever weakened is her heart (what the doctors call heart failure, but I am here to testify her heart has not failed!!!). SHE, also, has an infection in her lung which will take 6 to 18 months to heal. A Peacemaker is implanted in her heart to respond to an electrical block. Her heart is filled with Mercy. And SHE gonna' make it. Oh, Lordy, yes, SHE gonna' make it through.

November was full of family meals and joy in the season. Murphy seemed to be improving little by little. However, as SHE rolled on her rollator or leaned on Willie Dee Wimberley's walking cane into December, Murphy began an up and down motion. Never feeling very well, she kept going. We had long made plans to go to Atlanta during the middle of December to see friends outside prison and friends inside prison on death row. Before departing on December 13, Murphy was weak. Hannah, Murphy and I had a family meeting to decide whether to go or not. During a discussion leaning in two directions Murphy finally said, "I want to go." Go we did. We had a wonderful time and got to see every one under death sentence in Georgia. I am writing this on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. On Thursday evening the flesh-hungry criminal system was scheduled to kill our good friend Jimmy Meders. He is alive and off death row today living at Phillips

Murphy Update *continued on page 7*

Introducing Heather Barger

Board Member of the Open Door Community

By Lee Carroll

In 2016, when several key partners in the Open Door Community “retired,” it was decided that the organization would continue as a much smaller residential community of three people (Murphy Davis, Ed Loring and David Payne) and that it would move from Atlanta to Baltimore. A new external Board of Directors was created to guide the organization into the future. This is the sixth in a series of ten articles that introduce readers to the current Board of Directors. These “spiritual biographies” describe the theological journeys of individual directors and how their stories have come together to help continue the legacy of the Open Door. In this edition we introduce board colleague Heather Barger.

Heather Barger understands her calling in life to be a disciple of the liberating Jesus and an advocate for social justice.

But it wasn't always that way for her.

She grew up Southern Baptist in Augusta, Georgia. She and her family were active in their congregation, where her parents taught Sunday school and led a group of young adults. When Heather was 14, her parents divorced and she struggled with the break-up of her family. She remained in Augusta with her father, but stayed close to her mother, who moved to Atlanta. She was also involved in a non-denominational Young Life group, and it was on a Young Life retreat that she experienced a “conversion” and dedicated her life to Christ. Throughout the hard days following her parents' divorce, she was comforted by a newfound sense of God's accompaniment and care for her. Following high school, Heather went to Guilford

College in Greensboro, NC, a small liberal arts school guided by Quaker values such as community, integrity, peace and simplicity. One of her first classes was a course in American literature taught by an African American professor who introduced her to perspectives and values that challenged those of her own white evangelical culture. “It rocked my world,” she said, and it launched her on a path of re-examining her world view.

One semester was spent studying in Mexico, where she was introduced to liberation theology and experienced a Christian-based community that studied Scripture from the perspectives of the poor. She returned home with many questions about the American church and society that had formed her. She felt isolated without a community to help her process her angst and emerging theology. Her understanding of God was changing from a God who was her personal savior (only) to a God who liberated and brought hope for the world — a God best known in and among marginalized communities.

As biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann once suggested, “Our life of faith consists of moving with God in terms of (a) being securely *oriented*, (b) being painfully *disoriented*, and (c) being surprisingly *reoriented*.” Having gone through a secure orientation with God during her adolescent years and a time of disorientation during college, Heather moved passionately into reorienting her life as an advocate for social justice.

Upon graduating from Guilford College in 1997, she returned to Mexico to work with

a social justice education program. After a two-year sojourn there, she felt the urge to return to the United States to address needed reforms at home. She relocated to Atlanta and for eight years worked with several non-profit, justice-oriented organizations including the Atlanta Women's Action for New Directions (WAND) and Global Health Action.



Katie, Oscar and Heather

Greg Aikins

During some of those years, she also served as a “resident scholar” at the Open Door Community, and the Open Door became a pivotal place for deepening her vocation. She found it particularly satisfying that the ODC was not just about *serving* the poor; it was also committed to communal worship and theological reflection. This fed the loneliness of her soul and led her to conclude that the Christian life is not just about “me and Jesus.” It is “God's calling to all of us, indeed to all of creation. And it is a common or shared calling.”

Her experiences with the Open Door Community led her to pursue a Master of Divinity degree at nearby Candler School of Theology. She never envisioned her degree

program as a move toward becoming a pastor; she simply hoped it would deepen her theological roots for a career in community education and advocacy among the poor. For Heather, God was becoming the “Liberating Jesus.”

After graduating in 2008, Heather returned to the non-profit sector in Atlanta, advocating for immigrant worker rights with Georgia Legal Services Program and other agencies. It was also during those post-seminary years that she married Katie Aikins, and in 2013 the two of them moved to Philadelphia where Katie became pastor of the Tabernacle United Church. Joyfully, they are now the proud parents of two-year-old Oscar.

Today, Heather works as Community Education and Engagement Specialist with Project HOME, an organization addressing poverty and homelessness in Philadelphia. In addition to being active in their church, she and Katie are part of the Vine and Fig Tree Community, an intentional Christian community seeking to live more sustainably and witness to justice and peace. Heather also chairs the board of the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia that works for immigrant justice. In her ongoing “reorientation,” Heather noted that having a child has led her to reclaim her experience of God as holy comforter, as well as following the liberating Jesus. Indeed, God continues to surprise and befriend her as she lives into her vocation as parent, disciple and advocate for social justice. ✦

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

HOSPITALITY

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David Payne

Tyrone Cole, Eduard Loring, Michaela Murphy Buc and Beth Dellow serve a guest on January 1, 2020 as they celebrate two years of the Welcome Table in Baltimore.

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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.

