

HOSPITALITY

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Providing hospitality to the homeless & to those in prison, through Christ's love
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Donna Pickens

AAH Report

by John Pickens

The Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless (AAH) planned a street action on July 4th in downtown Atlanta during the July 4th celebrations and parade. The purpose of this action was to embody the presence of the homeless in downtown Atlanta during all the festivities and to present a Bill of Rights for the Homeless. Printed elsewhere in this issue is this Bill of Rights for the Homeless which, in abbreviated form, was passed out to the crowd in leaflet form by Colleen, Anne, Joanne, Donna, Annie Ruth and Harvey. Bard, Ed, Doug and I went down dressed as homeless men. Bard and Ed both were dressed in torn, ragged and dirty clothes, and Ed went without his glasses which literally made him a lost man as he can hardly see without his glasses. I was dressed much like Bard and Ed and had a three day growth of beard. Doug, who like Bard, is a house guest at the Open Door went as himself and did not wear anything special. By our appearance alone we would have drawn attention to ourselves. However, we decided to do something more just to make sure our presence was seen. In deciding upon this aspect of the action, we wanted to do something that by the very act of doing would connect us with the homeless. What we decided to do was to rummage through the garbage cans and dumpsters downtown looking for aluminum cans and anything else of value. This idea was suggested because one of our group several days before had seen a good and dear friend rummaging through the smelly dumpster behind the Open Door. Additionally, we have all seen homeless persons out combing the streets

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A Gift of Earthen Vessels

by Murphy Davis

There are days, to tell the truth, that you just have to wonder if it's worth it to try to live in community. It's sort of like marriage and family life: it's a great idea, but the reality requires more blood sweat and tears than anybody ever told you about ahead of time. And sometimes you just wonder.

You stir a soup pot, and there only seem to be more hungry people at the door. You open the shower line, but more hot, sweaty, dirty bodies appear the minute you've finished. You visit the prisoners, but for every visit there are five more un-addressed needs. You sit down to pray, but the cacophony of your thoughts and feelings won't lie still for long enough to get through a simple "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner." You work to devise strategies to stop the death penalty, and the state just gets another execution date.

And we live together out of a commitment to the love that Christ gives us to share as a body, but sometimes it seems the best we can do is still to fail each other.

And sometimes we just wonder: is it worth it? Wouldn't it be better (is that the same as easier?) to just give up? To go back to a more traditional life style—one that's not so weird or isolated or cut off from the mainstream culture?

A few weeks ago a little cardboard box came in the mail from St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Inside were a simple pottery bowl and cup. They were crafted as a Eucharistic set by Richard Bresnahan, trained as a master potter in Japan, and sent to us through our friend, Frank Cordaro of the Catholic Worker family. The message said that an identical cup and bowl had been sent to every Catholic Worker house in the country. (We are very honored to be included and considered a "Presbyterian Catholic Worker.") Frank wrote:

These Eucharistic sets are a gift to you from the Potter and our community. We wish to thank you for your special ministry to the poor and your ongoing struggle for justice for a world where it will be 'easier to be good.' These Earthen vessels were formed after the simple soup bowls and water glasses that are the common utensils in the hospitality houses. We hope they serve to remind you of the links between your work with the poor and the work of the Potters here at St. John's.

Richard the Potter added the note:

It is with great hope that the love and care taken by so many to create a piece of earth for everyday use, is enjoyed by those who inherit the earth.

A gift of simple earthen vessels. The vessels are to hold for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ. They

Gift - cont. on page 2

sit on the little table at the center of our worshipping circle each Sunday night, and we pass them to each other even as our brother Jesus passed them to us. We gather round the table because we know something (perhaps not enough, but at least something) about our own weakness and failings and fragility. We know that if we serve the poor, it is not because we are good or loving or smart. It is because--and only because--of the love of Jesus Christ that lives within us. We know that if we live in community, it is not because we are loving or kind or have nice personalities. It is because--and only because--of the mercy of Jesus Christ that lives among us and teaches us to forgive each other.

The earthen vessels are very fragile, and so are we. Their only strength is because of the fire of the kiln, and so it is with our strength. They come to us as a gift and a reminder: we are not alone. God has not abandoned us; neither have our sisters and brothers abandoned us. God comes to us each day through the Spirit and through our homeless and imprisoned friends. God comes to us through the scriptures, through the sacraments, and through prayer. God comes to us through an amazingly wide circle of friends who support our work and support us through gifts of shared work, money, letters, and words of encouragement.

We must often remind ourselves: when things seem the most bleak and desperate, we are saved not by our own plans or work, but by God's good grace. When the confused and hurt disciples walked down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they had lost their sense of purpose and direction. The stranger who joined them on the road eloquently illuminated the scriptures, but still they were confused. It was only when the stranger was welcomed into their home, gave thanks and broke the bread, that they recognized him. And they jumped out of their seats: "Didn't our hearts burn within us?"

When our hearts burn within us we usually figure it was the soup. But regularly we are reminded: in the ongoing work, in what seems at times to be pure drudgery--the grimy sweaty business of cleaning pots and cooking and driving a rattling car to the prison--we look up only to discover that Jesus was with us all along.

We come together out of love: love of the poor, love of God, love of each other. But our love is so shallow. It is never enough. We find ourselves too easily becoming judgmental and haughty and bitter. We turn our backs on each other, on God, and on the cry of our sisters and brothers who suffer around us, and we must cry out again and again to God: "Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh."

The simple earthen vessels remind us of so many truths: They remind us that we ourselves are simple earthen vessels, created for the simple purpose of holding the life and love that come to us from God. They remind us of the deep connection between the soup bowls and tea cups of our kitchen tables and the pottery bowl and cup of our Eucharistic table. They remind us that community is a fragile gift from God to be held gently with hearts full of gratitude. *



HOSPITALITY is published 11 times a year by The Open Door Community (P.C.U.S.), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of the Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the Partners, listed below with their current administrative functions

Murphy Davis - Southern Prison Ministry Director.
Volunteer Coordinator
Rob Johnson - Treasurer
Ed Loring - Correspondence & Resident Volunteer Co-ordinator

Newspaper:

Editor - Rob Johnson; Associate Editor - Ed Loring
Manuscript Preparation - Rob Johnson, Tom Klein, John Pickens; Graphics & Art - Donna Pickens, Layout - Rob Johnson, Tom Klein; Circulation- Norman Gale and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests

Art



Much of the art work in this issue was created by our guests and resident volunteers. A growing joy is the Saturday night "art time" that Donna Pickens supervises. Come visit our building and enjoy our hallway "gallery."

Open Door Schedule

WE ARE OPEN...

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 7:30 am until 6:30 pm and from 7:15 pm to 8:30 pm. The building is open from 9:00 am until 8:30 pm those days. Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are closed until 5:15 pm. Then our phones and door are answered from 5:15 until 7:30 pm

OUR MINISTRY...

SOUP KITCHEN - Monday-Saturday, 11-12 noon; Sunday 5:15-5:30 pm. BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST Monday-Friday 8-8:30 am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES - Once a week in August. Call for schedule.

USE OF PHONE - Monday-Saturday, 9am - 4pm. SHELTER REQUESTS - Monday-Saturday 9am - noon.

