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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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September / October 2022

## poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

## Invitation

Oh do you have time  
to linger  
for just a little while  
out of your busy

and very important day  
for the goldfinches  
that have gathered  
in a field of thistles

for a musical battle,  
to see who can sing  
the highest note,  
or the lowest,

or the most expressive of mirth,  
or the most tender?  
Their strong, blunt beaks  
drink the air

as they strive  
melodiously  
not for your sake  
and not for mine

and not for the sake of winning  
but for sheer delight and gratitude —  
believe us, they say,  
it is a serious thing

just to be alive  
on this fresh morning  
in the broken world.  
I beg of you,

do not walk by  
without pausing  
to attend to this  
rather ridiculous performance

It could mean something.  
It could mean everything.  
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:  
You must change your life.

— Mary Oliver

From *Red Bird: Poems*, 2008. Mary Oliver, 1935-2019, was the author of numerous books of poetry and won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. In 2007, the New York Times named her "far and away, this country's best-selling poet."



Bon Air Juvenile Correction Center | VPM Media Corporation

## Voices of Jubilee

By Lauren Ramseur

We live on the ancient land of the Powhatan people. They called this part of Turtle Island, Tsenaco-moco. When the colonizers came and the Powhatan people were forced off the land, the stolen land was renamed Richmond after Richmond Hill, England. This renaming is part of the strategy of white violence in our country that seeks to erase the history of the land. This renaming not only happens with land and geography but also with people. In our liberation work within the system of juvenile incarceration we see this history of renaming replicated to rename our children. Children are renamed 'adult' and put into the adult court system. Children are renamed "predators."

As people who inherited this legacy of white supremacy and systematic violence, our faith invites us into a counter vision for our world. To this ancient land and her people, the words of the prophet Isaiah ring clear:

You shall be called by a new name  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;  
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her  
(Isaiah 62:3-4)

The Voices of Jubilee is a community of faith on this ancient land of Tsenaco-moco, that exists at the borderland of incarceration. We cross the border from our free lives into the prison to love and accompany the children who are imprisoned in our community. Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center is Virginia's main prison for children ages 14-21,

where children are sent to serve their sentence after they have been convicted of a crime. They come from across the state and stay there from months to years until they are released to their families or moved to an adult prison when they turn 21. Our community began crossing this border to sing and learn a new song of hope together in the form of a gospel choir. Through advocacy with their legal team and partnering with others to transform our justice system, we work toward healing, liberation and the transformation of this system.

The Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center is located on the border of Richmond, in historic Bon Air, once a vacation community for wealthy Richmond city dwellers to escape the city air. Before Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center was a prison, it was the Virginia Home and Industrial School for Girls. According to Dr. Erin Bush, "the reformatory functioned largely as a juvenile prison, as girls were sentenced there by the Commonwealth's circuit, police and juvenile courts for charges ranging from incorrigibility, truancy and vagrancy to assault, theft and 'immorality' crimes such as solicitation and prostitution."

Before it was a prison for girls, the land of the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center was a plantation owned by the Robert Murchie family. The Murchie family plantation house is still standing just outside the barbed wire fence of the prison. From the 1840 Census we learned that the Murchie family held one enslaved child under 10 on the plantation and 4 enslaved children and youth between 10 and 24 years of age in 1840. When we say that the system of mass incarceration in our country is the current incarnation of slavery, it is not speculation. This land has been a place of systemic violence for generations. The very plantation that enslaved

**Voices of Jubilee** continued on page 7



# The Fragrant Work of the Gospel

By Peter Gathje

“I’m sorry I smell so bad.”

I had been approached by a guest in the backyard. He was wearing clothes that were wrinkled and dirty. These were the first words out of his mouth.

“You have no need to apologize,” I said to him. “How may I help you?”

“I need fresh clothes, underwear, pants and a shirt. I can wash up in a gas station bathroom.” Then he apologized again, “I’m sorry I stink.”

“It isn’t you who should be apologizing,” I responded.

“If not me, who? I’m the one who stinks.”

“How about the rich, the powerful, the people who run this country. The capitalists and bankers and politicians. They’re the ones who need to apologize to you.”

Another guest standing nearby said, “Ain’t that the truth!” I told the apologetic guest, “Meet me at the front door and we’ll get you set up with some fresh clothes and a shower.”

Earlier in the morning, when I had first arrived at Manna House, I went into the laundry room. I was greeted by the stench of shit. I traced the stench to one of our big black trash cans that serve as laundry baskets for the dirty clothes of those who shower. I sorted through the clothes and found the offending underwear. It is not unusual for the underwear of our guests to be soiled in this manner. No public restrooms combined with soup kitchen food leads to bathroom emergencies unmet. In other words, shit happens.

I thought of St. Paul and his famous metaphor of the Body of Christ. Paul once wrote how God the Creator “has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be.” Paul noted that “there are many parts, but one body.” And he continued, “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.”

Then he drew the theological and ethical conclusion, “But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (I Corinthians 12:18-26)



David Klein

Paul reflected the insight and ethos of Jesus and the prophets. If one part of the body (a member of the community) stinks, it is up to the other parts to do something about it. Those other parts must not shame the part that stinks but do something to take away the stench. Like, give that part a shower and some fresh clothes.

But Paul goes further. He names the cause of the stench. The stench is from the injustice and division that caused some to stink while others luxuriate in perfumed palaces. So, beyond a shower and a change of clothes, the very way all the parts of the body are related needs to be recognized and affirmed. Society needs to be structured so that the most vulnerable are treated with special honor.