Frederick Douglass: Prophet for Our Time

Frederick Douglass Prophet of Freedom

By David W. Blight

2019 Pulitzer Prize in History
Simon & Schuster
912 pages

Reviewed by Todd Moyer

Frederick Douglass was born to an enslaved mother in Talbot County, Maryland, in 1818. Douglass never knew for sure, but his father was most likely the white man who owned both his mother and his extended family and the plantation where they lived. Having escaped slavery, he died in 1895 a free man who had weighed in on and influenced every major issue, event and political debate of his lifetime. No American has ever loved freedom so deeply or demanded so much from a country that denied it to so many.

David Blight covers every aspect of Douglass's remarkable life in his equally remarkable, prize-winning biography, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. Weighing in at nearly 900 pages and, by my estimate a stout three pounds, *Frederick Douglass* considers the great man as a whole: his religious beliefs, political ideology and practice, his family life, punishing travel schedule, successes and failures in business, and his words. He produced so many moving, consequential words in his speeches, autobiographies, newspaper essays and other writing. Blight calls him "the prose poet of America's and perhaps a universal body politic," and places every one of Douglass's major essays, books, and speeches, and quite a few of his minor ones, in the context of his life and times.

Blight has a superpower: He somehow makes such a big book full of so many big ideas and big personalities lively and readable. In every chapter he includes at least one anecdote or aside that he could easily have written another several dozen pages about and still kept his readers' attention. This weighty tome somehow reads as concise.

Douglass's 19th-century life might seem at first glance a universe away from modern readers, but Blight manages to portray him in ways that make his ideas and arguments seem as fresh and contemporary as today's tweets. And not in a "Frederick Douglass . . . is being recognized more and more" way, either. Blight's Douglass is more timeless than timely, but he does have lessons for us in the 21st century on nearly every page.

The evolutions in Douglass's thought that Blight traces are fascinating. Abolitionists associated with William Lloyd Garrison made Douglass a celebrity — literally one of the most famous men of his time in the U.S., just years after he escaped enslavement — and for a time Douglass agreed with them that the U.S. Constitution amounted to "a covenant with death." The principled Garrisonians eschewed electoral politics because politicians compromised with slavers, and by the 1840s they counseled the free North to cut its ties with the South. Douglass preached that gospel for a time, too, but he came to believe that to divorce the South would amount to abandoning millions of enslaved men, women and children.

Instead, Douglass wanted Americans of good will to use every means at their disposal to destroy the institution of slavery, including sermons that could change the hearts and minds of Christians, but also the mobilization of voters and political parties. He also welcomed the prospect of ridding the U.S. of its original sin through revolutionary violence. He broke conclusively from the Garrisonians.

Douglass's unique religious beliefs and patriotism converged in the years leading up to the Civil War, the period when he split from Garrison; Blight calls the amalgam "mil-

lennial nationalism — America as a nation with a special destiny, fraught with contradictions, and living out a historical trajectory under some kind of providential judgment." Douglass identified with Old Testament prophets, and he believed that he acted in their tradition when he called for a righteous war to rid the republic of slavery by blood and fire. The war was among other things a fulfillment of the jeremiads against what he called "the slave power" that Douglass delivered across the country over a span of decades. When it finally came he considered it "a sanctioned war to destroy slavery and potentially to reinvent the American republic around the principle of racial equality."

Douglass watched helplessly as white Southerners overthrew Reconstruction by force in community after community, and more helplessly still as white voters outside the South let them get away with it.

When the fighting started, Douglass demanded that the Union provide opportunities to African American men to fight and sacrifice for the country the same as white boys, and when his clamoring finally convinced Abraham Lincoln to enlist African Americans in the Union Army, Douglass recruited soldiers and sent two sons into the service. Having escaped from slavery, delivered thousands of anti-slavery speeches and provided material support for John Brown's Raid, Douglass had good reason to sacrifice as much as he did to ensure the Union victory.

Of course, the Union Army whipped the Confederates, but not even redemptive war could fully defeat the slave power. As Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative says, the institution of slavery didn't end, it evolved. Douglass understood in his bones that the war did not end at Appomattox, and he urged his countrymen to impose a punitive and revolutionary Reconstruction on the slaving South. He cheered and fought for the passage and ratification of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, which began to define the terms of citizenship — not just for freedmen, but for all Americans.

Douglass, Blight writes, saw Reconstruction as "a continuation of the purpose of the war, a sacred responsibility to the Union dead and to 4 million slaves." He wanted the economic and political bases of the slave power demolished, and not just rhetorically. He wanted them wiped out apocalyptically, Old Testament-style. He wanted enslavers and traitors to pay up. He wanted "national regeneration and entire purification," he said, the "deadly upas, root and branch, leaf and fibre, body and sap . . . utterly destroyed."

His vision for Reconstruction wasn't all about punishment, however. He also envisioned land redistribution and reparations for the formerly enslaved, and he wanted full economic and political rights for freedmen and the space and security to exercise them. He wanted free schools for their children. He wanted freedmen to form the foundation of a new ruling party in the South.

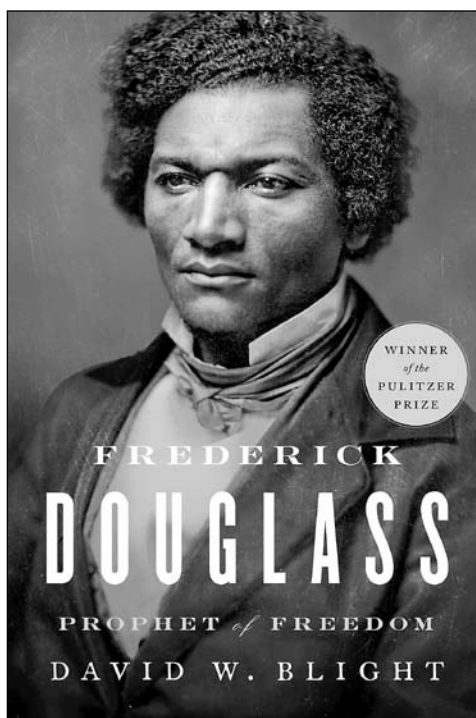
He knew that his vision of a new Republic could only come about as Union victory in the war had, through sheer power, so he also stumped for members of the only political party who could accomplish these goals: the Republicans. In Blight's telling, Reconstruction was arguably the most poignant period of Douglass's life. Douglass had a healthy distrust of the American political process (which, after all, had managed to compromise with, if not encourage, the enslavement of his fellow human beings for most of his life), but he engaged it with gusto as the best available means for change. He dabbled with third parties who might have provided better routes to the abolition of slavery before the war, but he remained loyal to the Republicans, for better or worse, long after it ended. Its candidates were imperfect, but at the time, in the real world, the party offered the only path toward freedom and equality for all Americans.