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 7:30 pm. BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Wednesdays 7:30 - 9:30 (Resuming August 28, Sept. 11)

FELLOWSHIP MEAL - Alternate Wednesdays 6:30 - 8:00 pm. (Resuming September 4)

The Open Door Community

by Ed Loring

A Common

LIFE
VISION
HOPE

On a Friday night in July, visitors Allen and Yvonne King stood in the hot kitchen taking orders from Sye. A homeless middle-aged black man, unemployed since one half of his body was severely burned by french-fries grease in a short order restaurant, Sye kept the Kings busy until midnight cooking a birthday cake for one of the partners at the Open Door. Allen and Yvonne did more than bake cake during their visit to the Open Door Community in Atlanta, Georgia. They helped to feed 100 people at the soup kitchen in addition to aiding 40 homeless and haggard men and women who came for a shower and a change of clothes.

The Open Door is a residential Christian community which ministers to the homeless and hungry on the streets of Atlanta and to prisoners across the state of Georgia. The roots of the Open Door Community stretch back to a small inner-city neighborhood congregation, the Clifton Presbyterian Church. Ed Loring was pastor, and Murphy Davis, Ed's wife who is also a Presbyterian minister, directed the Georgia office of Southern Prison Ministry from the church. The Clifton congregation numbered 30 members, mostly young adults who came together seeking a disciplined and active Christian life. Living in the midst of the poor and in a city with thousands of hungry and homeless people, the church decided to open its doors to 30 homeless men for shelter from the mean streets and bitter nights. Every night since November 1, 1979 Clifton Presbyterian Church has fed and sheltered homeless men in the sanctuary.

The need for shelter discerned by the Clifton congregation was, and continues to be, much greater than any one church could resolve. In 1979 there were approximately 1500 homeless people in Atlanta: today there are 5,000. By the winter of 1980-81 several churches followed the Clifton example and began offering hospitality, food, a blanket, and a foam mat to the poorest of the poor. A movement was now underway to shelter the homeless. During the winter there are now 30 churches, representing most denominations, feeding and sheltering 1500 men, women, boys, and girls.

During the second year of Night Hospitality Ministry at Clifton Church, Rob and Carolyn Johnson joined with Ed Loring and Murphy Davis to form the Open Door Community. We felt a new vocation emerge from our experience of serving God in the midst of the poor. We wanted to live with those whom we sheltered and we wanted to form an alternative style of Christian commitment--a residential community.

After a long and prayerful search for a building, the Open Door and Atlanta Presbytery purchased an old 56 room apartment building from the Atlanta Union Mission. Located at 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue, the new community began feeding the hungry on Christmas Day 1981 when 100 homeless folks came for dinner. Since that day over 400,000 meals have been prepared in the kitchen.

Community and service are the two foci of common life at the Open Door. Wanting to live a life of discipleship based upon the Bible, the members are molded by the experience of the early church as found in Acts 2 and 4. Partners are those members who covenant to give their lives and resources to the community. Resident volunteers are persons who join the community for 6 months to two years for experience and education as they follow different paths on their life pilgrimages. The Open Door membership includes three partners, two novices (those who are considering partnership), and six resident volunteers.

Faithfulness to the scriptures and resistance to the greed and materialism of contemporary society demand a lifestyle of simplicity and compassion. To that end each member of the community receives basic needs plus \$12.50 per week stipend. The Open Door is supported by contributions from churches and individuals. Although no government money is received, gifts are tax deductible. The 1984 expenses totaled \$130,000.00

including the cost for all the servanthood ministries. No member has an income-producing job.

Common life, the shared life in community, is more than work and rest. Each week we worship, study the Bible, plan advocacy for the powerless poor, and play together. Each month a speaker joins us for an analysis of a current social issue; and every sixth week we go to the nearby monastery for a retreat. Life together is often difficult, but the joy and purposefulness are resources deeper than our complaints. In addition to the partners, novices and resident volunteers, 26 street people live at the Open Door. Most residents are unemployable with physical and/or mental disabilities. Many have spent years on the streets, have served in the armed forces, are black, have been displaced by either agricultural technology on the farms or urban renewal in the cities. The majority of the homeless are neglected by the churches, government, and business. They have nowhere to go. Although families, teenage boys and girls, and single men and women constitute the homeless population, the vast majority are single men. At the Open Door we house 21 men and 5 women.

Let me introduce you to a couple of our friends. Tim is 30 years old; he looks 50. He is blind in one eye; crippled in his right leg. Tim is white. After his father ran off some years ago, economic necessity put Tim on his own. He worked day labor and developed a terrible alcohol problem. After 10 years on the street he was reduced to a beggar who often fell victim to beatings and abuse. A year and a half ago Tim came to live at the Open door. Slowly his life is being pieced back together. He has not taken a drink since entering

Open Door - cont. on page 4



the community and he works each day in the soup kitchen. Tim is a stronger person, often joyful and happy, but the steets still hold the specter of joblessness, alcoholism, and violence. It is a simple truism that haunts the lives of many homeless: on the steets a drink of liquor is easier to find than a slice of bread.

James story is quite different. A 62 year-old black man, James came to the Open Door two years ago exhausted from a fruitless search for a regular job. Shortly after his arrival, Murphy Davis realized that she and Ed had been visiting his son on death row. Through Murphy's ministry father and son re-established a loving and supportive relationship. On James 62 birthday, about a year ago, he became eligible for social security benefits. A lawyer friend of the Open Door worked hard to get James an efficiency apartment in public housing. James now has his own home, but he returns to the community five mornings a week as a volunteer. He often answers the phone and front door.

Each person who enters the community has a story of failure and triumph. Some folks, like James, experience victories in the battles for survival and a life of dignity. Others with whom we have lived return to the streets and freeze to death or die a slow and desolate death from privation.

Volunteers from the Atlanta area also consitute a part of the community. Some people come monthly, others come weekly to serve soup, prepare supper, sort clothes, or bandage hurts. One hundred fifty different volunteers work at the Open Door each month.

Servanthood among, with, and on behalf of the poor is the purpose of the Open Door Community. The biblical understanding of justice informs the mission and shapes the service performed the the name of Jesus Christ:

"The kind of fasting I want is this:
Remove the chains of oppression and the
yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed
go free. Share your food with the
hungry and open your homes to the
homeless poor. Give clothes to those
who have nothing to wear, and do not
refust to help your own relatives."
(Isaiah 58:6-7, TEV)

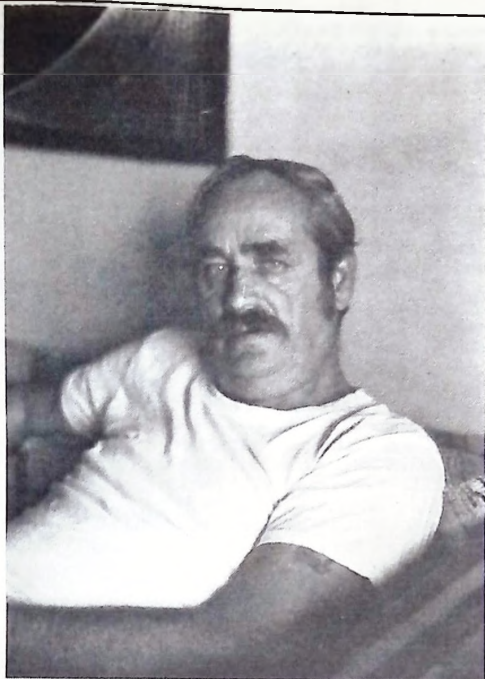


The day begins early at 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue. At 6:00 am one of the partners or resident volunteers begins to cook the "Butler Street Breakfast." By 7:30 a.m. the meal is ready to be put into the van and taken to an exceedingly impoverished area of the inner-city. In the basement of the Butler Street C.M.E. Church between 135 and 200 people, mostly black men, line up for the coffee, eggs, grits, a piece of fruit, and a vitamin C tablet.

