

HOSPITALITY

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

You Gotta Serve Somebody

by Murphy Davis

Editor's note: The following piece was delivered at Converse College, Spartanburg, SC, on May 4, 1990, at a symposium called "The Challenges for Women in the 21st Century."

As a way of introducing my remarks to you this morning, I want to say just a word about my life in the Open Door Community since this so deeply affects anything I would say to you.

We are a residential Christian community of 32 folks. We are African-American, white, Hispanic, young and old, women and men, formerly homeless, formerly prisoners and those of us who have always been housed; PhD's and illiterates, from backgrounds of the middle class, obscene wealth, and utter poverty.

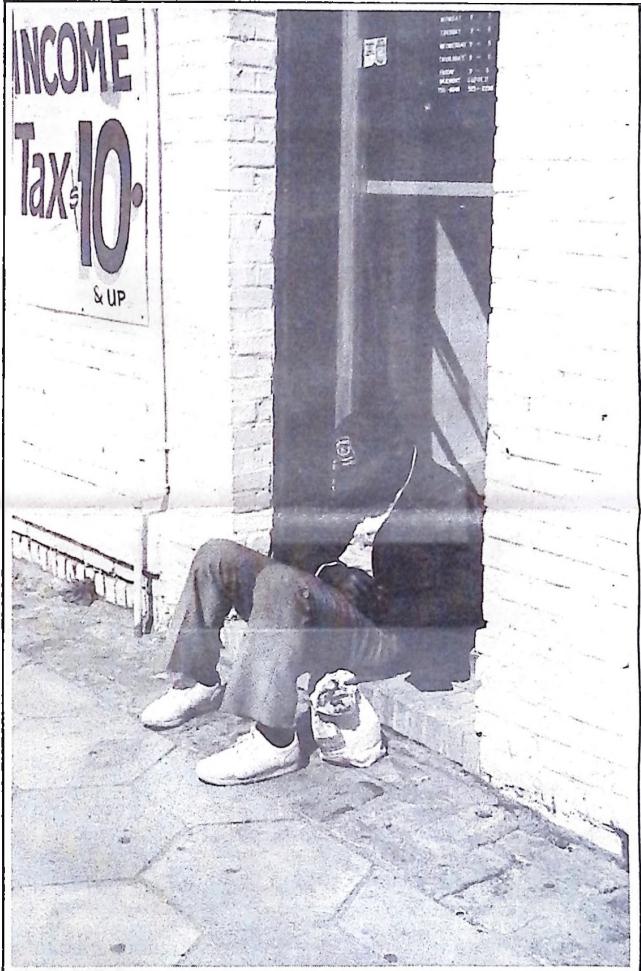
As a family we live together, eat together, worship, work, and sing together, share our money and other resources, and try to understand, learn from, and love each other.

Out of our family life and shared faith we live a life of servanthood and advocacy among and on behalf of the homeless poor of Atlanta: many more than 10,000 men, women, children and families who have nowhere to go; and servanthood and advocacy among and on behalf of prisoners in our state: the many and increasing thousands of women, men and children who live in cages. We particularly work among the 111 people who are on death row in Georgia.

As a way of beginning to talk about the challenge of service I'd like first of all to introduce you to three friends that I more or less brought along with me this morning.

First there's Charlie. When I left home yesterday morning Charlie was lying in the sunshine in our front yard waiting for the soup kitchen to open. He is, like hundreds of thousands of men and women and children across this land, homeless.

Charlie has been a working man since he was 17 years old. The last job he held was one he had for five years and he had worked up to \$4.00 an hour. But at 45 Charlie was slowing down a little and the employee



realized there were any number of 22-year olds to be had at the drop of a hat--and for \$3.35 at that.

So Charlie was fired. He was 45. It would be 17 years before he would be eligible for Social Security and none of his jobs had offered any benefits. The weeks and months of job hunting were fruitless: "Sorry," they all said, "but you know we're really looking for somebody a little younger. The strain on Charlie's marriage grew to the breaking point. By the time he found himself with no job and no family and no home, he began to wonder--in this macho culture--what kind of a sorry excuse for a man he was anyway.

He gets an occasional job out of a labor pool. He crawls out of his cat hole at

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4:30am and goes to sit in a dingy room full of hopeless humanity and prays for eight hours of work. Usually there's nothing for Charlie. But if he does go to work, he goes out hungry, and the soup kitchens will be long closed by the time he gets back. The best he can expect, though the company might pay the labor pool \$7.00 an hour for his work, is \$3.35 an hour minus a few bucks for transportation, hard hat rental, and all--maybe he'll have \$19 or \$21 at the end of a day.

The only place that will cash the check is a liquor store across from the labor pool--with a purchase, that is. So by night fall the best he's looking at is a bottle, a pack of cigarettes, and sixteen bucks. Try to live on it.

Charlie gets locked up a lot. From time to time he does 20-40 days in the City Prison farm for the terrible crime of public urination. We jail those who relieve themselves in public even though Atlanta has not one single public toilet. In other words, there is not a legal alternative. Even though with the money we spend in one year of punishing this heinous crime we could build and maintain public toilets all over the city. But for doing what every human body must do Charlie goes to jail.

Charlie also did 10 months on a one-year sentence for criminal trespass. That was from the time he was caught sleeping in an abandoned warehouse. He has another court charge pending because he went into Underground Atlanta and walked down the street. The police told him he didn't belong because he stank. So he was arrested.