I would guess that Paul’s insight into a Gospel response

to stench was connected to his knowledge of how Jesus responded to stench. You might recall the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus arrived days after Lazarus had died. When he commanded that the stone to the tomb be taken away, Martha, the sister of Lazarus, objected, “Lord, by now he stinks. . . . It has already been four days.” (John 11:39) Undeterred, Jesus had the stone removed and raised Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus’ raising of Lazarus prefigured an even greater work by God. God moved beyond the resuscitation of Lazarus to the resurrection of Jesus. Those who came early to Jesus’ tomb after he had been crucified may have well expected a stench. Instead of the stench of death there was the surprise of resurrection. God’s loving power raised Jesus from the dead. Easter calls us to this resurrection reality, and to the fragrant Gospel work of hospitality and justice so no one stinks. ✠

*Peter Gathje is Vice President of 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)*

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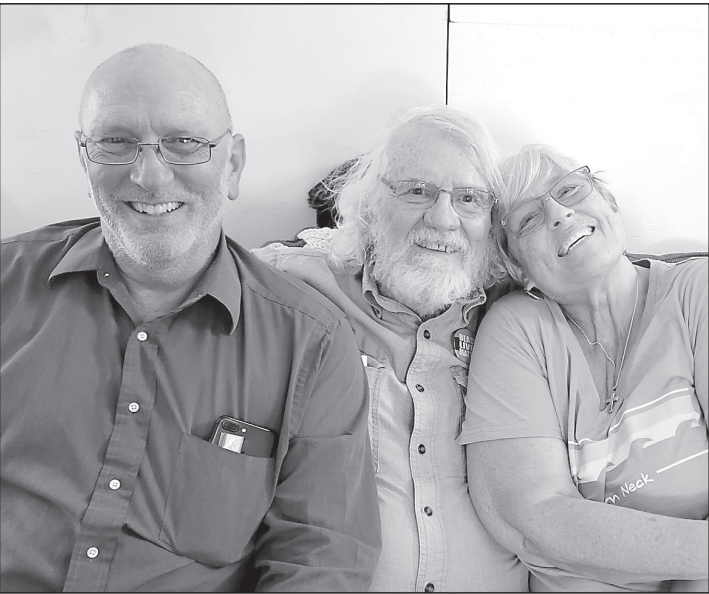
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## HOSPITALITY

*Hospitality* is published by the Open Door Community, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The Open Door is a Prophetic Discipleship Community honoring the Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

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*We are thankful for the ongoing relationship and visit from Mary Palmer and Andrew Legare. Wonderful stories and memories together.*

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**Copy Editor** Julie Martin  
**Proofreaders** Nelia Kimbrough and Julie Martin  
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**Subscriptions or change of address** David Payne (davidpayne@opendoorcommunity.org)

### Open Door Community

For more information about the life and work of the community, please contact either of the following:

**Eduard Loring** Activist/Advocate/Ally  
He/Him/His  
**David Payne** Office Manager

Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore.





# Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



# Solidarity

## A Review of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*

By Claire Schaeffer-Duffy

Reprinted from *The Catholic Worker*, March-April 2022

Some readers of this publication know the author of this remarkable memoir. A tireless advocate for death row inmates, Murphy Davis, along with partner Ed Loring, was a founding member of the Open Door Community, a house of hospitality in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, closely affiliated with the Catholic Worker movement. Founded in 1981, the Open Door is where Murphy and Ed raised their daughter, Hannah, and for decades shared life with formerly homeless people and recently released prisoners.

Hannah was 15 years old and Murphy 47 when doctors diagnosed Murphy with Burkitt lymphoma, a rare and aggressive cancer. The medical community gave her six to eighteen months to live, a prognosis Murphy outlasted by twenty-three and a half years but not without a heap of physical suffering. After a promising period of remission (her doctor declared her cured), the cancer returned to ravage her body bit by bit. She endured nine surgeries and seemingly endless rounds of radiation during a fight she ultimately did not win.

One would expect morose reading from such a plot line. Not so with *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. For all its record of pain and loss, the book brims with life and energizing conviction. Solidarity reaches new heights in the dying and living of Murphy Davis. What for many of us Catholic Workers is a stance of faith — a march on behalf of the oppressed, a stint in jail, or years spent living among the marginalized — was for Murphy a full-bodied immersion into the experience of being poor and chronically ill in a country of narcissistic consumerism where all space, even healthcare, is defined by the dollar.

Murphy describes personally and politically what her debilitation reveals — acute injustice, yes, but also profound, life-giving connections and a cellular understanding, perhaps, of God's solidarity with us. "We often resist solidarity," Murphy writes. "Solidarity is uncomfortable. But when we recognize our own helplessness and dependence on the mercy of God — as a critical illness forces us to do — we can experience solidarity and know ourselves as part of the Beloved Community, rooted in God's grace. And then we come to know, without a doubt, that goodness and mercy are doggedly in pursuit of us."

*Memento mori*, remember you will die, the saints and mystics say. To regularly acknowledge the inevitability of death can bring one's life into sharp focus. Yet most of us avoid keeping Death in view. Murphy could not, which is why, she believes, the doctors' ominous pronouncement of eighteen months did not reduce her to a ball of anxiety. She had often encountered Death's powerful presence "in prisons and execution chambers, on the streets, in the deadly decisions and unctuous proclamations of the bureaucrats of State and Church." She knew the limits of Death's reach. It could not touch her confidence in the abiding presence of God.