At 9:00 a.m., as the van loaded with empty pots, pans and dirty dishes returns to the Open Door, other community members are starting to open the clothes closet and shower room. Five days each week up to 40 men and women who have slept in abandoned buildings or vacant lots come in for a change of clothes and a hot shower. Simple bodily hygiene is most difficult for those with little access to toilets, running water, clean clothes and showers. Often we must turn people away for there is not enough time and room for all who would enter.



As sheltering the homeless is the focus of our ministry at night, feeding the hungry is the heart of our day. Seven days a week the soup kitchen is filled with folk. Preparation begins at 9:30 a.m. (as the Butler Street pots are washed!) and the tables are full between 11:00 a.m. and 12 noon. Then thousand meals per month are served fromn the kitchen.



Open Door cont. from p. 4

Various ministries supportive of the homeless are carried out as well. Ann Connor, a nurse who teaches at Emory University, comes each Wednesday to bathe and to care for injured feet. Dr. Jerry Hobson fits old used glasses on those with dimming eye sight. And on the first Saturday of every month Eric Kocher organizes several lawyers in a legal clinic for the poor.

The poor are not only locked out of the mainstream; they are also locked into prisons. Jesus proclaimed that God,

"has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed..."
(Luke 4, 18b)

Wanting to be partners with God in this majestic view of human liberation, community members join with Murphy Davis who provides the leadership for the Open Door's prison ministry. Death row prisoners are the focus. However transportation for families and loved ones, support groups, and visitation with prisoners throughout the state are important aspects of the ministry.

Opposition to the death penalty is the primary political focus of the prison ministry. Through speaking engagements, legislative lobbying, Bible study, and public protests the Open Door attempts to change

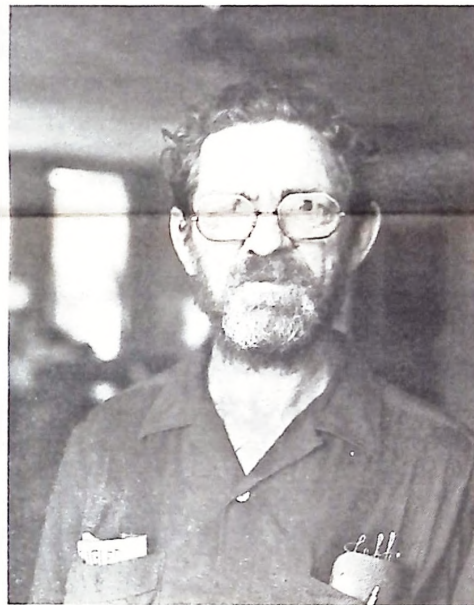


5 human hearts and human laws toward life sustaining structures of justice. "Why do we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?" is a question often asked.

Advocacy cannot be separated from direct personal involvement which is the highest form of love. Murphy spends a day each week on death row near Jackson, Georgia. Her ministry of visitation includes personal counseling and support, and responding to prisoners' needs. For instance, because everyone on death row is poor, and the state provides no legal counsel for court appeals, Murphy must locate lawyers who will represent the convicts without financial remuneration.

Burying the dead is one of the works of mercy. Three of the men executed in Georgia during the past year and a half have left their tortured bodies to the Open Door. As a community of faith we have gathered in love and hope to bury our dead brothers.

Death tries to come more secretly into Georgia in another way that the Open Door resists. For years trains carrying nuclear weapons have passed through our state on their way from a munitions factory in Amarillo, Texas toward the Charleston, S.C. naval base. Thanks to a national network of people along the "Nuclear Train" route, we in Atlanta have been able to witness for life several times a year as Death came near us. Like Germans in the past who accidentally saw trains carrying innocent people toward death in concentration camps, we are witnessing concentrated death in trains being carried towards innocent people of the future. Our belief in life will not let us keep silent.



Living within the struggle of life and death, we, like all of God's children are constantly in need of healing. Donna Pickens, a deeply gifted artist, leads us to discover ourselves and to explore the inner relationships between art and spirituality. There is now emerging a new aspect of our vision as homeless guests and community members mold clay and paint pictures which depict the love of life in the context of the quest for justice.

John Pickens is also bringing a broader shape to the life and work of the Open Door. Beginning as a lawyer on the 21st floor of a very tall building, he now guides us in our Legal Defense Ministry. John walks the streets, visits the jails, serves soup in the dining hall, and out of personal relationships with the homeless, he represents them in court. Liberty to the captives and rights for the widows and orphans are directions of John's discipleship.

The Open Door is home. It is a small portion of the Body of Jesus Christ. We have nothing and we are nothing, except for Jesus. You, our readers, are a constant source of hope and strength. Please visit us and pray for us and join in the works of mercy that love may reign. *

Irma

by Tom Klein



When asked to relate some highlight, some important experience or turning point of her past, Irma, her eyes sparkling, didn't need to pause before telling of her meeting with the psychologist Rollo May 10 years ago. At the end of his lecture, with eye contact and spontaneous hand holding, she had direct experience of what she termed "the love and light in another person."

Studying psychology at that time - and still well versed in all the distinctions and nuances of the different schools - Irma decided soon after this that her real interest was music. Having taught piano since she was 15, Irma said she missed in psychology the opportunity and freedom to express her "true thoughts and feelings." She made a point of mentioning her love of jazz - "the freest of all musical forms."

Irma taught piano and lived at home with her mother, until after her mother's passing a brother, without taking time to notify Irma, sold the house to the town sheriff who promptly had her moved to the street, -- and all of Irma's belongings to the dump.

With no clothes or possessions, Irma took a difficult live-in position. After eventually losing this job, and soon thereafter finding herself locked out of her hotel room, Irma in March came to the Open Door.

I don't know if there is a moral to this story. (Adam Smith's hand stays ever invisible - our Free Society puts unlucky people out onto the street -, our meager flesh and blood hands remain able to help but a few.) In any case Irma, after 16 weeks of studying office skills and brushing up on her typing through a PIC "Quality Plus" (partly government subsidized) program, has recently found a secretarial job. Irma's dream for the future is to form a jazz combo -- know of a good drummer or guitarist?