When the pain gets to be too much for him, Charlie drinks. As he lay in the sunshine in our front yard yesterday a car drove by. A young man stuck his head out the window and screamed with wicked venom, "Get a job, you bums!" Charlie raised his aching head for a minute and then dropped it on his arm again.

Next I'd like for you to meet Jerome. Jerome was young, African American, poor and retarded. He was executed by the state of Georgia in June, 1986. He was convicted of being involved with another man who killed a woman in Columbus, Georgia.

When Jerome got his death warrant, the Georgia Association for Retarded Citizens got involved in his case. They examined him extensively, confirmed that he was clinically retarded, and made a passionate appeal on his behalf.

But our society had long ago given up on Jerome. I read one school record from the time he was about eleven. A counselor wrote this advice to Jerome's teachers and guides: "Jerome is slow and probably unfit for anything other than simple factory work. He's not worth your time."

The admonition was apparently heeded. Nobody wasted any time on Jerome. His mama loved him, but her life was hard. She was a maid for the county sheriff and though she worked more than full time, she was paid so little that they had to depend on government

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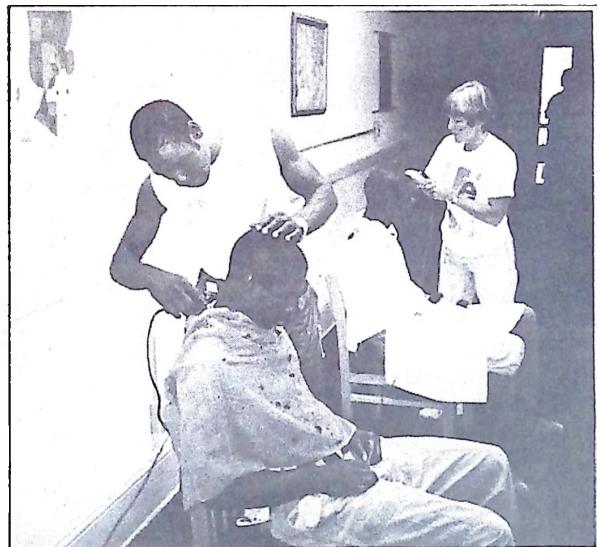
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HOSPITALITY is published 10 times a year by The Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper 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 following:

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Hair cutting is an important ministry at The Open Door. Joan DeWitt (right), and Benny Williams cut hair every week. Joan's year as a Resident Volunteer will be up in August, when she will begin nurse's training. We will miss you Joan!

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surplus powdered eggs and milk to keep from going hungry.

His life was one of degradation and neglect but Jerome, in his own simple way, tried to do right. When the state set his execution date they sent their own psychiatrist to examine him. Jerome tried to do the best he could on the intelligence test and he was very proud. The shrink said that he wasn't quite retarded enough to be spared from the electric chair.

The doctor was paid and Jerome died with 2,300 volts of electricity through his body once, twice, three times.

But before he died Jerome said to me one of the wisest things I think I've ever heard from anybody. We had been talking about prison life and Jerome looked at me and said: "You know--peoples was not made to dog around. Peoples was made to be respected."

And third, I'd like for you to meet Nancy. If you had met Nancy a few years back you would not have expected her to be a person who would end up with a ruined life.

She was a school teacher and her second marriage was to a prominent lawyer in a small Georgia town. He had once worked for the state attorney general's office and had friends in high places.

But for all his prominence Nancy's husband was a violent man. Soon after they were married he began to have outbursts that would leave Nancy bruised or with an occasional broken tooth or bone. Didn't Nancy's co-workers and friends and family wonder that she said she was "falling down the stairs" so often?

But we learn from Nancy that the problem of male violence against women and children cuts across every class line and every racial line. Our leaders like to talk about Willie Horton and stranger violence against women on the streets, and it's a problem. But we most often avoid the most obvious truth. And that truth is that the very most dangerous place for a woman to be in the United States of America is in a relationship with a man.

The most dangerous place for a child to be in the United States of America is in a family.

Hear it! Most women and children who are victims of violence are victimized at home. That's how deep our sickness is.

And for Nancy the sickness was eventually fatal. One night her husband came across the room toward her with a 2x4 in his hand. She turned, picked up his gun and shot him dead.

She was convicted of 1st Degree Murder and sentenced to life in prison.

She really and truly tried to make the best of her life in prison. She taught other prisoners to read. She wrote letters for the illiterate. She helped to set up a special program for mothers and solicited transportation for their children to be able to visit.

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The prison doctor told her that the lump that developed in her breast was benign. When it grew he insisted that it was "nothing to worry about" and accused her of malingering.

When she finally got another biopsy, it was too late. This "dangerous criminal" was sent home in a wheel chair to spend the two remaining months of her life with her teenage son and her elderly parents.



Now that you have met my three friends, I can go on to talk about the challenge of service. My title this morning should actually have been "You Gonna Have to Serve Somebody." Bob Dylan sings that song:

You might like to wear cotton
Might like to wear silk
Might like to drink whiskey
Might like to drink milk
Might like to eat caviar
Might like to eat bread
May be sleepin on the floor
or sleepin on a kingsize bed
But you gonna have to serve somebody...
It may be the Devil or it may be the Lord
But you gonna have to serve somebody.

The point is this: Everybody is serving somebody or something.

Not having made a decision does not mean we are not serving. Because you see, I really believe that anyone, especially of the middle or upper class, who is not serving her oppressed neighbor is serving the status quo.