That confidence, however, does not spare Murphy from an aching yearning to live to see Hannah grow up. Their relationship is one of the poignant sub-plots in this story of heroic faith. Murphy endures much to stay alive for the sake of Hannah and Ed. Cancer brings bodily humiliation, rigorous regimens of chemotherapy and excruciating pain. It also

brings a healing stillness to a woman known for her relentless activism. "Nothing can be loved at speed. To live life at any depth, speed has to go," Murphy writes.

What sets this cancer chronicle apart from many others is the author's social conscience. The writer, after all, is Murphy Davis — an ordained Presbyterian minister who left her salaried church position and a Ph.D. program at Emory, finding the latter too removed from the struggles for civil and human rights happening around her. Hannah was ten days old when her parents opened an emergency shelter for the homeless and ten years old when they occupied an abandoned hotel to publicly make the point that Atlanta had the capacity, if not the political will, to shelter the city's poor.

*Surely Goodness and Mercy* illuminates in personal detail what it means to be poor and chronically ill in a healthcare system that considers cost over patient recovery. It means hours-long waits in the crowded emergency room of Grady, Atlanta's only safety-net hospital; monitoring one's own medication because nurses are understaffed; and being told the earliest available date for an urgently needed diagnostic test is six months away. For Murphy, the impediments become a touchstone with those less privileged than she. Lacking money, she taps into the wealth of relationships and discovers personalism's power to penetrate an inhumane system. Ever the fighter, she and Ed join a diverse group of Georgians to successfully stop Grady from requiring a co-pay from its poor patients for medications and clinic visits. The campaign "challenged the notion that we are a nation divided by race and class," Murphy writes. "The fight brought a revival!"

I first read this book in the early days of the pandemic, a time when the message *memento mori* reverberated throughout the body politic. The final chapter, which Murphy wrote months before her death, brought tears to my eyes. Rereading it, I am astonished by her courage and largesse. *Surely Goodness and Mercy* will long remain a relevant read, for "Death comes to us all," as playwright Robert Bolt famously noted. But it is our current collective ailments — Covid-19 being only one of them — with their attending anxieties that make this book an urgent read as well.

Murphy reminds us that the market-driven, for-profit system we inhabit is "intended to privilege the few and increase a sense of powerlessness among the rest of us." We can live otherwise. "Illness is God's reset button," she writes. Through her own journey with cancer, she learned that those she carried also carried her. "The solidarity I experienced in my illness was not because of what I was doing — because I was not doing anything for all appearances. Rather, the poor were taking care of me, welcoming me into their space. I am most alive when I fight for the lives of the poor as if it were my own life — because it is my own life. Solidarity is the relationship for which we are created." ✦

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, a freelance writer, lives and works at the Sts. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her articles and reviews have appeared in *America*, *Commonweal*, *US Catholic*, *the collection* *Non-violence as a Way of Life: History, Theory, and Practice* and *Opposition to War: An Encyclopedia for US Peace and Anti-war Movements*.

## Open Door Community Press

# Surely Goodness and Mercy

*A Journey into Illness and Solidarity*



Murphy Davis

Forewords by Jürgen Moltmann  
and Bryan Stevenson

## Surely Goodness and Mercy

A Journey into Illness and Solidarity

by Murphy Davis



Alison Reeder

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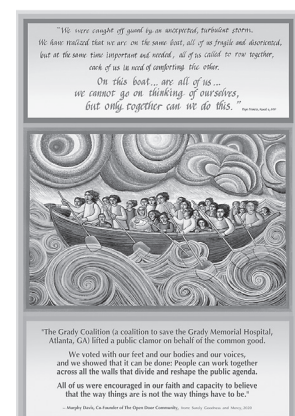
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From artist John August Swanson, who created the beautiful cover art for *Surely Goodness and Mercy*:

"Murphy Davis' book is so powerful and moving that it inspired me to use a quote from it along with Pope Francis's quote on my new poster Storm."



The poster sells for \$15 and can be ordered at:

<https://temp.johnaugustswanson.com/product/storm2020-poster>



# Poor People's Campaign, June 18, 2022

By Eduard Loring

Written June 19, Juneteenth.

On June 18, thousands of committed people hungry for justice for the poor and oppressed gathered in D.C. for the long anticipated Poor People's Campaign Assembly. Although Juneteenth is celebrated every June 19, as Edith reminded me, many locations around the country celebrated Juneteenth on Saturday. A jubilee of folks joyed and "lifted every voice and sang" to the end of slavery in Annapolis, Maryland. *The Baltimore Sun* gave the event good coverage. Nothing on the Poor People's Campaign Assembly (PPC). Dennis and Tensie locked hearts in Santa Maria, California to words of inclusion and "we are ALL in this together." Constitutional chattel slavery is ended. (Only by the terror of war did the USA end this idol of White Supremacy.) Prison slavery remains in the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. White Supremacy reigns in the U.S. and Hungary. We have miles to go before we sleep.

At 8:00 a.m., Taka and Margaret picked David and me up and whirled us to D.C. The day was a gift of cool, breeze and sunshine. Crowds assembled. Music blared. Freedom Songs that I miss at other rallies and marches had us swaying and raising our voices. Rev. William Barber and Rev. Bernice King spoke from the depths of the slave cabins and the power of the Black Religious Experience of the church, streets, prisons and chain gangs. I felt like I was in Atlanta back in the saddle again!!