Douglass watched helplessly as white Southerners overthrew Reconstruction by force in community after community, and more helplessly still as white voters outside the South let them get away with it. Well into the 1870s he demanded "not a peace that rested on one man's standing on the neck of another, but a peace which arises out of equal justice and equal rights to all," but voters outside the South decided they'd had enough and declared a formal end to Reconstruction in 1877. With it went Douglass's hopes for the total defeat of the slave power.

At the same time he accepted political patronage jobs in D.C. Did he sell out? Blight doesn't think so. He acknowledges that Douglass, the firebrand prophet of the antebellum period, could hardly muster the same moral authority while serving as the D.C. marshal or the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, but what was Douglass all about if not constant reinvention?

Frederick Douglass's political instincts were not perfect, and many of the decisions he made and the words he used to defend them do not stand the test of time; he infamously sacrificed the voting rights of women, for example, to help ensure the voting rights of African American men after the war. But flawed though they were, those instincts were better than most, and Douglass was able to communicate them better than almost any American who came before or after him. As Blight makes clear, he speaks to us still. ♦

Todd Moyer teaches U.S. history and is head of the Oral History Program at the University of North Texas in Denton.



The New School

Christian Zionism – History and Harms

By Ed Crouch

History

Christian Zionism is *Christians supporting Zionism*. Zionism is a term attributed to a Hungarian Jew, Theodor Herzl, who began advocating politically for a separate Jewish State in 1896. After the Nazi Holocaust, many saw Israel as a safe haven.

Christian Zionist ideas are attributed to an Englishman, Rev. John Darby. By 1830, he was teaching that the Bible literally predicted End Times on earth. Darby's teachings were widely spread around the United States by the *Scofield Reference Bible* printed by the popular Oxford University Press. The Scofield Bible popularized Darby's teachings.

Core beliefs of Christian Zionists:
 God gave the land to the Jewish people in Genesis 12.

- Present-day Israel is a continuation of the Israel of the Bible.
- It is the Christian's responsibility to back modern Israel.
- God will bless nations and individuals who bless the Jews.
- War will break out in the last days among nations surrounding Israel.
- Then Jesus will come back, rescue the Jews who believe in him, and take them to heaven.

Mainline Christians reject many, if not all of these beliefs as distortions of the Old Testament and note they are not mentioned in the New Testament.

Christian Zionism is an extremely important movement currently in the U.S. Here, their lobby may number 50-70 million citizens. They are concentrated in the Bible Belt, but by no means exclusively. Many evangelicals or fundamentalists (estimated at 80 million) are Christian Zionists.

A 2006 Pew Survey notes that 60 percent of U.S. evangelicals support Israel. They have allied with the Israeli government and the U.S. Christian Zionist lobby to ensure Israel's regional supremacy. Some believe that God gave Israel to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession in order to save the world after the second coming of Christ. In 2013, a Pew Research poll found that 72 percent of white evangelicals said they felt more sympathy for Israelis than Palestinians. Christian Zionists are often unaware of the political implications of this sympathy and of the harms inflicted on Palestinians.

Christian Zionism is also a secular movement with political, or theo-political goals. It influences much of American policy today! In 1980, the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem opened for business. It has served as a center for worldwide Christian Zionism ever since.

Starting in 1981, the Christian Zionist agenda has embraced Presidents Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Donald Trump, all of whom have exerted tremendous influence at home and in Israel. Also in 1981, the Council for National Policy was established. It has 600 members who pay dues of \$2,000-\$10,000 per year. Groups like these donate millions of dollars to the state of Israel, with some of the money even earmarked for settlements stolen from generations of Palestinians who have lived on the land since the time of Christ.

Starting in 1983, an American Jewish Rabbi, Yechiel Eckstein, has persuaded Christian Zionists to raise \$1.5 billion over the last 36 years to support Israel. At the same time, he

convinced Jews to ignore the Christian Zionist End Times schedule and their missionary activities. He did this through 3,000 radio broadcasts on five continents, with 23 million weekly listeners!

Today there are over 250 political Christian Zionist organizations in this country. The largest is Christians United for Israel (CUFI) numbering seven-nine million members. Its leader is televangelist Rev. John Hagee of San Antonio, Texas, who claims an active church membership of 22,000, with a weekly radio audience of 100 million. Hagee militantly proclaims that those who fight against Israel fight against God.

Harms

Former Dean of Bethlehem Bible College in Jerusalem, Rev. Alex Awad, a Palestinian, wrote, "The passion of Christian Zionists to bring Jews to the Holy Land and create a Jewish state . . . was accomplished through piling layer upon layer of wars, massacres, bloodshed, ethnic cleansing, political manipulations and pain. Millions of Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Egyptians and Jews have suffered death and destruction . . . in large part due to the theological convictions and political activities of Christian Zionist leaders."

The Israel Lobby, with huge support from Christian Zionists, helped elect Trump and successfully lobbied much of Congress. Christian Zionists have helped assure the Israeli

these settlements and for aggression against Palestinians by Jewish settlers.

Awad states that "Christian Zionist leaders are partly to blame for the rise of radicalism among Palestinians and Arabs due to long years of oppression, humiliation and frustration."