In other words, as long as our neighbors are being oppressed among us--and they are--and we are not serving them, then we are serving those who benefit because of our neighbor's oppression.

We would not have homeless people if it did not benefit someone. We would not be spending millions, billions of dollars a year at every federal, state, county, and municipal level to build prisons and jails if it didn't benefit somebody. Do you mean to tell me that we've got all these billions and we can't build housing for people? Where do you think crime comes from? Despair! But prison construction is big business. Beware when you raise a question.

The oppression of some benefits others. Our government speaks, for example, of

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acceptable levels of unemployment." Meaning, of course, that a certain level of unemployment is actually good for the economy.

Tell that to the unemployed person!

You gonna have to serve somebody. The question is whom do we serve?

Now in traditional terms, when we talk about serving our neighbors, we really have in mind charity.

That's a great word: caritas. Love; passionate caring; compassion; advocating love; stand-up love.

But charity is often taken to be serving somebody a bowl of soup and thinking that's it.

- Don't get me wrong here: the bowl of soup is critical. (I live in a soup kitchen, for heaven's sake!) A hungry person has to eat and the sooner the better.

But let a love for justice walk hand in hand so that at the very same time we serve the food we ask, "Why is my neighbor hungry?" What's going on in our system that creates so much hunger in a land where we throw away more food than any people in human history ever dreamed of!

Charity and justice together provide a night's shelter while asking Why? Why? Why are all these thousands of people homeless? Women and men and boys and girls and families?

We have huge quantities of construction materials--and buildings everywhere--church buildings, government buildings, college buildings, so many of them standing empty most of the time.

Why? Why are so many of our neighbors homeless?

At many points in history women have taken important roles in the struggle for justice for the oppressed. I'd like to take a moment to mention one group of our foremothers who are a resource for us in these days: the ASWPL--the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.

After the Civil War, African American people were freed from the institution of chattel slavery. But southern white people were bound and determined to maintain a tight social control. In three decades after the war it is estimated that more than 10,000 African American people were lynched.

Gradually there emerged the myth of the Black rapist: threatening at every turn the deflowering of Southern white womanhood.

It became the excuse for lynchings that continued well into the twentieth century. And it was done in the name of Southern white women.

Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary Tolbert: bold, courageous, outspoken African

American women, stood up, protested, pleaded with their white sisters to take up the cause. "Because it is done in your name," they argued, "you are the very ones who can stop it."

It took about 35 years to get some real action. But in 1930, Jessie Daniel Ames joined with white church women from around the South to form the ASWPL.

Their motto as they picked up the crusade against lynching was "Not in our Names."

They were tireless in their petition drives, meetings, letter-writing and demonstrations and taking on their own men. Their effectiveness in bringing an end to the public acceptance of lynching is a reminder to us of the power of women working together to end oppression.

The crusade against lynching had its problems, but it was genuinely an interracial women's movement: the sort we need so desperately today.

Do you know? Do you have any idea how much the poor and your oppressed neighbor need you? Do you have any idea how much your life, your service, your compassion and love is needed by the many who suffer because of injustice?

Oppression in the form of racism, sexism, war and poverty is causing death and destruction around the world and right under our noses. The flagrant destruction of the earth and its precious resources and the destruction of human hope and human dignity are a part of the same death-dealing spirit that says: Serve yourself. Take what's yours and then get yourself a gun and an insurance policy to protect it. Use up whatever you want right now and let somebody else worry about it tomorrow.

Our earth and the earth's people (most of whom are in this very moment poor and hungry) need us to give our lives to service of our neighbors toward the goals of justice and social transformation.

It is so easy to be blinded by our class, our privilege, and yes, even blinded by our educations and educational institutions.

But in these days our ignorance of our neighbors' plight--whether willful or unwitting ignorance--our silence, and our inaction mean, literally and powerfully, service to a public policy that is killing our neighbors at home and around the world.

You gonna have to serve somebody.

Please. Let us get ourselves out of exclusive travel on the predictable path. Go into the shelters, the streets, the jails and prisons, the substandard housing. Don't let fear and oppressive myth control your life.

Meet your neighbor. Listen. Hear her story. Learn of her life.

Serve her.

A Day in the Life of the Homeless

by CM Sherman

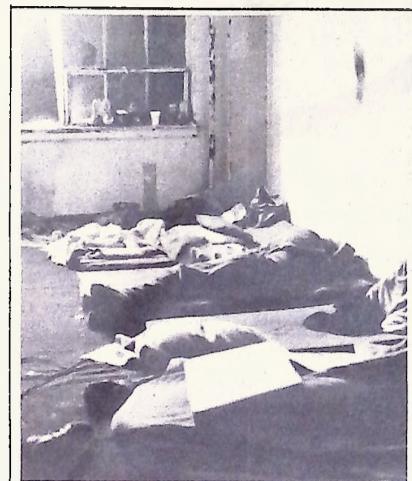
Venturing upon the subject of homelessness invariably necessitates the question: Why are people without homes? For a quick-fix answer, just pick up your newspaper and read the various articles, opinions and editorials about the issue, and I am quite sure you'll learn a lot from the know-it-all creatures who have never been unsheltered, but can explain, illogically, every aspect encompassing the condition of the homeless.

Because I am a formerly homeless person, I am forced to construct a personal opinion regarding those senseless views written and spoken about the homeless problem: They make me sick! So excuse me if I begin to step on some toes, but I cannot tolerate all the stupid media and personal comments which perpetuate the myth that homeless people are the authors of their own destiny.