The Sacredness of Community

by John Pickens

It is with a certain degree of hesitancy that I share the thoughts on community contained in this article inasmuch as this article is basically a summation of a song that I wrote several months ago. Yet, at the time I wrote this song it spoke to me immediately of what Christian community should be, but probably seldom is. So, even though it is only in those moments or fantasy that I any longer hold on to the belief and, yes, desire to be an accomplished musician and songwriter, I share with you the song set out below entitled "Holdin' To A Sacred Vision". It is my hope that something in this song or article will strike a familiar chord within you and thereby gently nudge you to explore some degree of intentional community with those Christian sisters and brothers who cross your path. The courage to share this song stems in large measure from the following excerpt from our brother Henri J.M. Nouwen in his book "The Wounded Healer", wherein he states: "When one has the courage to enter where life is experienced as most unique and most private, one touches the soul of the community . . . I have found that the very feeling which has seemed to me most private, most personal and hence most incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there is a resonance in many other people. It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others."

This song "Holdin' To A Sacred Vision" comes directly out of my involvement and experiences at the Open Door and reveals to some degree what we have been striving to achieve in our common life. This song - both the words and the tune - came to me one afternoon as I sat with my guitar by one of the small lakes on the property of the trappist monks of the Monastery of the Holy Ghost in Conyers, Georgia, not far from Atlanta. The partners and resident volunteers of the Open Door were out at the monastery for a day-long retreat and during some free time I went down by the lake. I often find that a few quiet moments by myself with my guitar can get me in touch with what I am really feeling. Such, I believe, happened that afternoon. So, with that bit of background, I offer the following words of explanation about how this song speaks to me of Christian community.



The "sacred vision" refers to Christian community which is characterized by a true sense of love and fellowship among its members. Love of our sisters and brothers in Christ is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, and this love can often best find expression in the atmosphere of Christian fellowship which revolves around shared worship and works of servanthood with the poor and oppressed. By using the word "sacred", I do not mean to romanticize life and work in Christian community, because such a life very often is very trying and demanding while at other times a life filled with real joy and satisfaction. I know the word "sacred" found its way into this song mainly because I was writing it on the grounds of a place (the monastery) that feels very sacred and spirit-filled to me. Yet, I do believe that Christian community that does achieve a true sense of shared love and fellowship has a divine aspect to it, such as the community built by the apostles and first disciples of Christ as recorded in Acts 2:43-47 & 4:32-37.

Christian community as described above to fully achieve any measure of resemblance to that early model of community must be open to a shared life with those in its surrounding society who are without the material and personal resources to make it in the world and who have been left out of mainstream society by systemic oppression and discrimination. Put simply but biblically - a Christian community must, I submit, share life directly with the poor and oppressed and thereby try to see that no one is without the necessities of life and that no one because of their race, sex or economic status is forgotten and left to live a marginal life on the fringe of society. As the writer of Acts tells us, in those early days "every day the Lord added to their group[community] those who were being saved"(Acts 2:47). As the gospels tell us, the bulk of those drawn to Jesus were the poor, the outcast, the sick, the lame, the mentally deficit, and the forgotten. The events in Acts tell us that the apostles and early followers of Jesus carried on his ministry with the same focus and direction, and thus clearly that early community of Christians included in its membership the poor and the oppressed of that day. Additionally, just as that early band of Christians discerned a call to take the good news "to the ends of the world", Christian communities based in locales in various countries should, I submit, make efforts to reach out to the peoples of the world irrespective of their race, national origin or political ideology, for Christ called us all to love even our enemies. By assuming and practicing an attitude of worldwide relatedness, perhaps one day we will see worldwide peace and amnesty.



M. Dale

for cans. So, it was to embody these friends of ours and with the hope that one day they would not have to eke out an existence dependant upon what was found in the bottom of a garbage can that Doug and I pushed an old rickety grocery cart along Peachtree Street filling it with cans and Ed and Bard slung plastic bags over their shoulders and filled them to capacity. Thus, as the crowd waited for and later watched the highly acclaimed July 4th parade, the four of us and the six leafleters worked the crowd trying our best to divert their attention away from the extravaganza parading in front of them to the despair, disrespect, humiliation, poverty, hunger and slow-coming death that are daily realities for the homeless.

The remainder of this AAH Report will offer some additional explanation for why we conducted this action and to share with you some reflections that some of us had about the action. I have talked with almost everyone who took part in this action, so the following are our joint thoughts and reflections.

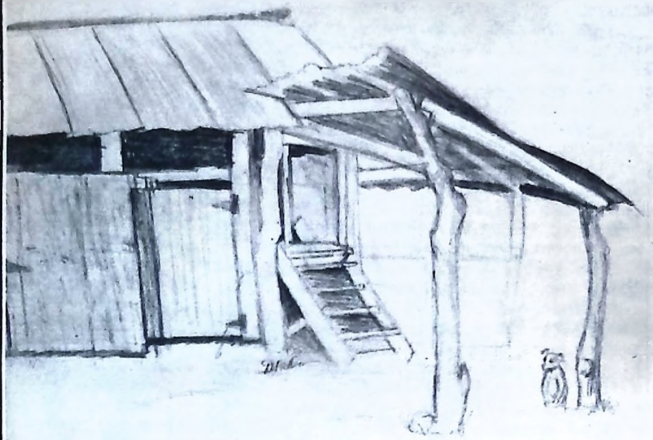
1. The four of us dressed as homeless persons were trying literally and spiritually to embody the presence of the homeless among those who are not homeless and who do not suffer the ravages of hunger, poverty and homelessness. If we had not been there, I know that hardly anyone would have seen or thought about the homeless and their plight. The Atlanta city government and the downtown business associations are doing a good job of hiding the fact that there are 5000 homeless people in the city. With police corrdoring off the parade route and an obvious police presence along that route, I am sure it was intimidating for those who, because of their years of homelessness, would have by and large stood out in this crowd. I saw only a few people (five, in fact) who I knew to be homeless and they were keeping a very low profile. So it was that we were standing in for the homeless in a place that because of their homelessness and our city's posture toward the homeless they could not themselves go. This "act of presence" was directly in line with the very reason for the existence of the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless - to be a voice for the voiceless and to bring to light that which the world would hide in the darkest corners of our cities.

2. For many of us who took part in this action it was fully consistent with our faith as Christians and represented a further acting out of our lives with the poor and homeless. As many of us grow in our faith, we are seeing with fresh eyes that as disciples of Christ we are called to be with the poor by feeding the hungry, clothing the tattered, visiting the prisoner and freeing the oppressed, and that by doing such acts of mercy we meet and are with Christ. Such growing faith is further showing us the presence of God among and with the poor and oppressed. Thus, for many of us practicing the presence of the homeless in downtown Atlanta was an attempt to bring the presence of God and Christ into the heart of this city. For several of us being dressed like the homeless was spiritually equivalent to heeding the call to "be with the poor" as much so as when we are directly serving the needs of the homeless. Similarly, several of those leafletting experienced a feeling that they too were homeless. This feeling came upon them as they walked in the rain handing out leaflets to most of the crowd which had taken cover next to the buildings when it had started raining shortly before the parade started. Because the rain had driven most everyone up close to the buildings, the leafletters stood out as they walked in front of this crowd. Therefore, the leafletters too embodied the homeless and brought the presence and message of God to that holiday crowd.