Ethnic diversity was a rainbow on earth: Christian, Jew and Islamic. Also, non-religious organizations with large groupings of young people. The American Communist Party and too many socialist parties. Why does the left splinter like Baptist Churches? Many labor unions and ordinary salt of the earth who care for the poor because they were raised right and want to act NOW. The Black Jesus was everywhere. I talked to him in a person of the Communist Party. Luther's ubiquity indeed.

We met up with Mark Harper and Edith Holleman, which gave me a connected feeling of Open Door Diaspora. All six of us went out to lunch after the Assembly and then returned home. We hope to be together again in September when the PPC will act again with and in solidarity with the



I wish more people believed  
we will not get justice  
unless we have a mass movement  
in the streets.

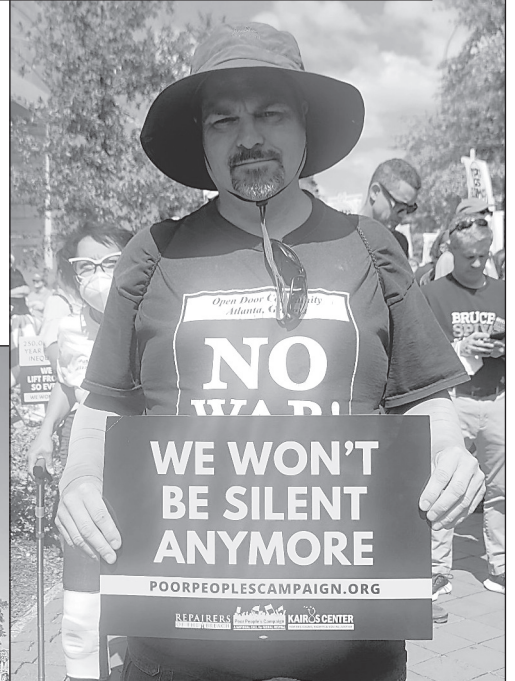
Top and Above: People  
on the street in  
Washington D.C.

Top Right: **David  
Payne.**

Right: **Ed Loring,  
Taka Ono and  
Margaret Akselrod.**

Below: **David,  
Margaret, Taka,  
Mark Harper,  
Edith Holleman  
and Ed.**

Photographs: David Payne  
and ODC/Baltimore



poor and oppressed. I hope you will join us.

I wish for the sake of solidarity that Juneteenth Celebrations and the Poor People's Campaign Assembly had not overlapped on the same day. Many Juneteenth festivities occurred on Sunday. Also, I wish the PPC had included a march. I heard many complaints that we did not do

so. I wish more people believed we will not get justice unless we have a mass movement in the streets. And we will likely not get a mass movement until more children are killed and the middle class begins to suffer to the point of action. Love in action is the only solution, and the solution is justice for all. "Justice is what love looks like in public."

What is your response? Are you ready to act?  
Thank you. ✦

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





# Starvin’ for Justice

June 29 - July 2 in **Washington D.C.**  
from David Payne

The Open Door was glad to be a witness at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Starvin’ for Justice Fast & Vigil. The witness is a call to abolish the death penalty in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. We listened to many moving speakers with their stories of injustice in the judicial system. Abolition of the death penalty has always been one of the Open Door’s calls to action. My first time going to the Fast and Vigil with the Open Door was in 2015 during their 22<sup>nd</sup> year. It has been an honor to meet and be with longtime friends of the Open Door who present their body as a witness for justice. We pray for our broken country. If you want to learn more about what you can do to help abolish the death penalty you can go to [www.deathpenaltyaction.org](http://www.deathpenaltyaction.org).

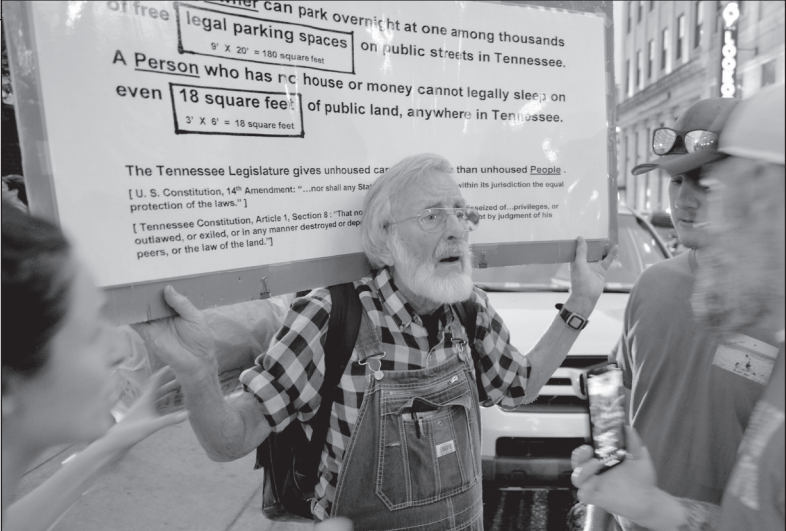
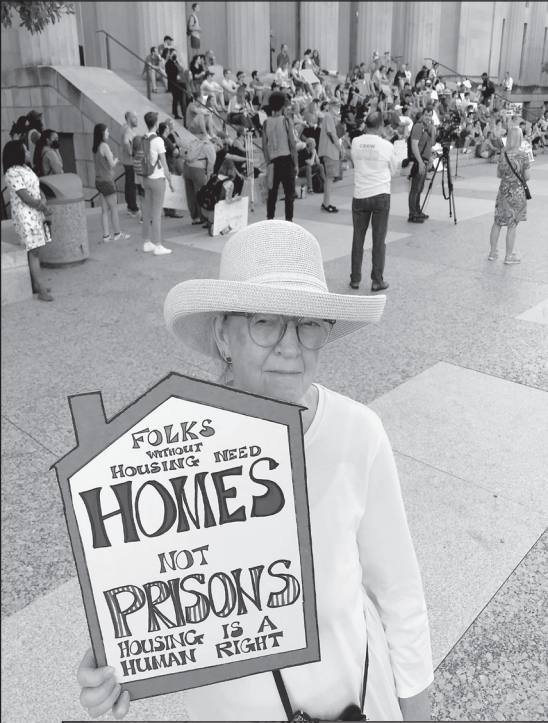
Top: **Abraham Bonowitz** is Co-Director/Founder of Death Penalty Action.