Swiss theologian Karl Barth taught that any territorial theology would be a profound error for Christians. The misuse of the Bible alleging divine involvement in the military occupation of Palestine is a manipulation of the Bible for secular goals. Biblical scholar Gary Burge argues that these "prophetic predictions . . . are unsupportable."

Non-Jews are surely horrified to hear CUFI's leader, Rev. John Hagee, preach his toxic blend of racism and Islamophobia. Some Christian Zionists teach fear of Islam, that Muslims, particularly after 9/11, are worse than Nazis, enemies of God, aliens, or even squatters on their own land! This attitude greatly harms Israel's relationships with billions of liberal Jews, Christians and certainly Muslims around the world.

Hagee and many Christian Zionist leaders actively pursue their conviction that all Jews must return to Israel and rebuild a Jewish Temple in East Jerusalem. This is one of the most sensitive religious sites in the world, home of Al-Aqsa Mosque built on the Temple Mount — the third holiest site in Islam. Such notions alienate both Christians and Muslims.

Likewise, Trump's 2018 move of the American embassy from Tel-Aviv, a Jewish city, to a more international city like Jerusalem, greatly upset Palestinians. While the U.N. General Assembly condemned this change by a large majority, it must have greatly pleased Christian Zionists.

Christian Zionists contend that the United Nations and the International Criminal Court are the enemy. To believe this is to resist the peace efforts of much of the world. In 1967, Israel stole the Golan Heights from Syria — forbidden by one of the Ten Commandments, the Geneva Conventions and the U.N. Both the U.N. Charter and the ICC condemn Israel for possible war crimes against the Palestinians.

In 2018, with Christian Zionists' approval, President Trump has unilaterally terminated 70 years of humanitarian aid to Palestine through the U.N. Relief and Works Agency. This was an 80 percent or \$300 million cut to a program benefitting 5.4 million Palestinians including financing for 700 schools and 500,000 students.

Awad points out that Christian Zionists are "militarizing the church . . . [and that] Christian Zionists overwhelmingly supported the war in Iraq." Many see the Middle East's endless wars as signs of the end times interpreted in the old Scofield Bible and still preached today.

The Christian Zionist lobby had a strong hand in passing laws in 27 of our United States *against* advocating for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel. These new laws labeled BDS (which was most effective in South Africa) as *anti-Semitic*. Naturally, some of these laws are being overturned as violations of freedom of speech. Now 250 universities, including Harvard, have similarly opposed BDS promotion by students, arguing this would violate "academic freedom" *when in fact it would be an exercise of it*. Could a major reason really be to avoid offending wealthy donors or the Israel Lobby?

Indeed, politics and religion make powerful bedfellows. But Maya Angelou reminds us, "History, . . . if faced with courage, need not be lived again." ✠

Born in China, the son of Presbyterian missionaries, Ed is a retired Seattle social worker seeking to promote love and justice. He writes a monthly Palestinian JustPeace blog at gecrouch61@gmail.com.



salaamone.com

government that it will continue to receive \$3.8 billion a year in U.S. foreign aid, which includes munitions that have killed and massacred perhaps 90,000 Palestinians within Israel over 71 years! They have died by rockets, bombs and guns from land, sea and air. Just last year, residents of Gaza held non-violent demonstrations, and 200 civilian Palestinians were killed and 25,000 injured, mostly by sharpshooter snipers. This is viewed by many as incremental genocide or ethnic cleansing.

The wholehearted backing of Israel by Christian Zionists has led the latter to overlook principles of justice, ultimately tarnishing their own image, not to mention Israel's. As such, Christian Zionists contribute greatly to the ongoing 52-year illegal military occupation.

Daily, Israel forcibly displaces Palestinians. There are 800,000 settlers now living on pirated land. Israel has demolished 55,000 Palestinian homes since 1967. In their place are built Jewish-only settlements and roads with accompanying walls, and water resources are stolen from Palestinians. All the while, American Christian Zionist churches and groups contribute mission funds to settlement playgrounds, swimming pools and even military tanks! Christian Zionists have been the most fanatical advocates for the illegal expansion of

Enemy Love: On Not Becoming What You Hate

By Weldon D. Nisly

“America, love it or leave it,” a taunt of the tumultuous sixties, was shouted by citizens at citizens who dared criticize America’s war on the Vietnamese people.

Now a similar tirade reverberates across America. A president taunts members of Congress to go back to the places from which they came. Unpresidential tweets hurl false accusations: “They hate our country.” Weaponized words scorn congresswomen of color for the benefit of the president’s loyalists.

porters as “incredible patriots” when they chant “Send her back,” is unconscionable behavior. Hypocritically declaring, “You can’t talk that way about our country, not when I’m the president,” is not patriotic or presidential. Hate-speech, like racism, is wrong.

While writing this article I watched “The Hate U Give,” a film about a teenage Black woman navigating life between her home in a poor neighborhood and her education in a private high school. In a key scene, the lead character, Starr, hastily exits a party when someone shoots a gun. She is driven home by Khalil, a close childhood friend who showed up at

manifesting “backbone,” as was touted at a recent campaign rally, it manifests spinelessness.

An oft-repeated response to the president’s reckless cruelty is, “This is not who we are.” Really? A particularly egregious presidency cannot absolve an egregiously racialized stream of our national history. Indigenous peoples and people of color know all too well the deeper truth and tragedy of America’s racist history of genocide and slavery. Until we know that “this *is* who we are,” we cannot become all we can be.

Over four decades of pastoral and peace ministry have distilled two spiritual insights for me. One is that we are not the worst thing we have ever done. Our worst act does not define us or negate the good that we are and do. Neither does it erase the truth of our being created in God’s image. The other insight is that when we persist in the “worst angels of our nature,” we become what we do. Whatever good we are and do is undone and overshadowed by the worst we have become.