Statements I have heard, such as, "The homeless can house themselves," are references to the mentally disabled, the destitute, disadvantaged, disenfranchised and disoriented, and such declarations could hardly come from a rational mind. But to say that such comments are immoral, despicable, obnoxious, repugnant and contemptible is perhaps too modest to express my passion against all of the hostile lip and pen service directed against the homeless.

An offensive newspaper article I read as a kid back in the late 1930's held Black folk responsible for their own illiteracy--even during the time of slavery. How ridiculous can you get? Yet some of the opinions I am hearing today bear just as much absurdity. When people don't have an unbiased frame of mind, the serenity, or the guts to honestly assess the issues, they have no choice but to blame the weakest party--usually the victims. This is either a stupidity, a prejudice, or a cowardice--call it whichever. Most folk--save for the courageous advocates--do not have the strength of character to go against the establishment and speak the truth about the hypocritical reality surrounding homelessness in America. Why? Because the cold reality of homelessness--more than any other issue of the twentieth century--represents the by-product of all the ills, the sins, and all that is wrong and troubling in our society: racism, discrimination, immoral insensitivity, economic injustice, and greed.

Racism is the major reason that about eighty percent of the homeless wanderers in Atlanta are Black people who have to struggle doggedly and fiercely against a discriminatory establishment which seems determined to keep them pressed along the outer fringes of society. And because of the immoral insensitivity on the part of an uncaring government which has betrayed and neglected the handicapped, over thirty percent of the homeless population are mentally incompetent folk who are unable to provide shelter for themselves. Because of the economic injustice in this country, many low-wage workers simply cannot afford housing. These conditions, along with the



Homeless men sleeping in an empty building.

constant razing of low-income housing units, have pushed the poor to perish in the streets.

But listen! That's only half the story! The hardship of the unsheltered folk extends beyond the inconvenience of living without a home. The meanest aspect of homelessness is that it predisposes the victims to much greater pain, misery and humiliation than what is seen by a casual observer. The only way to totally understand the degree of hardship and agony suffered by the homeless is to be forced, unwillingly and unconditionally, to live the life for a long time.

But while no rational person would voluntarily suffer the consequences of being homeless for an extended period, the Open Door Community offers the next best approach with a less demanding commitment which allows members and friends the opportunity to go out for a 24-hour vigil to share life with the unsheltered and explore the abusive social climate that besieges them. Through this vigil the participants personally experience the ugly cloud of oppression which hangs over the unhoused folk in the form of exploitation, bias, discrimination, harassment and humiliation which they suffer and sustain each day.

To anyone who dares to taste the sour plight of the homeless in Atlanta, I invite you to join us sometime for a 24-hour street tour. In the meantime, I will take you on a literary voyage of our last street vigil of when Elizabeth Dede, Ed Loring, Larry Travick, and I went out to share life with street folk. I hope that this journalistic account will serve to enlighten you to the facts of the life of homelessness.

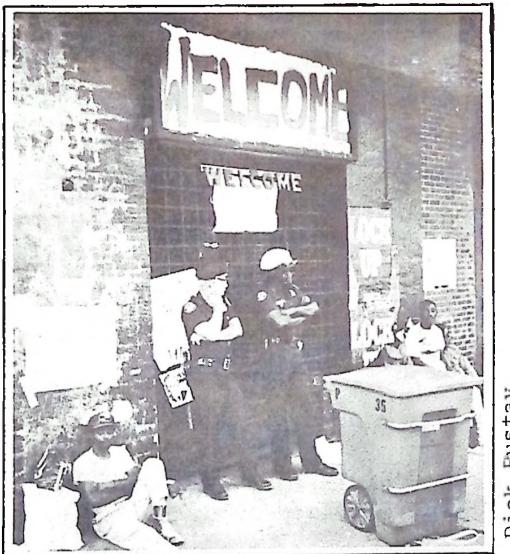
In going out to share a day with the homeless in Atlanta, there are certain significant locations we visit, including Woodruff Park. This was the second stop on our tour after we had gone to Odyssey III for dinner at about 4:15pm. Arriving at the park during late afternoon, we found the premises filled with homeless wanderers. For the lack of someplace else to go, the ill-fated, ill-treated "vagrants" surge into the park from every quarter. This is the only social life

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they know. Some flock in to rest after a hard day of toil from the labor pools; others stagger in just to shoot the bull and socialize, and still others come in to sadly air their grievances about being homeless. As we sat and observed that vivid spectacle of homelessness, I felt that those poor souls represented the living incarnation of a systematically oppressive society which cleverly segregates its people while paradoxically standing for freedom, justice and equality. Those helpless humans, segregated and rejected from the mainstream, took my mind back to the 1940's, for they were a perfect portrait of society's "new niggers." Today these are not of any specific race or color, but a new breed of 1990 underclass citizens whom the establishment keeps segregated through a deliberately unbalanced economic system designed to reject the uneducated, the unskilled, the marginal, the poor, and often the dark-toned folk in order to keep them relegated to the foot of life.

The four of us idled about without observing anything unusual until shortly after midnight when we witnessed an act of police violence against the homeless in front of the health department. A cop was speeding east on Butler St. and saw a homeless man lying on the steps of the health department. Despite his urgency, the officer could not resist the opportunity to extend the unofficial war against the homeless. He abruptly stopped the vehicle, dismounted, rushed to the steps, lifted his big foot, and stomped it about the poor man's arm, nearly crushing his hand while angrily shouting, "You can't sleep here! You gotta move on!"