Far Right: **Shujaa Graham**, exonerated from California’s death row in March, 1981, is a Peer Organizer for Witness to Innocence.

Right: **Chris & Jack Payden-Travers**, with the ACLU’s Capitol Punishment Project and **Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan**, Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches.



Photographs by David Payne



# Tennessee Night of Action

July 1 in **Nashville, Tennessee**  
from Nelia and Calvin Kimbrough

Tennessee’s anti-camping bill (SB1610/HB0978) became law on July 1. Camping on all public property is now a class E felony punishable by up to six years in prison, a \$3,000 fine and the loss of voting rights. On Friday evening, July 1, Open Table Nashville held a Tennessee Night of Action Against the Criminalization of Homelessness. After a rally on Legislative Plaza, 200 protesters marched through downtown Nashville and down the middle of Lower Broad to Commerce Street Park on Third Avenue. At the park, 50 people slept in civil disobedience to protest the new state law. There were no arrests. This law is another example of the Republican super-majority in the Tennessee Legislature seeking to “punish” Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga and Knoxville.



Photographs by Calvin Kimbrough

Top Left: **Nelia Kimbrough** at the Rally.  
Above: Marchers take to downtown Nashville’s streets.  
Left: **Karl Meyer**, Nashville Greenlands Catholic Worker; does some street teaching.



# The Fourteenth Amendment

## Powerful Past and Prescient Present

By Nibs Stroupe

July is the anniversary month for the adoption of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. It was ratified on July 9, 1868, and on July 29, Secretary of State William Seward declared that it was officially ratified and now part of the Constitution.

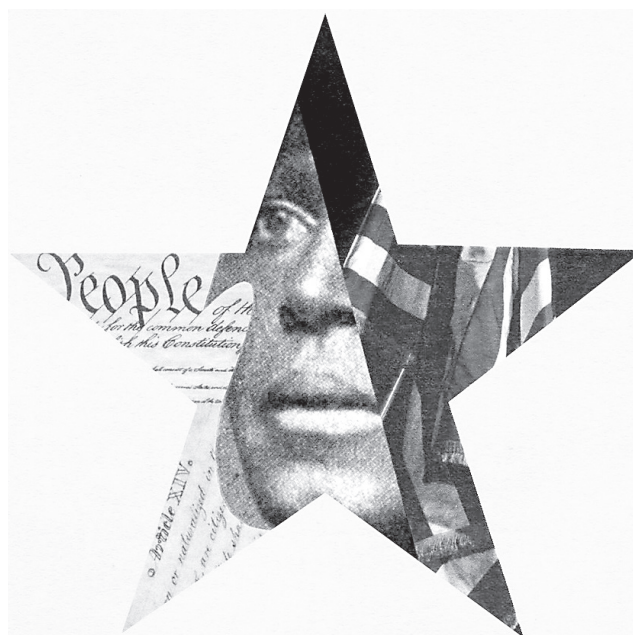
This amendment is one of the most litigated parts of the Constitution because it did four important things. First, it established the right of citizens to due process in relationship to the government. Second, it provided equal protection to all citizens. Third, it established the idea of “birthright” of citizenship — if you are born “here” in the USA or our territories, you are automatically an American citizen. Fourth, it indicated for the first time that state and local governments were subject to these first three steps.

This 14th Amendment has had a difficult time in American history. Even while it was being ratified, white Southerners were working to undercut it, and indeed did undercut it through a reign of terror and legislative manipulation. It would take almost 100 years before it would gain even a minimal force of law through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In a terrible but not surprising decision in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act by taking out its “special” enforcement status for those states whose history indicated an unwillingness to adhere to the 14th Amendment. It should be no surprise that the decision (*Shelby v. U.S.*) came out of the state of Alabama, a state as Martin Luther King Jr. said in his 1963 speech: “with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification.”

This struggle over the 14th Amendment is so great because, in many ways, it is the crux on which the American experiment and indeed the idea of constitutional government hinges; it always seems to be hanging in the balance. Do we believe in the idea of equality or not? Our history says no, for the most part, but the 14th Amendment is among our better angels, urging us to say yes. Many of our leaders have

all. That is one of the great things that we should remember as we celebrate this powerful amendment to the Constitution.