A startling revelation of this insight for me happened decades ago in Philadelphia, where we lived at the time. The Philadelphia mob boss was murdered in front of his house, the consequence of a feud with other mafia families. His funeral was held in the cathedral where he was eulogized as a doting grandfather. Whatever truth the eulogy held, his public life was as the Philadelphia godfather. Countless people suffered or were killed while he was godfather. That was who he had become because it was how he lived his life.

Our life portrays whether we “become what we hate.” Our love proclaims that we do “not become what we hate.” Love is stronger than hate.

Jesus fulfilled the Great Commandment: “Love God, self, neighbor,” with an addition, “Love your enemies.” (Matthew 5:44) Enemy love is a life of active, nonviolent



From left: Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan), Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and Ayanna Pressley (D-Massachusetts). President Trump said they should “go back” to their home countries. Three of the four were born in the United States. (Associated Press)

Four congresswomen, with the audacity to fulfill their constitutional right and legislative responsibility, dare to manifest the courage and conscience to critically assess our country’s warring ways and call out the president’s offensive actions. The president’s tirades are racist and wrong.

The headlines of *The Seattle Times* got it wrong: “Trump, lawmakers trade fire in escalating war of words” (7/16/19). President and lawmakers are not equally culpable for an “escalating war of words.” That is as fallacious as the president’s declaration that racist violence in Charlottesville was on “both sides.”

“I want to tell children across this country . . . that no matter what the president says, this country belongs to you. And it belongs to everyone” is not the equivalent of “These people that hate our country . . . can leave.” Trump’s exclusionary rant against congresswomen of color is in stark contrast to Ocasio-Cortez’s inclusionary encouragement to all children.

The four congresswomen were wrong in one way. In a press conference, they called Trump’s diatribes a *distraction* from their legislative responsibilities. Brookings scholar Andre Perry explains, “By downplaying racism as a *distraction*, we assist in the normalization of racism. . . . Racism is never a distraction. It is the policy of the privileged and the enemy of the just.”

Responsibility for racism falls on many people: people with white power and privilege; people in pulpit and pew; people who mimic weaponized words and ways; people who are silent. People who accept the “new normal” of escalating racial violence and white nationalism. People who lack awareness or concern for our racialized history. No one bears greater responsibility than the holder of the highest office in the land who sets a toxic tone that enflames many.

Over a century ago, President Teddy Roosevelt acknowledged his presidential “bully pulpit.” Every president has made use of that pulpit. But the presidential bully pulpit was never intended to justify bullying.

Trump belligerently presumes the right to tweet or talk about people and places in hateful, hurtful, harmful ways whenever, wherever, however he chooses. Praising rally sup-

the party moments earlier. On the way, they have a conversation that leads Khalil to warn Starr about the toll hate takes on humans. As they are talking, he is stopped by a police officer for changing lanes without signaling on a street that at this late

Trump belligerently presumes the right to tweet or talk about people and places in hateful, hurtful, harmful ways whenever, wherever, however he chooses.

hour is empty. A moment later, the white officer, mistaking Khalil’s hairbrush for a gun, shoots and kills him. As the only eyewitness, grief-stricken Starr is torn between keeping silent to go on with life or speaking out. She risks all to tell the truth and confront hate.

While watching this heart-wrenching film, the title acronym suddenly hit me: THUG! “The Hate U Give” twists one into being a THUG who bullies others with hate. There is no inconsequential hate – to the other or to yourself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:21) What you treasure becomes the life of your heart and the heart of your life.

In the hysteria of the early 1950s Red Scare, Senator Joseph McCarthy poisoned the national ethos and wantonly ruined human lives with hateful accusations against anyone he considered to be a communist. In a 1954 Senate hearing, Senator McCarthy relentlessly questioned Joseph Welch, accusing him of Communist ties. Suddenly Welch stunned the Senator by respectfully naming his reckless, cruel, hateful actions. “Until this moment, Senator,” said Welch, “I never gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last?” Welch’s words rippled across the Senate floor and the country, breaking the hate-spell of McCarthyism.

Confronting this president with a call for decency is ridiculed by one who belligerently escalates racialized hate. Brazenly professing “no concern . . . because others agree with me” is unconscionable and unpresidential. Rather than

resistance to enemy violence. Violence is the enemy. Violence is sin — anything that violates God and all that God creates.

Maya Angelou gives prophetic wisdom to Jesus’ enemy love with her poem, “Still I rise.”

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I’ll rise. ✦

After 40 years of Mennonite Church ministry that included community, pastoral and peace ministries, Weldon Nisly currently devotes himself to Contemplative JustPeace building and work with Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is a Benedictine Oblate. His life is dedicated to the abolition of war. Weldon serves half-time on the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team and also was on the CPT Palestine team in Hebron in Sep-Oct 2017 and Aug-Sep 2018.



Becca Conrad

The South Is Always In Us: Why We Must Have Black History Month *continued from page 1*

which is the seat of Phillips County, the home of the searing lynching in the Red Summer of 1919. We were there to participate in the dedication of a memorial to the more than 235 victims of the Elaine Massacre in Helena. I had learned about it from Catherine, who was going to be a main speaker at the event. When Catherine first told me about it, I was stunned. I had grown up in Helena in the ground zero of white supremacy, believing in its truth, believing that God had ordained it. I had heard vague rumors of the Elaine Massacre, but it had been called the Elaine Race Riot then, seeking to indicate that it was a response to a Black rebellion. It was largely kept secret then (and now), but when it surfaced, it was said that only 2 or 3 Black men had been killed (in order to keep them in their place). Though African Americans have some political power now, white supremacy remains firmly in place. It was stunning to me that Helena would even consider doing this. So I needed to go back, returning to the delta.