Police at the Imperial Hotel. No one is allowed to sleep in this vacant hotel.

The atrocious incident filled us with alarm. Startled and speechless, Ed turned toward me grimacing in shock and disbelief. I suppose my own features contorted into an expression of amazement.

At around 4am we headed across town toward the Techwood area. Along the way we passed some shocking scenes, which brought tears to our eyes. They were scenes of homeless men and women scrambling desperately to get out of their abandoned buildings and

catholes before dawn to avoid being detected by the police. Some of them seemed to be disoriented, not knowing where to go to escape harassment by the cops. Others appeared to be worried about where they would get their next meal. One by one they staggered out into the streets of an unforgiving world. Some of the stronger and industrious ones headed to the labor pools to slave for a meager salary.

Elizabeth, Ed, Larry and I also went to the labor pools--but not for work. Instead, we visited several labor pools where we saw the cruel and systematic misuse of predominantly Black homeless men by white-owned labor services. Their cold-blooded exploitative employment contracting bears a marked resemblance to the eighteenth century slave markets where Black bodies were sold and traded for the convenience of whites.

From Techwood we hustled back across town to the Butler St. CME Church where our own community folk served us, as well as a multitude of others, grits, eggs, oranges, and coffee. The huge number of hungry people, mostly Black men, who gathered around the church to eat was a solid reminder of the economic injustice in Atlanta, where the population is two-thirds Black, but where whites receive a great majority of the total personal income. This sad condition, coupled with the abandonment of the poor by the Republican administrations, have rendered the Black male an endangered species with a low life expectancy. He has to struggle so hard against all odds and against a hostile establishment which seems determined to gradually destroy him through malnutrition, hardship and humiliation.

We left the church and went back to Woodruff Park where we witnessed a demonstration of official harassment of the homeless by police officers. Their scheme began that day, as it does every day about an hour before lunch, when an officer circulated through the park to direct threatening remarks at all homeless-looking persons in an effort to scare them away to make room for the hundreds of middle-class folk who converge on the grounds around noon.

Observing this official devilry on the part of police officers was an eye-opening experience for Elizabeth, who seldom visits the park during lunch. As she sat looking like a homeless person with her legs crossed on a bench while reading the news, a police officer approached, and said harshly, "You can't have your feet on the bench!" Later, however, she noticed that several other folks had their feet propped on benches, but because of their middle class appearance, they were purposefully ignored by the officer.

As noon approached the official harassment took on a more threatening dimension as a whole gang of officers stormed like rangers into the park, as they do each day, to make sure that no third-rate, ebony-skinned brother comes into close proximity with a first-rate, ivory-toned sister. At the entrances of the park the cops stood like paratroopers, their menacing presence designed to discourage--and thus deny--the admission of the underclass into the

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vicinity. There were horse-mounted police, foot patrols, motorcycle cops and other units, all keeping a hawk-eyed surveillance over the area in protection of the rich, who come in town and take the park from the poor. Elizabeth could scarcely believe her eyes as we watched the discriminatory action with disgust, loathing and revulsion.

A few hours later we concluded our vigil, but the memory of all the hideous things we had seen applied against the homeless keeps exploding in our minds. It is from that nightmarish experience that I have outlined a mere fraction of the many forms of injustice that are experienced by the unfortunates during a day in the life of the homeless. But of course, the mindless critics blame the homeless. Some claim that street folks are nothing but harassing agents, when in fact, the homeless themselves are the chief recipients of harassment by police officers and citizens who heckle and call them nasty and racist names. Some contend that the homeless are vile and violent, but they are, most often, the victims of violence and police brutality. Some say that the unsheltered are lazy, sorry, and take advantage of the goodness of society when, in truth, it is the thousands of homeless people in Atlanta who are abused, misused, exploited and taken advantage of by the heartless labor pools and big businesses which exploit their cheap services. Some declare that the unhoused are responsible for their own homelessness, but the economic injustice and the razing of over five thousand low-income housing units in the area without replacements during recent years prove that those critics are liars.

Not only do the homeless have to fight against the natural elements and racism, greed, economic injustice and insensitive leaders, they also have to struggle against the poisonous influence of the critics who purposefully paint untrue portraits of their condition to distract their deserved sympathy and support.

To me, it is sour and distasteful to digest all the poisonous servings of obnoxious editorial feedings against the homeless by critics whose virulent recipes are intentionally gauged to befit the appetite of the insensitive world which gloats over negative remarks against any reality clearly expressing society's neglect and irresponsibility. Yet, as the media serves the bad-mouth upon the homeless, as the police serve brutality upon them, and as the public serves them scorn--we are called to serve in their defense, for as we see the face of Jesus in the homeless, we are reminded that all the forms of injustice and bad judgement which are applied against the poor are also being pressed against Christ, who said, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me" (Matt. 25:45).

It is because of that spiritual principle and reality and to honor our servanthood of discipleship that we venture upon the 24-hour expeditions to walk that lonesome valley of homelessness with our friends in the street. For we know that a day in the life of the homeless is truly a visit with our Savior.

The Paradox of Promised Rest: Life is a Funny Thing

by Elizabeth Dede

"Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."