3. The experience of leaning over into the bottoms of the garbage cans and sifting through the garbage gave us an additional dimension to our understanding of what it must be like to be homeless. To say the least, the trash cans stunk and were filthy and after sifting through the garbage for hidden cans our hands were also filthy, smelly and sticky. No wonder now why so many of those we feed and give showers to smell and are filthy. The act of bending over into these trash cans was a very difficult and depressing act. Difficult inasmuch as we were right in front of so many people who could not help but notice - often under some real "hard" stares and occasionally followed by a policeman's direction to "keep moving". Depressing inasmuch as physically being at the bottom of the barrel gave rise to feelings about one's self-image and made one feel that their life too was at the bottom of the barrel. Although most people were not openly hostile, there certainly was a feeling of alienation for those of us who were dressed as the homeless. It is not difficult to surmise the toll it must take on the homeless to experience day in and day out and year in and year out such humiliation and alienation, not to speak of the physical realities that so many live with.

4. Being in the midst of this festive July 4th parade was depressing and discouraging in several particular ways. As celebrities, floats, and bands came marching by, I remembering asking myself how many thousands of dollars had been spent to put on this show and how many more thousands had been spent on the soft drinks, beer, and junk foods we had seen in the garbage cans. The money so spent really pained me as I know how little is spent in this city to meet the needs of the homeless poor. The needs of the homeless are so great, yet the monetary response of our city, county, and state governments, churches, businesses, and, yes, we as individuals is so minimal. Tremendous amounts of human misery in this city could have been eliminated if only our priorities had been right. But, we as a society and as a nation have set different priorities and thus increasingly are drawn to the fires of nationalism and patriotism. This too pains me as I am coming to the growing realization that the American government is not promoting justice and independence at home or abroad. Stated simply, but I believe correctly - the Reagan administration and the American government (including the Congress) is anti-poor and pro-rich. How else can one explain the many policy changes of this administration (passed in many incidences by Congress) that adversely affect the poor and its minority members - such as drastic cuts in funding for low income housing, cutting the number of recipients of food stamps and disability payments, cutting funding and support for legal services to the poor, stacking the board of the Civil Rights Commission, naming Edwin Meese as Attorney General, and getting set to stack (just like Nixon tried to do and to some extent did) the Supreme Court with conservative, strict "constitutional" constructionists. These policies are only making things worse for the poor, while the rich get richer. Predictions are already being made that such a trend on the national level will increase dramatically the number





AAH

cont. from p. 8

Donna Pickens

of people who are pushed out of their homes and/or apartments and thus wind up among the homeless on the streets. American foreign policy is proceeding along similar lines, as we refuse to disengage from the oppressive white minority, ruling class in South Africa and send monetary assistance to Central America to be used by those who have in the past, and desire in the present, to suppress and oppress the poor masses.

With these thoughts going through my mind as I worked my way through the parade crowd, I thought of how great it would have been to have had another, not so lavish parade depicting what black theologian Vincent Harding calls "The Other American Revolution" - that being the centuries old struggle for freedom of the black people of America. Vincent Harding sensitively tells the story of this "Other American Revolution" in his book by the same name. If a parade were built around the themes and facts set forth in this book, the hypocrisy of our American heritage would be boldly exposed. Think about this as you read the following excerpts from Vincent Harding's book about what was really going on around the American Revolution, the Civil War and in more modern times:

"For some persons, the paradox was painfully obvious. Here were the colonists, moving toward revolution, calling for freedom and justice, pledging to seek liberty or death. And here were their enslaved Africans. The patriots of New England were based in the major slave ship center of North America. The patriots of Virginia were surrounded by one of the largest populations of captive Africans in the colonies. Together the slaveholding patriots and the slave-trading patriots were planning to make a revolution based on liberty. . . That was part of the paradox of the American revolutionary period, and there were many children of Africa who saw it very clearly. . . Neither Lincoln, his generals, nor the vast majority of their soldiers was committed to a war for black freedom. overriding objective was to preserve the Union, to bring white North and South back together so that this white man's country might continue to work out its Divine destiny. . . Indeed the centuries-old black quest for justice has relentlessly challenged the white nation to complete its own best work, to fulfill the broken promises of the Declaration of Independence, to join the thrust for black freedom and bring forth what is indeed a new, human nation. But at the hard, critical edges of decision, the leaders and the people of white America have chosen piecemeal solutions, or turned back from the tremendous costs of the new way."

5. Despite all the depressing aspects of what we encountered in downtown Atlanta, there were several encouraging and uplifting signs of hope. Even though Doug and I got a lot of hard stares, a good number of people greeted us warmly and with some compassion. The most noticeable of these were the folks who intentionally came over and out of their way to drop a can in our grocery cart. This happened a good number of times. Then, after the parade as I walked back to my home with the full-to-the-brink grocery cart, a woman across the

street stopped her car, waved a can and pitched it across the street to me. Although I did not need or want any more cans at that point, I gladly retrieved it. These acts of kindness illustrated to me that people really are and want to be good and decent and will show that aspect of themselves if given the chance. This thought reminded me of Peter Maurin's (co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement) comments that the poor are the ambassadors of God and serve to call forth the good in those not so poor. In his Easy Essay on the "Duty of Hospitality", Peter Maurin wrote:

"People who are in need and are not afraid to beg give to people not in need the occasion to do good for goodness' sake. Modern society calls the beggar bum and panhandler and gives him the bum's rush. But the Greeks used to say that people in need are the ambassadors of the gods. Although you may be called bums and panhandlers you are in fact the Ambassadors of God. As God's Ambassadors, you should be given food, clothing and shelter by those who are able to give it. . . But the duty of hospitality is neither taught nor practiced in Christian countries."

6. Another uplifting and inspiring aspect of this AAH street action was the participation by our three homeless and formerly homeless brothers - Doug, Bard and Harvey. Their participation with those of us who have never been homeless is a sign of great encouragement that one day the voices coming from the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless will be the voices of the homeless themselves and not just from those of us who try to speak for the homeless. For me personally their participation was especially inspiring having known a little something of their backgrounds, which I will share with you in abbreviated form.

Doug is a 53 year old white man who has lived at the Open Door now for five to six months. Doug hails from Macon, Georgia, where he was an auto mechanic for many years. Several years ago, Doug was run over by a train and spent a year and nine months in the hospital with a broken hip, broken ribs, a back broken in four places that had to be fused back together, and a punctured lung. On top of this, Doug has had a history of epileptic seizures. On July 2nd, two days before our street action, Doug had a severe seizure at the house, which we all thought was a stroke, and he was taken to Grady Memorial Hospital. He was surprisingly released the same day and was walking home barefooted when several members of the Open Door saw him and brought him home. That same night he attended our AAH planning meeting for the action and then two days later walked the streets downtown with me behind the grocery cart. Picking up cans with him was one of those rare experiences I will not soon forget.

Bard is a 47 year old white man who has also lived at the Open Door for the past five to six months. Bard has a college degree and considerable experience in sales and computer systems analysis. After several unsatisfactory employment experiences and then some family difficulties, Bard found himself on the streets for several years. Bard is invaluable to us at the Open Door as he daily answers the phone, greets all persons who come to the Open Door daily, and helps out with a lot of clerical and administrative matters. More importantly perhaps, Bard has been a regular attendee of AAH meetings and has taken on an increasingly active role in AAH work.