The memorial in Helena is impressive. It is a three-step structure of granite and a map — and it is no small thing. One piece weighs over 14,000 pounds, and it was designed and constructed by a local resident, Amoz Eckerson. The ceremony to dedicate it was held on Sunday afternoon under an open tent structure in Helena. The tent was just south of the memorial, between Walnut Street, which used to be the home of Black businesses, and the main drag of Cherry Street, where the white businesses were located. It was also right across the street from the very Phillips County courthouse where more than 122 African Americans were sentenced for defending themselves in the slaughter and where 12 African Americans were sentenced to death because three white men had died in the slaughter, most likely killed by the “friendly” fire of those who did the slaughter.

The venue for the dedication was filled, with 400 or so people there, and 85 percent of the attendees were Anglo, a surprise to me. Where were the African Americans? Was this dedication seen as an easy way out for those classified as “white,” a way of salving our conscience without making any changes in the current culture? Was it a sign of the lack of local African American leadership in the development of the process? Was it seen as a waste of money, money

memorial is. From my outsider perspective, the memorial seems to be a white event that expresses white acknowledgment of a horrible crime 100 years ago and our sorrow for it. Its development and funding suggest that the same dynamic that led to the slaughter still prevails: People classified as “white” must be in control. Even at this touchpoint where the violence and brutality of white supremacy are expressed and remembered in a powerful art piece, the power of white supremacy still prevails.

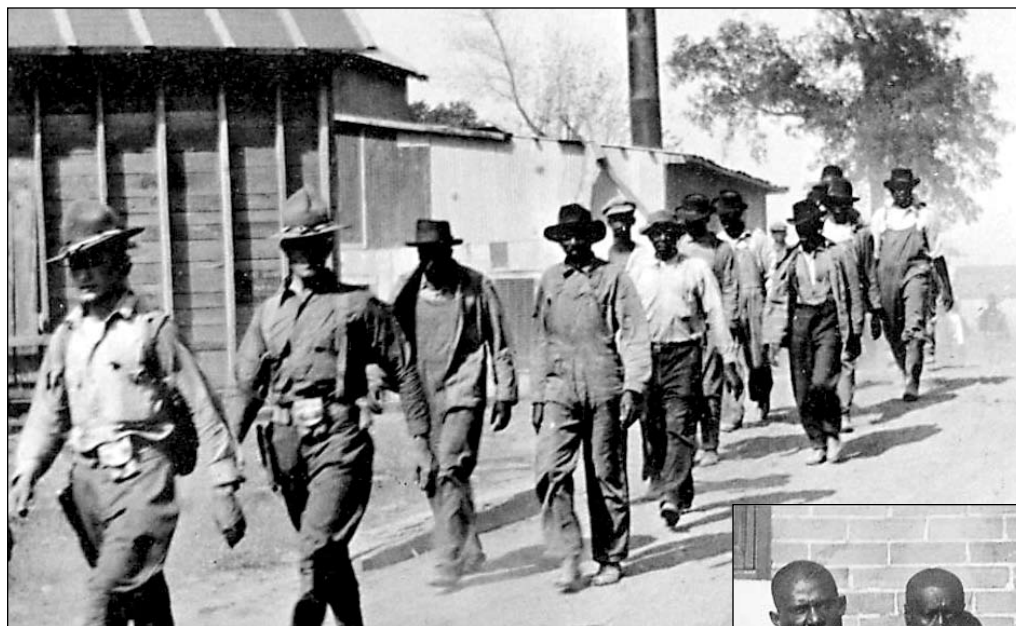
Catherine indicated that the same streams of hatred that carried the perpetrators to such a slaughter still flow in all of us. The South is always in us. The idea of reconciliation is needed, she indicated, but there are many steps needed before that. Recognition and repentance and resistance and reparations are essential. As Minister Malcolm once put it, “Make it plain.” And she did. In times like these in 2020, we all have to make choices. We can either stay in league with the spiritual forces that led white people to slaughter African Americans, or we can resist that spirit and move toward the spirit of justice and equity and difficult loving.

This memorial is a reminder that there are several narratives intertwined in the story of American history. We are currently engaged in a great struggle over whether the narrative of the power of white supremacy will once again be normalized in our story, as it was in my childhood in Helena. The Trumpster and his base see white supremacy as the natural order, even as God-given. Some of the rest of us see it as sinful and an abomination. Donald Trump and his base are harking us back to the slaughter fields of Elaine, and it is our time to resist him and that movement. Much of the havoc created by Trump has the delta boiling: no equity for workers,

disenfranchisement of voters, a culture of seeing the “other” as enemy rather than as sibling.

The South is always in us. That truth remains in places like the memorial to the Elaine Massacre, and especially in places like the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery. These voices from the ancestors call to us to acknowledge that truth, that the South is always in us. We must name that truth, but we must also have prophetic

vision, like Ida Wells had. It is why we must always have a Black History Month, a ritualized time to acknowledge the necessity and struggle for equity and justice. We must seek to live out of a new and different vision — the one that not even a conflicted leader like Thomas Jefferson could control, the one that not even the killers of Phillips County could erase — the vision of equality. ✦



African American men taken prisoner during the Elaine Massacre by U.S. Army troops sent from Camp Pike; 1919.

There were two ceremonies involved, the first in Elaine on Saturday in the hot and humid delta of the Mississippi River. One of the controversies of the whole process was that the memorial was placed in Helena — where there was plenty of killing — rather than in Elaine, where the slaughter started. I wasn’t part of the inner workings, so I don’t know the reasons for that placement, but the town of Elaine is on the verge of extinction (less than 500 people), so that was the likely reason. Still, some art form to acknowledge Elaine as the central location of the slaughter would seem to be appropriate. The ceremony in Elaine was dominated by white leadership, and that gave me an uneasy feeling. It seemed to amplify the idea of the South — Black folks cannot be in charge.