-Matthew 11:28-30

My friend Mary, who is famous for her practice of wearing ridiculous scarves into the most serious circumstances of her life, and who often instructs me to "put on a scarf" when I am taking myself too seriously, frequently says, "Life is a funny thing." Throughout our two-week occupation of the old Imperial Hotel, I found myself saying, "Life is a funny thing," often in circumstances that weren't really funny at all. While Mary is an easy-going person who truly enjoys life, she is not a flippant person and takes the business of enjoying life seriously, which includes a concern for the oppressed of the earth. So when she says (or when I found myself saying), "Life is a funny thing," it is with a real understanding of the paradox of the seriousness of people fighting for their lives on the streets of Atlanta, even while there is a joy that makes you want to laugh, or weep, in being a part of the struggle. The funny thing about life is that in order to be truly alive you have to be actively involved in things that aren't really funny at all.



Cleaning out the Imperial Hotel is hard work!

So it is that from our active involvement we come to a time of worship, and we are tired. We have been carrying a heavy load. The loads are many and varied that we bring. I am burdened by the anger I feel towards our city government and the business community. For me there is one simple solution to homelessness, and it has nothing to do with property values, or making downtown Atlanta attractive to tourists and conventioneers. To abolish homelessness, which I believe our God calls us to do, there is only one thing to do, and that is to move

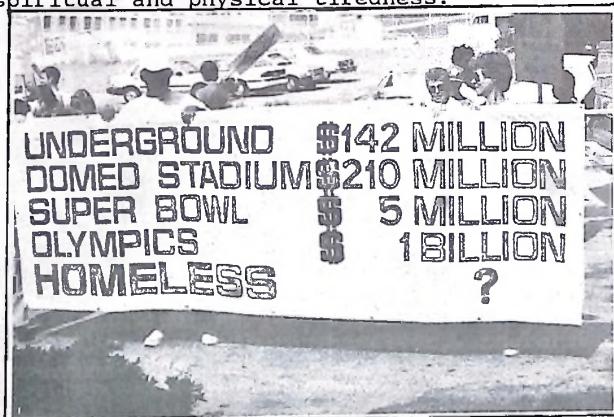
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every homeless person into permanent housing. Yet, when the city government and the business community had the very real opportunity to join together and provide housing for seventy-five homeless people, they irresponsibly and immorally said, "We won't do that. If we provide housing for seventy-five, thousands more will come asking for the same treatment." Amen, I say. That is exactly as it should be. Since the city and the business community are so concerned about the comfort of the tourists and the conventioneers, they must also be concerned immediately (not three and a half years from now) for the well-being of the thousands of homeless people. But being morally bankrupt, the city and the business folk refuse to accept their responsibility. Irresponsible behavior makes me angry.

I am also loaded down with confusion. We wanted housing so badly we could taste it, and for a time we could almost taste the sweetness of victory. But then in one moment, with one simple question asked by a homeless brother ("About this shelter, can it be open 24-hours?"), the victory turned to defeat, and there was no housing. "But shelter is a curse word," I said to myself. Housing is what we want. How were we so cruelly side-tracked? Why didn't we avoid that trap which the city laid? What role should People for Urban Justice have played? The questions of confusion are painful, and they go on into eternity, one leading to another, unanswered.

And I am weighed down by the heaviness of sadness I feel for our sisters and brothers who are homeless. On the last day of negotiations with the city, we drove off with jubilant shouts of "Housing!" ringing in our ears. We would not let the mayor push us around. We would knock on the table, point to our demand for housing, and demand Maynard's signature, even if that meant seventy of us would go to jail. Where is that Palm Sunday-like jubilation now? Once again, our homeless sisters and brothers were crucified on the cross of shelter, which is nothing more than a dragging out of the death of homelessness. I am sad.

For those members of the community who stayed at the Open Door for the most part during those two weeks, there is a knowledge, too, about weariness and heavy loads. The extra-heavy work-load they picked up in order to continue to feed the hungry while the rest of us occupied the hotel brings with it a spiritual and physical tiredness.



And then when we were finally re-united as a community, we had the exhaustion of death to face as we learned of Mitch Snyder's death. It was like waking up from a bad dream, only to fall asleep again and resume the dream except in even worse proportions. Life took on the quality of an inescapable nightmare, and we, weary as we are, could not find rest.

So it is good news that the Gospel promises us rest today. "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest."

But we are struck by the paradox of life again. The rest comes to us in a funny way: we must put on a yoke and pick up another load. How will we ever find rest?

Jesus tells us there's some learning to be done. We've got to know how to be gentle and humble, because that's how Jesus was; and that's how we will get to the promised rest. Now, for those of us with big mouths and angry guts, it is a difficult thing to learn how to be gentle and humble. Throughout our weeks at the old Imperial Hotel we had some fine examples: I think of Laura Cooper's straightforward saying to Shirley Franklin, "Shelter is a curse word." And Michael Allen's testimony to the healing and strength found through the community formed in an abandoned building. There is something humble, unpretentious in those declarations that give me strength to go on as I remember them in moments of quiet reflection. Or I think of the generosity of Johnny Duvalier, who went to get lunch for us while we were locked into the Imperial on our last afternoon. That is gentleness I can afford to learn about. Even the tall, silent presence of John Seals--like a tree--teaches me about patience.

And it is through learning like this that we can find rest. In another paradox, we put on an easy yoke and pick up a light burden because what we know is that we need to pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus. Or, as we were reminded by Rev. Albert Love, there is no victory without struggle--there is no Easter without Good Friday. We have to go to the table first, taste its betrayal, its bitterness, its finality--we must take Jesus' suffering and death into ourselves first.