It is not just progressives who have understood the meaning of the 14th Amendment. Regressives have understood it, too. That’s why the fight over the 14th Amendment continues. Those who speak of being “originalists” over the authority of the Constitution are seeking to take us back to the days of the origins of the Constitution, when white men of property were seen as those entitled to power. There is a lot of



Najeebah Al-Ghadban

talk these days about the changing demographics in America, with young people and people of color becoming the majority in the USA sooner than many of us realize. Some progressives have hopes in this demographic change, and I have hopes too.

Yet, we should realize that old white men (and women, it seems, since the majority of them voted for Trump) will not yield this power easily, if we yield it at all. Limits on vot-

ing rights, purging voter rolls, overt gerrymandering — all are designed to take us back to the original Constitution. And now the Supreme Court seems to be taking a hard turn toward this regressive status. The recent *Dobbs* decision joins the *Dred* and *Harriet Scott* and the *Plessy* decisions in those by SCOTUS that sought to move us back to the white, male supremacist model that the 14th Amendment seeks to mitigate.

There is one other area in which the 14th Amendment becomes even more contemporary for us. Section 3 of that amendment sought to deal with former Confederate officers who sought to become members of Congress after their states were re-admitted to the Union. Here is text of Section 3:

“No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.”

In light of the January 6 House Select Committee Hearings on the deep involvement of Donald Trump in the violent attempt to overthrow the certified and legitimate results of the 2020 elections, it seems clear that this Section 3 of the 14th Amendment applies to him. Before the House impeached Trump for a second time in February, 2021, they considered using the 14th Amendment to disqualify Trump from holding elected office again. They decided to go the impeachment route, partly because they did not have enough people willing to talk publicly about Trump’s involvement in the January 6 insurrection.

That has now changed, and it is time now for Congress to act on this and disqualify Trump from running for office again. Section 5 of the 14th Amendment empowers Congress to enforce its provisions, and thus the current Congress could act before the end of this year to take this action. It would take only a majority vote of both the House and the Senate to do this. In the current House, its passage is a given. In the Senate, it would be up to Manchin and Sinema, although some Republicans like Collins and Murkowski and even Mitch McConnell might vote for it. The Senate might even break the filibuster to accomplish this. The sweet part of this is that once it passes, it would take a two-thirds vote of each house of Congress to overturn it, which would not be attainable. I want the Justice Department to prosecute Trump on his actions, but this would be in addition to such a prosecution.

On many levels, the 14th Amendment is a key to our identity as a people, and now it takes on even more political relevance. So, let us give thanks for those who worked hard for this amendment and those who continue to fight hard to enforce it. Take time this month to read the 14th Amendment — our very life as a nation may depend on our ability to believe and to live it. Then, while you still can, make sure that you are registered to vote and that all your friends, neighbors and colleagues are registered to vote — these November elections will tell us if we are moving with the 14th Amendment or against it. ♦

<sup>1</sup>“Honoring the 14th Amendment,” Courtland Milloy, *Washington Post*, July 28, 1987.

*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 for Justice, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. He is managing editor of Hospitality. He writes a weekly blog at [www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com](http://www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com). ([nibs.stroupe@gmail.com](mailto:nibs.stroupe@gmail.com))*



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Do we believe in the idea of equality or not?  
Our history says no,  
for the most part, but the 14th Amendment is among our better angels,  
urging us to say yes.

understood the importance and the meaning of this Amendment. Thurgood Marshall was one who understood it, and he put it this way in his Bicentennial speech in 1987: “While the Union survived the Civil War, the Constitution did not. In its place arose a new, more promising basis for justice and equality, the 14th Amendment . . . guaranteeing equal protection of the laws.” (1)

Marshall correctly understood that the intent of the Constitution in its beginning was to keep power in the hands of white men of property, and so there was no mention of the full humanity of women or of people of African descent or Native Americans. Yet, the idea of equality was so powerful and so electric that the white men of property could not confine it to themselves. Women heard their names called. African-Americans heard their names called. Native Americans heard their names called. Latinx Americans heard their names called. Asian-Americans heard their names called. Poor people heard their names called. LGBTQ people heard their names called. The power of the 14th Amendment is to speak to all of us; the power of the idea of equality is calling to us

ing rights, purging voter rolls, overt gerrymandering — all are designed to take us back to the original Constitution. And now the Supreme Court seems to be taking a hard turn toward this regressive status. The recent *Dobbs* decision joins the *Dred* and *Harriet Scott* and the *Plessy* decisions in those by SCOTUS that sought to move us back to the white, male supremacist model that the 14th Amendment seeks to mitigate.

There is one other area in which the 14th Amendment becomes even more contemporary for us. Section 3 of that amendment sought to deal with former Confederate officers who sought to become members of Congress after their states were re-admitted to the Union. Here is text of Section 3:

“No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial

Voices of Jubilee continued from page 1

children in 1840 is Virginia’s prison for children in 2022. Into this desolation, the prophet Isaiah speaks to us a word of hope and transformation. Isaiah invites us to listen for and practice the names of liberation and freedom. “You shall be called by a new name . . .” A central piece of our work is to proclaim this Good News with the children in prison on

name, Beloved. We know that Sam’s heart did. Later that afternoon, Sam’s attorney walked out of the courtroom. “The judge took seven years off his sentence,” she announced. He would only have to serve six instead of 13. “This never happens,” she said, quite shocked. “Not in this courtroom, not with this judge.”