Photographs from the Arkansas State Archives

The twelve men convicted and sentenced to death after the Elaine Massacre.

that could have been spent for education and job development in such a poor town as Helena? I later found out that most of the African Americans were at an alternate service in Elaine that same afternoon, a service no doubt dominated by Black

We can either stay in league with the spiritual forces that led white people to slaughter African Americans, or we can resist that spirit and move toward the spirit of justice and equity and difficult loving.

On Sunday morning, Caroline and I attended the worship service at the white Episcopal church; the bishop of Arkansas was there to preach to the descendants of those who had perpetrated the massacre. His sermon was disappointing, barely mentioning the massacre and then only in the context of loving as the answer. And the loving that he stressed was not the harsh and dreadful kind of love mentioned by Dostoyevsky and Dorothy Day, but rather the sentimental feeling of everyone trying to get along. He did not utter the word “justice” at all in his sermon. It was what I had expected but still disappointing when he had such a potent context to talk about the need for justice, then and now.

leadership, not white. It was a service that sought to re-configure the South as Black space as well, and poor Black space at that.

There were many speakers at the Helena ceremony, but my friend Catherine Meeks was the main one, and as usual, she was right on target. Most of the speakers had lamented the past, as well they should, but most all had implied that while this slaughter was a terrible thing, we were moving past that now. Reconciliation was a strong theme for the earlier speakers, and it seemed to fit in with the theme that survivors from both sides needed to come together now and be friends. That perception leads me to understand how complicated the

¹ *Living Into God’s Dream: Dismantling Racism in America*, Edited by Catherine Meeks, Morehouse Publishing, 2016, pp. 119-128.

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door; retired pastor and author of 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. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)

Grace Abounding

By Peter Gathje

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. (Romans 5:20)

I saw her standing on the sidewalk at the end of the Manna House driveway. I was hopeful that she was in a peaceful mindset. This guest has had a difficult history at Manna House. Her outbursts, her threats of violence and finally her throwing of hot coffee at a volunteer culminated in her being banned indefinitely three years ago.

A guest who is banned is not allowed at Manna House. Usually a ban is for a week or two, or maybe a month. The hope is that the time away will allow the guest to evaluate what went wrong, and then come back to discuss how a change can lead to being welcomed again.

With this guest, shorter bans in attempts to help her develop some minimal respect for other guests and volunteers had utterly failed. The combination of her personality and mental illness were too much for us to handle. So a “permanent” ban was reluctantly imposed.

During this ban she still came around to Manna House once in a while. One of us would serve her out on the sidewalk, away from other guests and volunteers. Sometimes this service was as simple as a cup of coffee. Sometimes it involved more complicated negotiations about clothing items she wanted.

Kathleen and I would also see her around midtown on occasion. Each encounter was always fraught with some

anxiety. This guest can move from friendly to volatile in a matter of minutes. Then she disappeared. Months passed without seeing her, until this morning, when I went down to the end of the driveway to talk with her.

I greeted her and asked if she would like a cup of coffee. “Already sent somebody in to get me a cup,” she replied matter of factly. For this guest, going around the rules comes easily.

“Glad to hear you’ve got coffee coming. How have you been?”

I knew the big grace was that despite all she had been through, despite her being banned from Manna House, she was talking with me.

“I nearly died a few weeks ago. Sunstroke. I was in the hospital, ICU. They thought I wasn’t going to make it. And I almost didn’t.” She looked at me as if to emphasize she had been on death’s door. And then added, “None of us know when we’re going. Could be anytime. Wasn’t my time. Will be sometime.”

“I’m grateful it wasn’t your time.” She smiled when I said this, and then asked for some socks and a shirt.

“I can get those for you.” Sin’s power is death. I see the power of sin in how this guest nearly died. The summer’s heat and humidity and the lack of shelter, of a place for her to stay, had nearly killed her. And maybe even our ban from Manna House had nearly killed her.

As she sat on a bench in the front yard to put on her new

socks, she said, “Look at my feet. All swollen and red. Guess it’s from that sunstroke.”

A pair of socks is a small grace. And she liked the shirt I brought out. I knew she likes shirts that are big and hang down around her. I had brought out an XXL. Perhaps another small grace.

I knew the big grace was that despite all she had been through, despite her being banned from Manna House, she was talking with me. For a moment she trusted me enough to share her life, and extend a gracious welcome to me.

We were in a very small space of grace where Manna House boundaries and her ability on this day to be pleasant intersected. Sin was all around us, and in us, and yet this was

a moment in which grace was abounding. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. So small I can easily miss the abundance of grace in the Kingdom as it grows and pushes against the power of sin and death.

I left this guest sitting in the coolness of the morning on the bench as I returned to the back yard. Death had to wait for another day. ✦

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)

Murphy Update *continued from page 1*

Prison! He was granted clemency. The struggle for Murphy’s life and health continues unabated while friends on the row and friends on the streets are stunned because...

Murphy has not really regained the limited strength she had before the Atlanta trip. We had a wonderful Christmas, but Murphy’s body-shaking coughing and difficult breathing has been worsening. On January 4, Hannah, Jason and Michaela invited Murphy and me to come over for supper to celebrate our long-lasting friendship with Lauren Cogswell Ramseur, who has a new empowered ministry to juveniles in prison in Virginia. We also were thrilled to be with Doug and their two children, Sarah and Davis. While eating supper, sitting still, Murphy gasped for breath. Hannah, Murphy and I were alarmed.

On Sunday, both our oncologist and infectious disease doctor agreed with Hannah that we should go to the ER forthwith. By 2:30 we were enrolled. Around midnight we were taken to an observation room and by 5:00 a.m. we were roomed on an oncology floor. After many tests and gallons of blood taken to be analyzed, there was no further diagnosis, to our disappointment. One idea, yet to be tested, is that the medication for the fungal lung infection is not working.

We went home on Tuesday evening. We were scheduled to return to Johns Hopkins on Thursday for a bronchoscopy. However, we received a call from a messenger who informed us Murphy’s heart was not ready for the anesthesia; we were sent to the Heart Failure Clinic instead.