But, tell me, Jesus, how can this be easy and light? How can struggle, betrayal, suffering, and even death become easy and light?

When we pick up our cross, we lay down our sinfulness. We pick up our cross in the knowledge of Christ, his suffering and death, his betrayal, his broken body and shed blood--all of this by and for us. We also pick up our cross in the knowledge of Resurrection: suffering leads to victory! It is sin that burdens us and makes us weary. It is my anger and resentment that wears me out. So let us rejoice that Jesus has gone before and taken all that garbage on. As gentle and humble folk we can pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Thanks be to God! The victory is ours through Jesus Christ! I can rest better, so much better, since I laid my burden down. Amen and Hallelujah! □

Keep the Olympics Out of Atlanta!

by John Barbour

Editor's note: John Barbour is a long-time faithful volunteer at the Open Door Community. He is also a long-distance runner, so we are grateful for this knowledgeable and caring piece on Atlanta's bid for the Olympics.

Because I love the Olympics, because I love athletics, and because I love Atlanta, I find the prospect of this city hosting the 1996 Games to be perfectly awful.

As an athlete, I am reminded that when Baron Pierre de Coubertin rekindled the Olympic flame in 1896 the Games were intended to be a celebration of human potential, by athletes and for athletes. The athlete is the unit of labor without which there can be no Olympic Games, and it is primarily the athlete for whom the Games should exist. The Atlanta bid, however, has been put together by people with scant interest in Olympic sports and in those who take part in them, not to mention the citizens of Atlanta. They are motivated by the lure of prestige and dollars.

Atlanta has a poor history of support for Olympic sports, as the United States Olympic Committee itself has noted. As recently as 1986, fewer than 1000 spectators attended the Martin Luther King Games track and field meet, the last world-class track meet to be held here. How many Atlantans remember Sam Graddy, a double-medalist in the '84 Olympics and a graduate of Northside High School? How many Georgians even know who Roger Kingdom is? He ought to be as well-known as Dominique Wilkins and Dale Murphy. Last year the Vienna native broke an eight-year-old world record in the 110-meter high hurdles, and in 1988 became only the second man in Olympic history to win back-to-back gold medals in the event. He was named the world's outstanding male track athlete for 1989. Kingdom twice ran in the King Games here. How many Atlantans saw him?

Sometimes the Peachtree Road Race is cited as an example of Atlanta's support for Olympic-type sport. The Peachtree, with 40,000 runners, is a magnificent and unique event, but it cannot reflect the state of the city's support for Olympic sports. How many of those 40,000 could name last year's male and female Peachtree winners, or what their respective Olympic events are and how they fared in the last Olympics? It is one thing to gear up to run in an annual 10K race, and quite another to follow and support the sport itself, just as to play on the company softball team does not mean that one supports major league baseball.

As a long distance runner it frightens me to consider the potential effects on athletes of endurance events held in Atlanta. If the Atlanta Organizing Committee (AOC) truly had the best interests of the Olympics and the athletes in mind, they would schedule the Games for October, as did Tokyo in 1964 and Mexico City in '68. But that would conflict with football season, and when push comes to shove, Atlanta is a football town. (However embarrassing the Falcons may be, they still mesmerize us, and the fan loyalty

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of UGA and Tech backers is unassailable.). The AOC has proposed that the '96 Games run from July 20 to August 4. As I write this, it is 90 degrees Farenheit outside with approximately 90% humidity--similar to that of the proposed time period. I am an experienced marathoner, yet I would not wish my worst enemy to run in these conditions. At Moscow in 1980, John Treacy, a potential medalist, collapsed from heat exhaustion with half a lap to go in his 10,000 meter semifinal. It was ten degrees cooler than here and a good deal less humid. Perhaps the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is unaware of this danger. When Mexico City bid for the '68 Games, its representatives were asked point blank by IOC members if the city's 7000-foot altitude would have any effect on athletes and performances. They were told, straight-faced, "No." Altitude, in fact, completely altered the face of the '68 Olympics. Australia's Ron Clarke held world records for every flat race from two miles to 20,000 meters, yet finished a badly beaten sixth in the 10,000 meters, the Games first track event; the ashen-faced Clarke passed out from oxygen deprivation and, it was later revealed, was near death for several minutes.

Any endurance athlete should feel insulted that the AOC would propose such a schedule. Here's an idea: let's find the day and time for which the men's marathon is scheduled (most likely August 3 at prime afternoon television time) for '96, and on that day and time this year let me get together with Billy Payne and anyone else from the AOC for a 26-mile run anywhere in Atlanta. They'll find it's a lot different from wining and dining the unelected aristocrats who make up the IOC at posh Caribbean hotels. I'm ready and waiting.

As a citizen of Atlanta, I have ceased to be amazed at the things that can be done in this city when certain people put their minds to it. The city wanted the Democrats, the city got 'em. (The national media's main emphasis in their reportage on Atlanta was the city's unsurpassed level of boosterism.) Somebody floated the idea of a domed stadium, the next thing you know the Governor said it was "doable," and from then on (despite the fact that people lived where power brokers wanted to put the dome) it was virtually a fait accompli. As remarkable as is Atlanta's ability to cut through red tape, it is often at the expense of public discussion. This is inherently undemocratic. Who are the people of the AOC? Who elected them? Were public hearings ever held to discuss the impact of the Olympics on the city? A recent visitor from Los Angeles, upon seeing AOC paraphernalia at Hartsfield Airport, remarked to his Atlanta companion, "You guys had better hope you don't get those Games. For two weeks the city's an impossible place to live." A developer's plans are subject to the zoning board's approval, but there is no such check on the AOC to guarantee scrutiny in the name of the public good. The Journal-Constitution coverage has regularly trumpeted the AOC's cause, though as a major financial backer of the Olympic bid, the paper's editorial impartiality is subject to question.