Sam continues to face hard and lonely days, but the beloved community that formed in that courtroom continues to be the body of Christ for one another through emails and phone calls across the border of the prison walls.

this same land. For generations the children have been given all sorts of horrible names in their lives. We’ve heard judges name them “monsters,” and reporters call them “predators.” Sometimes they are named by how our community de-values them: worthless, lost, troubled. As followers of Isaiah’s God, we enter that space and listen for God’s liberating name and remind one another that God has given each of us a new name. We have a name, not a number. We belong to God. We will NOT be renamed for slavery. Our name comes from God who created us in love, for love. One of the first songs our gospel choir director, Makeda McCreary, taught us to sing was, “I am a child of God, you have chosen me, I am chosen not forsaken, I am who You say that I am.” It has become a central piece of our theological foundation to claim this new name that God has given us in covenant together. Our name comes not from the system of violence but from the Beloved Community of God, our name is Beloved, our name is “My Delight is in Her.”

Our young friend and a member of our Voices of Jubilee congregation — we will call him Sam — was standing before a judge just before his 21st birthday. That judge would determine the course of the next 13 years of Sam’s life. At the conclusion of his time at Bon Air, Sam, like many of the residents, was facing adult prison time — 13 years. He had been locked up already since he was 15, growing up behind bars. He had lived and studied at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center for 5 years. He graduated from high school there, completed his therapy programs and obeyed the rules. Sam also worked to claim responsibility for a serious harm during that time, doing brave and often messy work. Sam is soft-spoken, kind and gentle in spirit. He loves to write and fills notebooks with his prose.

On a weekday morning, a group of Voices of Jubilee gathered in the hall outside a Virginia courtroom, and we met Sam’s family. While my co-pastor Ashley testified, the rest of us had to wait outside the courtroom. One of the members of his family asked if our choir director, Makeda, would lead us in song. With hushed voices so the guards wouldn’t stop us, and behind our masks so we would keep one another safe, Makeda led us in song: “Who has the final say? Jehovah has the final say . . . no matter what the judge may say, Jehovah has the final say. I have no reason to fear. The Lord is my Light. The Lord is my Light.” A joyous song of unrelenting faith filled the hall, which most days echoes with words of judgment and condemnation.

In a final attempt to bend the heart of the judge, Sam’s attorney asked us to come together in the hallway, and the bailiff would open the door. She wanted the judge to see the support Sam had in the community. This was June of 2020; we weren’t even hugging our grandparents yet. But Sam’s liberation was at stake. We tightened our masks and quickly gathered arms around each other like a family that had been separated for too long. The doors swung open and there we all were, standing together in love and solidarity. We prayed that the judge’s heart saw us and heard us proclaim his true

death, when we live into the name God has given us, we join together and rejoice. On this land, we hear God’s good news to us (Isaiah 62):

You shall be called by a new name  
Children at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center,  
You are a flowering garden in the hand of God  
You shall be a precious jewel, the crowning glory  
around God’s very head  
God’s delight is in you.

We will keep singing and showing up to reclaim and rename this land, to reclaim and rename those who have been locked away. We will remember Tseneca-moco, and we will remember our true name until the Beloved Community comes in all her fullness. Please join us. ✠

<sup>1</sup> Bush, Erin. “Virginia Home and Industrial School for Girls.” *Social Welfare History Project*, Virginia Commonwealth University, 20 July 2022, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/corrections/virginia-home-and-industrial-school-for-girls/>.

*Rev. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur is the Co-Pastor of Voices of Jubilee, an abolitionist community of hope located in connection with the youth imprisoned at the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center in Richmond, Virginia. (www.voicesofjubilee.org) (lauren.ramseur@gmail.com)*

HOSPITALITY Prays

Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism.  
— Ron Ferguson

Prayer for Walking with God

Life would be so much easier, Lord,  
if you would just give us clear answers to all of our questions!

Instead, as with Jesus’ disciples, you teach and you answer us  
through a myriad of life experiences —  
through our pains and sufferings,  
through our losses and grief,  
through those we meet during our lives,  
through our struggles for social justice and peace.

So please, dear God, bless us  
with the *wisdom* to discern what you are saying to us,  
with the *faith* to learn from you, and  
with the *passion* to act as faithful disciples.

Deliver us from despair,  
from losing hope when life seems hard,  
from fearing that your silence means you have abandoned us,  
from passing by the hungry, the poor and the oppressed.

To be sure, you never promised that working for justice and peace would be easy;  
but you *did* promise always to be with us ...  
and we are very grateful!

So walk alongside us all our days, O faithful God,  
as we seek to be your trusting and loving people. AMEN.

— Lee Carroll

*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. (lcarroll@ix.netcom.com)*



# Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Nibs,

I really appreciated the latest edition of *Hospitality* [May/June 2022], especially Elizabeth Dede’s article about the poor immigrant and the treatment he received from this country and at Stewart. With private prisons we’ve created a behemoth hard to undo. Prisons should ONLY be owned by the government, because they have the most at stake in emptying their cells. Now we’ve turned cells into financial investments for corporate players. Ugh! How do you get THIS beast back into the barn?

Enjoyed your dialogue sermon. I remember getting one many years ago — at my ordination! The bent-over woman. (Maybe she represents the U.S. right now — or the world.)

Peace, blessings and prayers for the Holy Spirit to lead you both where it will!

Greta Reed,  
Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Ed,

Thanks again for sharing Murphy’s book with me. I found it to be a powerful, compelling read. The depth of her commitment (and yours) humbles and inspires me. As I read about your work with the homeless and hungry, the prisoners on death row and those unable to access good health care, I understood better than ever how “the personal is political.”