Harvey is a 40ish black man who, to my knowledge, is homeless. I first met Harvey when I was working the door at the Central Presbyterian Night Shelter, when that shelter was the last stop in town for the homeless and housed about 225 men and women a night. That cold night, Harvey helped a crippled woman out of a car and brought her up to the front of the line so she could get in first [which was okay since she was so crippled]. However, Harvey wanted to help take her on up the stairs, as she did need help, and thus, I thought, stay up himself in front of all the other men. Despite his assurances that he would come down, I told him he could not help her up and that I would get a shelter volunteer to help. Harvey was quite upset and proceeded to take from his back pocket an old and tattered copy of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights and he began to read to me in front of everyone the 13th Amendment, which, as he said, supposedly abolished slavery in the United States. Quite obviously that night, as 200 or so black men and women waited for us white folks to let them in to a dingy gym to sleep on the floor no abolition of slavery was evident and Harvey rightly told me so. Yet, several years later, there is Harvey at our AAH

meeting and then at the street action handing out leaflets. The presence, therefore, of Doug, Bard and Harvey at this action provided hope for me that the homeless have within their midst those that can and will be their own voice and who will continue to struggle to make those better off more responsible for those less off.

Having gathered the above thoughts and reflections from those who participated in the street action, I think all would agree that the action was rewarding and accomplished what was intended. Some might ask, however, was it successful and did it really do or accomplish anything. Out of almost 3000 leaflets handed out, we got one call, and that was from a homeless person who wanted to know how to get out to the Open Door for a bowl of soup. My response, however, is that we are not particularly concerned with success as the world defines it, even though we would shout for joy if our actions and words eliminated homelessness in Atlanta. We know we are in a long struggle in a country and city that sets its priorities on material matters that cater to individual desires for greater wealth and security and leisure-time entertainment. In this context we must first and foremost simply be concerned with being

faithful as Christians and putting our faith into action. By acting in such faith, we follow a host of people down through the ages who have acted on the faith that God is a God of justice and mercy who fulfills the promise of freedom for the oppressed, food for the hungry and homes for the homeless. Such faithfulness finds its roots in the type faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:1, which Clarence Jordan translated as: "Faith is the turning of dreams into deeds - faith is the life based on unseen realities." Although we had hoped for more than one response out of 3000 leaflets, I rest my hope on that unseen reality that one or more of the several thousand people who saw Doug, Ed, Bard or I as we collected aluminum cans in front of them and bent over into a garbage can will one day at the right time remember our image and take a step out of their world of comfort and security and into a world of caring and sharing with those that have so little. Such unseen realities, and others I can't even imagine now, I believe will one day find fulfillment and all God's children will then have all they need, but not more, to live the life that God and Christ would have us live. Until that day, it seems to me that we all should continue to live out and act upon our faith secure in the belief that regardless of what we see in this world it does matter that we are faithful and that our lives are not lived in vain. *

Bill of Rights for Atlanta's 5,000 Homeless



WHILE MANY MAY CELEBRATE THIS DAY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE FORCED TO LIVE AND EKE OUT AN EXISTENCE ON THE STREETS. THIS IS NOT BY CHOICE, FOR IF THERE WERE FREEDOM AND JUSTICE THEY WOULD BE LIVING MUCH LIKE YOU -- IN A HOME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND THEY WOULD BE WORKING IN DECENT JOBS. WHILE AMERICA SPENDS BILLIONS ON DEFENSE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS, FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA, AND TACIT APPROVAL OF OPPRESSION, DISCRIMINATION AND INJUSTICE IN PLACES LIKE SOUTH AFRICA, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS GO HOMELESS AND HUNGRY RIGHT HERE IN AMERICA BECAUSE FUNDING FOR LOW INCOME HOUSING AND HUMAN SERVICES HAS BEEN SEVERELY CURTAILED.

THE TIME HAS COME FOR THE HOMELESS TO DEMAND CERTAIN BASIC RIGHTS INHERENT IN ANY SYSTEM OF LIBERTY AND JUSTICE:

1. DECENT HOUSING

There is no affordable decent housing in this city. We demand a commitment to the development, not the demise, of low income housing for the Homeless. There are too few shelters in this city, many of which are open only during the winter months. At the very least, we demand adequate shelter space which is clean and safe and open every night of the year.

2. ADEQUATE AND SAFE JOBS

There is no way to make it when the few jobs available for the homeless are through labor pools, which exploit the homeless and pay sub-minimum wages. We demand regulation of labor pools.

3. FOOD, CLOTHING AND SHOWERS

There are too few soup kitchens, clothes closets and toilet and showering facilities in this city. We demand greater provision for such basic necessities.

4. PERSONAL COUNSELING AND TRAINING

Those who are homeless face a variety of problems, such as inadequate job training, low self-esteem, mental health problems and alcohol and drug abuse. We demand accessible and effective programs that will move people to a personal state of liberation, freedom and self-fulfillment.

YOU CAN HELP THE HOMELESS REALIZE THE TRUE MEANING OF LIBERTY

CALL
THE ATLANTA ADVOCATES FOR THE HOMELESS
874-9652

HOME

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by Ann Fitz

Homelessness means more than just the lack of shelter. Henri J.M. Nouwen says,

Home is that place or space where we do not have to be afraid, where we can let go of our defenses and be free from worries, free from tensions, free from pressures. Home is where we can laugh and cry, embrace and dance, sleep long and dream quietly, eat, read, play, watch the fire, listen to music, and be with a friend. Home is where we can rest and be healed. The word "home" gathers a wide range of feelings and emotions up into one image, the image of a house where it is good to be: the house of love.

When I hear this description of a home, I realize that I have spent a lifetime of homelessness. How often have I cried myself to sleep with "home sickness" - even while I was living in my own apartment. There have been many times I have felt the despair of "being a stranger" and wanting to "go home" - again while living in space of my own (Even the very word, "apartment," conjures up images of separateness and alienation).

The search for my home has led me many places, some of which have been fulfilling, some of which I have experienced failure that brought on even more homelessness and loneliness.

I have experienced marriage and family. In that situation there were some successes and many failures. I have studied for, perfected, and practiced a career. This was supposed to make me happy, fulfilled and successful. The only success I experienced was financial. However, the more the money increased, the more my fear of failing and falling rose to match it. There was no out-running that fear. Again there was the dreadful home sickness--"Where is my home? Why can't I rest and feel at home in this house I have bought and furnished?"

I have sought my place, my home in other ways as well, looking for the right companion, the right friend, the right mate. The harder I looked for love the



Ann Fitz (extreme left) is joined as a resident volunteer these days by Kent Arnold, Tom Klein, Norman Gale, and Britta Lindloff. Ties are not part of the mandatory attire for supervising soup kitchen. Smiles are.

farther away slipped everything I wanted. When I listened to the "world," I felt that I was not trying hard enough. I should get some better clothes, a newer car, have my hair done!

When I finally threw up my hands and said, "I can't make anything work. I am a failure at this, and I quit," when I said, "Take this kind of life and shove it!" then I started my journey toward home. This journey has been long and often painful, but always just below that painful surface was the knowledge that I finally was headed somewhere--maybe home.

The parable of the prodigal son began to have deeper meaning for me, especially where the son said, "I would rather be a servant in my fathers house than this--at least it would be home. The search for my home has finally brought me where I am today--living and working among my own kind, the home-sick and homeless. The paradox is that in finding my place with those who have no home, I have found my home. ★

Welcome, Joanne



Welcome to Joanne Solomon, our new Administrative Assistant. Joanne had been a regular volunteer and had been serving as co-chair of the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless when we decided to create this new position. We look forward to having her gifts and energy with us full-time now.