We now have many medical appointments. At this moment, we are in the infusion room for Murphy’s monthly IVIG. Later today, we return to the Heart Failure Clinic. Friday, Murphy sees her pulmonologist in the morning and her oncologist RN,NP at a different hospital in the afternoon. Next week, we see more docs. SHE will continue the journey swimming cross the Jordan River which is chilly and wide.



David Payne

Today, Murphy feels poorly in her body but strong in her soul. We live by the Isaiah passage above and by your prayers and support for us. Many thanks to you all and for those activists, lawyers and family who worked to save Jimmy Meders from the jaws of the Babylonian Beasts.

Ed Loring
He, him, his and the whole wide universe
Partner of Rev. Murphy Davis ✦

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

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Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Murphy,

I hope you are doing well going into this THIRD decade of the century!

In very dilatory fashion I have finally read your very excellent article in the July 2019 issue of *Hospitality*, "To Be a Mother or Not. Who Decides?" I appreciate so much your unswerving focus on the welfare of women who do or do not mother, and that their decisions should be supported.

While I respect the seamless garment folks who speak as clearly against war, execution and poverty as against abortion, I do regret their inability to see the many terribly difficult circumstances which must be considered when someone faces pregnancy. And the haters who want to force pregnancy but never support the mothers or children are certainly NOT pro-life as you so well explain.

Thank you so very much for your great analysis, and especially the word about the wonderful new California program to reduce maternal death, and that the majority female Nevada legislature has made the state a safe harbor.

Bless you.

Peace,

Ellen Barfield

Baltimore, Maryland

Ellen is an anti-war and justice activist in Baltimore.

To whom it may concern,

Enclosed is a check for several issues of *Hospitality*. I have read them but have been unable to reconcile my faith in Jesus with your statements. Please know I have searched and continue to be open to the teaching of the "Word" and seek the Holy Spirit to guide, lead and teach me.

Respectfully I request you to remove my name from your mailing list.

With prayer,

Bobbie Howard

Talladega, Alabama

Dear Open Door,

I am sorry you are not "next door" in Georgia anymore, but I understand and know you are doing good stuff up there. Here is a small donation and Merry Christmas.

And I am SO sorry that 910 got demolished! I used to live on Myrtle St. and went by there fairly often. It was a wonderful old house and I know you have lots of great memories about it.

I could never take the cold and snow up there where you are now! Stay Warm! And take care of yourselves.

Best wishes always,

Kathy Mullally

Lineville, Alabama

Dear Ed,

Thank you so much for writing me! I am actually really good. Still living in Berlin and working as a journalist, which I really like doing. I remember you as well very good and think of my time in Atlanta with the Open Door Community often. And I try to stay informed about your work on Facebook and in *Hospitality*. Thanks so much for sending me the newspaper — that's why I wanted to say thank you with a little early Christmas gift.

I really hope Murphy is better? I've seen on Facebook that she wasn't good all the time. Please send her all my good wishes!

I hope you like Baltimore as well as Atlanta. How are things there?

All the best to Baltimore,

Imre Balzer

Berlin, Germany

Dear Open Door Community,

Prayers and good wishes for peace and improving health this blessed season. Thank you all for continuing to remind us that Love and Grace are found daily in the distressed disguises of the poor.

May your work continue — it is sorely needed in our world.

Sincerely,

Gail Hegarty

St Augustine, Florida



Rita Corbin

Friends,

Thank you for the *Hospitality* newspaper. Always challenging, inspiring and informative. Thanks for the calendar, too!

Blessings of healing and wellbeing in Advent and the New Year.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Mark Frey

Akron, Ohio

Open Door Community Needs:

- ☐ Granola bars
- ☐ 2% milk. We use 2 - 3 gallons a week for coffee.
- ☐ Coffee. Coffee.
- ☐ Stamps to write prisoners
- ☐ Money for Prisoner support and prisoner family support
- ☐ Gloves
- ☐ Winter socks
- ☐ Stocking caps
- ☐ Hoodies: medium, large, extra large. Used and from thrift stores are great.
- ☐ Knit hats. Thank you to someone who just sent a great package of hats.
- ☐ Scarves for women. Thank you to someone for a recent gift.



Rita Corbin

Please send us your name when you give a gift.
Thank you! Murphy, Erica, Beth, Tyrone, David and Ed

Recommended Reading



Rethinking the American Environmental Movement post-1945

turns a fresh interpretive lens on the past, drawing on a wide range of new histories of environmental activism to analyze the actions of those who created the movement and those who tried to thwart them.

Concentrating on the decades since World War II, environmental historian Ellen Griffith Spears explores environmentalism as a "field of movements" rooted in broader social justice activism. Noting major legislative accomplishments, strengths and contributions, as well as the divisions within the ranks, the book reveals how new scientific developments, the nuclear threat and pollution, as well as changes in urban living spurred activism among diverse populations. The book outlines the key precursors, events, participants and strategies of the environmental movement, and contextualizes the story in the dramatic trajectory of U.S. history after World War II. The result is a synthesis of American environmental politics that one reader called both "ambitious in its scope and concise in its presentation."

This book provides a succinct overview of the American environmental movement and is the perfect introduction for students or scholars seeking to understand one of the largest social movements of the twentieth century up through the robust climate movement of today.

Ellen Griffith Spears is an associate professor in the interdisciplinary New College and the Department of American Studies at the University of Alabama. She is author of the award-winning Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town (2014).

A BLESSING

The world now is too dangerous
and too beautiful
for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed
you see God in everyone.
Your ears, so you hear
the cry of the poor.
May your hands be so blessed
that everything you touch
is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing
but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed
you run to those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened,
so set on fire, that your love,
your love, changes everything.

*Written for The Burning Man gathering
by Rev. Brian Baker, Dean of Trinity
Cathedral in Sacramento, California.*