Murphy had such a brilliant smile, and her light still shines through your daughter and granddaughter. I enjoyed their singing during Murphy’s “homegoing” and smiled to see the picture of Michaela advocating for Ukraine in *Hospitality* [May/June 2022].

Thanks for all you do, and please accept this small donation toward your expenses.

Blessings to you, David and your community.

Peace,  
Margaret Knapke  
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Open Door Friends,

Enclosed is a contribution/subscription payment for receiving *Hospitality*, which I read cover to cover every time it comes. I especially appreciate, among the many inspiring pieces in this last issue, Barry Burnside’s “Remembering Murphy” and his wonderful drawing of Murphy singing & playing her 12-string guitar! [January/February 2022]

Many thanks for all you do.

Sincerely,  
Randy Kohler  
Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts

## The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring

*The New York Times: Letters to the Editor*

Here is the truth, with no claims that it is only or total truth: football players are modern day gladiators. They perform in an arena, with fans consciously or unconsciously satiating their desire for violence. I played the game in high school and was a fan for decades. Increasingly, reading article after article about young, mostly Black men dying at an early age due to CTE-related causes, I am appalled — but not surprised — that this sport continues to be sanctioned by society at large. But then I’m also appalled by the NRA and the everyday massacre of innocent Americans. There’s a direct link, in my mind at least, between football and guns: the glorification and acceptance of violence as part of the American Fabric.


Ron Blair, Fairfield, Iowa

*Lee Drutman, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University, tweeted last year, “Anybody serious about commenting on the state of US democracy should start reading more about Hungary.”*

In other words, not only can it happen here but, if you look at certain metrics, it’s already started happening. Republicans may not be able to rewrite the Constitution, but they can exploit existing loopholes, replace state election officials with Party loyalists, submit alternative slates of electors and pack federal courts with sympathetic judges. Representation in Hungary has grown less proportional in recent years, thanks to gerrymandering and other tweaks to the electoral rules.

When I hear thunder  
I often wonder  
What the world would be like  
Had it been different.  
Alas, it wasn’t.  
But  
Just suppose  
St. Francis of Assisi had prayed,  
“Lord, make me an instrument of your justice.”  
Instead of peace. Everybody wants PEACE. Peace. Peace.  
But  
Ain’t no peace.  
Peace will come when Justice  
Rolls down like waters.  
St. Francis, look what you done done.

*Arumination by Ed Loring*



Rita Corbin

Dear Peter,

Your article in the July/August 2022 edition of the Open Door Community’s *Hospitality* newsletter left a deep impression on me. The article is well written, captivating and a vehicle for much contemplation.

You explored numerous perspectives from which to view the encounter that you experienced at Manna House and I have meditated on this topic multiple times until I was compelled to “score” the event. Although I try not to pass judgment, I believe that you handled the situation appropriately (A+).

Two additional thoughts regarding the encounter: (1) perhaps the enemy wanted to thwart your morning prayer; and (2) you likely caution volunteers not to open Manna House unless two or more volunteers are present, and to follow the posted business hours out of respect for those who observe the hours, which obligates you to lead by example.

I truly appreciate everything that you wrote so eloquently.

Take care and God bless,  
Ruth Rogers  
Bangor, Maine (formerly of Atlanta)

Ed,

Hello there my friend and brother in Christ. I just received your most welcoming letter updating me on Juneteenth and thousands of committed people hungry for justice for the poor and oppressed. I appreciate you keeping me informed on what’s going on out there in the real world. I am basically limited to the information we receive in here.

I love all the pictures you included in your letter of the marches and rallies protesting on the streets. Love all the banners and to see the many people protesting for justice to be done. Very encouraging indeed. A wonderful and beautiful sight to see, everyone coming together for a good cause regardless of differences. Truly amazing.

Your quotes at the end of your letter really stood out to me. “Love in action is the only solution and the solution is justice for all.” “Justice is what love looks like in public.” Seeing the pictures and reading your letter does inspire me to want to participate in a mass movement for Love and Justice. I would of loved to have been there marching with all of you and doing my part to make a difference in our communities and in society as a whole. I never been too much into politics but I am starting to realize how important they are, and how they do play a big part in our everyday lives and we need to take a stand for justice.

I love the Veterans for peace banner, “Fight Poverty Not Wars.” It is awesome to see you on the front line of it all. Very proud of you Ed. I pray I get out one day and be able to attend some rallies and marches against injustice.

Thank you for keeping me in your thoughts and close to your heart. I feel special to be included to the Murphy Davis Prison Project. I appreciate you allowing me to experience what all of you are doing by these pictures.

Nothing new on my end. Just dealing with this desert heat. Today was one hundred and fourteen degrees outside and very humid.

Sending all my love and utmost respect, your brother in Christ,

Noe Hernandez  
Prisoner in California

## Welcome Pantry Needs:

- ☐ Canned Goods, Small OJ Bottles, Shelf Stable Milk
- ☐ Pop Tarts
- ☐ Single Serve Oatmeal Packets
- ☐ Assorted Small Cereal Boxes
- ☐ Pretzels
- ☐ Crackers
- ☐ Granola Bars
- ☐ Baby Wipes
- ☐ Travel Tissue Packs
- ☐ Tampons

We have an Amazon Wish List: [https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1Q9TWJ0HZPJAX?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1Q9TWJ0HZPJAX?ref_=wl_share)