Dear Editor

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Grace to you and peace. Greet one another with a holy hug.

I've written three times without mailing the letters, because they were outdated before I could get them in the envelope.

Last fall I visited Fairmont's soup kitchen, which had been started by a young Catholic couple and was open six days a week. Their volunteers were all working several days a week. I offered to get enough volunteers from my churches to serve on Sundays. By this time, my congregations had begun to trust me, and the response was more than I expected. I preached on Ezek. 34 and Matt. 25 and shared some stories from the streets. Then I passed around legal pads for folks to make some type of response (Ethiopian offering, letter to Congress, prayer, volunteer at soup kitchen). Out of about 125, more than 40 signed up to volunteer and 40 more made other commitments. Since then several more have joined. I had planned a monthly rotation, but it takes 2 months to get everyone scheduled. Some have started working weekly on other days, so that on 5 of 7 days, someone from one of my churches is working.

My hope was that people might come face-to-face with situations they'd been unaware of before--and that has happened. But what I didn't count on were the closet radicals who had been in need of an opportunity. One woman called me after I had shared concerns about shelter needs and said, "These long term plans I dream are fine, but Roy (whom she'd met at the soup kitchen) is sleeping in a truck and it's cold!" She and her husband decided to give a month's salary toward beginning shelter ministry. Not long after that the kitchen learned it had to move and we began searching for a new place. Nothing suitable was for rent, but one man said he'd rent for a few months only if we would buy the building. It had 4 apartments and a full basement and was ideal in every way--location, handicapped-accessibility, size. It was holy week when all this came together. Five of us--the Catholic couple, the woman who called me and her husband, a 50 year-old grandmother from the same church, and I--committed ourselves to buy the building for \$50,000.

We've met weekly since then, and from April 12 to May 11, we re-located the kitchen by renovating the front apartment. It took 900 hours of volunteer labor and \$500 to do \$10,000 worth of renovations, including (for a later drop-in center) showers and a clothing area. The floor is remarkable. A local department store had remnants of really expensive linoleum and one of our group (an artist) coordinated a patchwork design that makes the whole place unique. We had volunteers

often working until 2 am, often, and many others donated in other ways. One young unemployed husband, who rarely attended church, did go to the soup kitchen when his wife worked. He offered to overhaul our old commercial refrigerator. Another man, who doesn't attend church at all, but met while visiting his son-in-law in the hospital (hurt in a mining accident), did all the plumbing for us. And on and on! There are so many stories to tell, including those of teenagers and children who volunteered to work.

West Virginia continues to have the nation's highest unemployment rate and it will get worse because of past dependence on coal. Local industries (small plants for mining equipment, light bulbs, etc.) keep laying off more workers. One large mine, owned by an Ohio company that's part of a utility corporation, continues to produce; but it causes other problems. They have the mineral rights to most property around my church area, and they undermine the houses. The method used is "long-walking," which causes shifting and settling, often breaking up buildings. Usually they buy the houses and sometimes sell them back, but even in the best cases, people's lives are disrupted and they have no choice in the matter. One group of people near Morgantown protested the process and the company closed the mine and put the miners out of work. We have a long heritage of having sold our rights and with the present economy, people feel powerless. That's one reason religion has been so important here, both in positive and negative ways, as sources of power and as an escape.

Well, that's enough socio-cultural analysis. I feel that I'm where God wants me to be and I have a deep sense of joy about serving here. I get to rock lots of babies to sleep (I just use old sermons on them) and I'm privileged to sit with families when their old people die at home. There's much pain, but also much strength here. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Although I broke up the Friday evening volunteer team of Bert and Ernie, I kept the tradition alive by performing a wedding in Charlotte with a minister named Kermit.

I pray for each of you every day.

Bert Coffman

P.S. I'm still in the kitchen on Fridays--chopping onions and dipping soup. Places change, but tradition lives on. Also, note that from 910 Ponce de Leon, I reside at 911 E. Park and the new soup kitchen is at 109 Fairmont Ave (Ten-Nine)! Just can't escape the Spirit.

We are in the last few days of Dee's pregnancy and are eagerly awaiting the birth of our child. There is the excitement, an anxiousness, and a hoping sense of comfort knowing it is God's hands. We hope and pray for a good labor and a healthy baby. We'll let you know soon after the child arrives.

My job situation here is bad, and that has been taking a toll on me and, I'm sure, hindered my concentration and sapped some of my energy. The chaplaincy job with Catholic Charities is still, to say the very least, discouraging. It is depressing. It is not where I want to be. The jail is doing all it can to keep me away, to discredit me and to force the Oakland Diocese to disown me. I am constantly hassled by jail administrators and the county's employed Chaplain; I am denied access to certain parts of the jail; I am accused of breaking rules and regulations; I am sometimes even "set up" by other prisoners at the request of certain jail employees; I get an occasional anonymous "hate note" in my mail box. I find that much of my time at the jail is spent "defending" my work, defending my alliance with the prisoners, or simply struggling from being locked out altogether.

I get precious little support or encouragement or advice from Diocesan personnel, who largely turn their backs on my difficulties--urging me, with sympathetic



M. Dale

Letter - cont. on p. 13

Letter

cont. from p. 12

13

smiles, to "hang in there." The bishop, when told of my struggle, simply shook his head as if to show he understood, but said, "It will take awhile, John, for you to be accepted at the jail."

Accepted?! Lord, have mercy. But that is what the Diocese wants of me and of all their jail/prison ministers--to be accepted, on the institution's terms. Don't make waves with those in power. Go to the jail, the church tells me, be present to the convicts, but don't alienate yourself from the cops and please don't cause any controversy. Don't challenge the system, at least not so obviously, the church keeps insisting. Don't talk to the press, don't organize against the death penalty. You are a chaplain, John. Don't undermine the diocese.

So you see my surprise and despair has not been at the jail's response to my work; no, that was to be expected. In fact, were the jail officials not troubled with me I think I would begin to worry that my ministry was not worthwhile. But I am deeply discouraged by the Church's lack of real interest in and commitment to my work. Perhaps I was naive to think it would have been any other way, that an institution like the Catholic Church--with its hierarchy, with its immense power, with its bureaucracy--would respond differently. After all, like the jail--with its hierarchy, its power, its bureaucracy, and its inhumaneness--self-preservation becomes an all-consuming priority.

My work for the Oakland Diocese has been, for me, a real test of faith. It has been another in a growing line of eye-opening "educational" experiences regarding the institutional church and how it so often fails to really confront--as church--the evils of our day. From my vantage point here, as someone working for that church, I am experiencing first-hand its hierarchical structure, its unwillingness to put, as Jim Wallis says, "its body where its doctrines are," and how it manipulates and is manipulated so that the needs of power can be served. I think I am witnessing what Wallis calls "an affront to the work of Christ."

Perhaps I am too harsh. I readily admit that despite this conflict I have with the jail and with the church, my ministry in the Bay area--at the county jail and on death row at San Quentin--has not been without its rewards. I have met many people, Catholic and Protestant, who support my efforts and who have begun, in their own way, to reach out to those in prison and jail here. Dee and I see this especially in our anti-death penalty organizing where, in less than 1 1/2 years time, our mailing list for the East Bay Justice Project has grown to include nearly 600 folks, and our work with various church denominations has proved very fruitful. As an example, last month we were successful in getting the entire Northern California/Nevada Conference of United Church of Christ to adopt a resolution calling for an end to the death penalty here, and mandating that UCC congregations begin to include capital punishment on their social justice agendas!

I've also been blessed to make new acquaintances here, making friends who like myself have experienced similar frustrations regarding the institutional church and who, despite the church's attempt to stifle or restrict their work, have found ways to continue preaching and acting out the Gospel messages. It is most often in these people that I witness Christ's word in action, Christ's passion, and victory of love over evil.

But most importantly, my strength and my education continues to come from those in the cages at the county jail, those in the cells on death row at San Quentin. Their suffering is my suffering, their hope my hope. Their stamina--and what stamina!--is what gives me the stamina to carry on, despite whatever obstacles the jail or the diocese places in my path. Rather than withdraw from these issues of crime and punishment, vengeance and mercy, life and death, I find myself becoming even more deeply engaged.

This is not to say I don't constantly struggle with my relationship with God, that I don't wonder how intimate I really am (and can be) with God. Sometimes it is even difficult for me to pray, really pray, when I am drained, or when I am distraught, or cynical. I am coming to realize though, that where God's absence is most profoundly felt in my life is often where God's presence is most profoundly revealed. So I continue on this journey....this "faith update," as we have come to call it.

God's peace be with all of you.

Love,

John Vodicka,
Oakland, California



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

General Assembly Mission Board • 341 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE • Atlanta, Georgia 30365
(404) 873-1531

July 1, 1985

The Open Door Community
910 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE
Atlanta, GA 30306

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the article Holy Week Witness for Atlanta's Homeless by John Pickens in your June 1985 issue of "Hospitality." As I read it I experienced pain, grief, helplessness and thanksgiving for your ministry. It also evoked visions of a society in which all people can enjoy food, comfortable homes, community and loving treatment not dependent on whether one works or not, or any other human condition. As I read it I also cried because it evoked glimpses of our common human condition and human boundaries -- needy, greedy, fearful, insensitive, etc., etc. We all need liberating -- the oppressed, the oppressor, and all the in-betweens!

Lord, Open us to your
truth, grace and
Mercy!!!

Thank you for "Hospitality." Every time I find the time to read it I am moved by the quality of The Open Door's Ministry. May you continue to experience the abundant life of Christ in your midst. Enclosed is a contribution to support your ministry.

Sharon
Sharon Dixon
Rita Dixon

RD/cm

As good as such Christian community sounds, unfortunately much in our world and within ourselves keeps us from attaining it. We at the Open Door, I believe, would be the first to tell you that we have not attained it. Yet, for many of us, and I know for many of you, life in an intentional Christian community is a basic reality of our lives the vision of which we will hold to "even though it [Christian community] is hard to find." So my sisters and brothers - those of you who have experienced a shared life in Christian community and those of you who have yet to live such a life - I urge you to envision for yourself a life in Christian community and to then hold on to that vision through the thick and thin of it all until you find that place of Christian community that for you embodies the divine and sacredness that was Christ. I truly believe that there is such a place for each of us and that God wants us to find and will lead us to that place.



Adie Bethune

HOLDIN' TO A SACRED VISION

by

John Pickens

1. I'm holdin' to a sacred vision
Of love and fellowship Divine
Yes, I'm holdin' to a sacred vision
Even though it's hard to find.
2. A part of that sacred vision
Is seeing no one without
Yes, a part of that sacred vision
Is seeing no one left out.
3. Another part of that vision
Is worldwide peace and harmony
Yes, another part of that vision
Is a world with amnesty.

But our world is filled with pain,
Pain we can't quite explain.
And this world has death all round,
But it won't bring me down.

4. 'Cause I'm holdin' to that sacred vision
A new reality for me
Yes, I'm holdin' to that sacred vision
One I hope will set me free.

And I sing hallelujah, Praise the Lord
For visions in the night
Hallelujah, Praise the Lord
For visions bathed in light.

5. And I'll finally see that sacred vision
Of love and fellowship Divine
Yes, I'll finally see that sacred vision
One it took so long to find
One it took so long to find.

Peter Maurin

Works of Mercy

The best kind of apologetics
is the kind of apologetics
people do not have
to apologize for.
In the first centuries
of Christianity
pagans said about Christians:
"See how they love each other."
The love for God and neighbor
was the characteristic
of the first Christians.
This love was expressed
through the daily practice
of the Works of Mercy.
To feed the hungry,
to clothe the naked,
to shelter the homeless,
to instruct the ignorant
at a personal sacrifice
was considered
by the first Christians
as *the right thing to do*.
Surplus goods
were considered
to be superfluous,
and therefore
to be used
to help the needy members
of the Mystical Body.



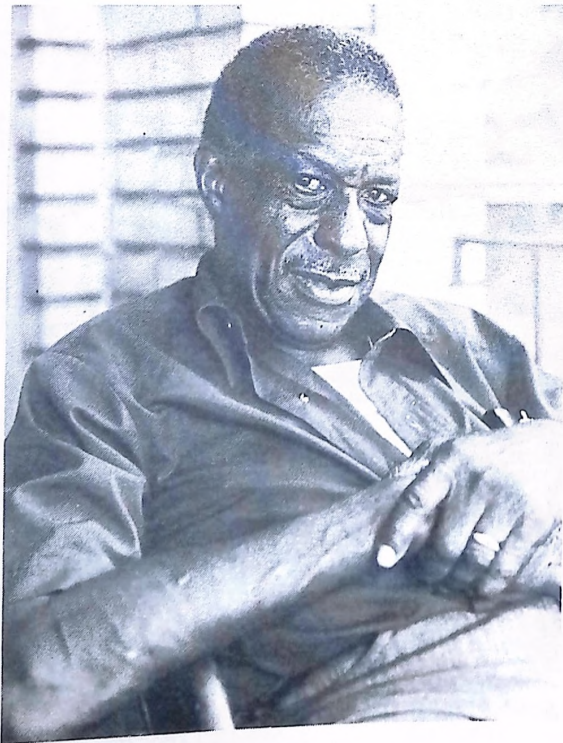
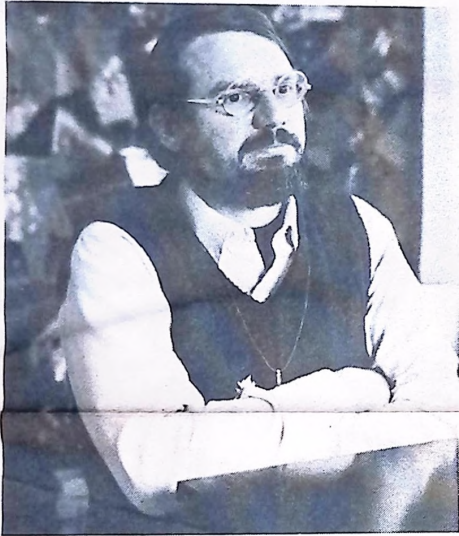




Photo- Rob Johnson