The AOC is already spending seven million dollars in the campaign simply to get
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the Olympics--money spent whether Atlanta gets the Games or not. A million of this are public monies from the state, Fulton County and the City of Atlanta. A mammoth public relations campaign has included television ads, billboards, and lobbying trips to the denizens of wealthy IOC members, often fronted by Andrew Young. (\$1.6 million alone has gone for travel and lobbying, another \$800,000 to entertain IOC members in Atlanta.) To administer the Games themselves will cost another billion dollars. The AOC assures us that the Olympics will be profitable (\$56 million worth), and have published an economic impact statement to this effect. To be sure, the statement paints a rosy picture. Yet it was not independently prepared, but done in-house by the AOC itself, and thus its conclusions are at least debatable. Moreover, in its calculations the AOC fails to consider the effect of normal or alternative economic activity. That is, the economic impact of the Olympics (estimated as the equivalent of 20 Democratic conventions) is compared, incorrectly, to zero economic activity without them, thus falsely inflating the figures.

But let's assume that the AOC's most optimistic projections are correct, and that the Olympics bring a hefty profit to Atlanta. What happens to the money? What will the "trickle-down effect" of the Olympics be? What has been done to ensure that the Olympics will benefit every citizen of this city, from the wealthiest and most powerful to the poorest of the poor? The answer is, nothing.

Recent Olympics have not been kind to the poverty-stricken people of host cities. In Mexico City, many were driven from the inner city to make room for the Games, resulting in student riots with scores of Mexicans killed by the military. The Mexican government did its best to divert public attention from the riots, which by comparison make Kent State look like a tea party. In Los Angeles, rents of low-income housing units around the Coliseum skyrocketed, putting poor people onto the streets. And in Seoul, many of the poor were systematically pushed back into the hills by a government that wanted to hide them from the world's view.

Atlanta has yet to indicate that its behavior will be any different. When the Democrats (the "party of the people") came here in '88, there was talk of a "vagrant-free zone" and many of the poor and homeless were "temporarily relocated"--through no choice of their own--from the area around the Omni. More recently, the numbers of homeless coming into shelters and soup kitchens around the city experienced an unprecedented and dramatic decline in early April, due to a security crackdown designed to move street people out of the center city and which coincided directly with the final visit to Atlanta by IOC members before the September selection of the 1996 Games site.

Underground Atlanta and the Georgia Dome have been hailed as economic boons to the city, though so far the poor have suffered because of them. There remain ten thousand citizens in Atlanta without homes. There's

shelter space for only a fraction of that number, though shelter space itself is inadequate: housing is what's needed. As these projects have demonstrated, there is the power to get things done in Atlanta when its leaders have the will. An Olympic Games requires dormitory-style housing for the thousands of athletes and coaches from around the world who come to take part. What a perfect opportunity for the city to meet its low-income housing needs--use the Olympic Village to house the homeless after the Games! Yet the AOC's plans call for all Olympic housing (\$60 million worth) to be built at Georgia Tech and Georgia State, reverting to the universities' use afterwards.

But the Olympics, we are promised, will turn a profit. They will benefit all Atlantans. I, therefore, ask the AOC: Are you prepared to promise that all profits from the 1996 Olympic Games will go toward the creation of the low-income housing downtown that is needed to get our citizens without homes off the streets, out of the shelters, and into decent housing that can enable them to hold jobs that pay a living wage? If you believe everything you've been telling the IOC, that Atlanta is truly "too busy to hate," then you must answer "Yes." Couvertin said that the purpose of the Olympics was not to win but to take part. The same may be said of citizenship in this city.

The city of Toronto, a competitor for the '96 bid, has seen its citizen support erode because its Olympic backers failed to address the needs of its poor. The people of Oakland have said they didn't want the Raiders football team at the expense of that city's desperate human needs. Up to this point, the AOC has functioned as an oligarchic, anti-democratic public relations machine without public accountability. Now it has the chance to show that it cares about more than its own image, to add some compassionate substance to its abundant style.

In a graduation address at Emory a few years ago, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Daniel Boorstin spoke of "the amateur spirit" in its root terms, applicable not merely to athletics as we have come to connect it with the Olympics, but to business and political leadership. "The leader, I suggest, is one who is imbued with the amateur spirit. The leader must be an amateur in the original sense of the word. From 'amare,' to love, and from the French 'amateur,' meaning lover, it originally meant someone who did something for the love of it." Wealth, fame, and power were not mentioned.

Send the '96 Games to Melbourne, which hosted a successful Olympics in 1956. It's down-under's turn, and it will be springtime there. With the same resources, civic pride and Olympian will, we can build a better city for everyone. And let's run that marathon, Mr. Payne. We can pass time talking about where all that housing might go.

N  Olympics

N  Olympics

Grace and peaces of mail

Editor's note: The following letter is a copy of a letter Frances Pauley sent to Tom Teepen, the Editorial Page Editor of the Atlanta Constitution.

July 12, 1990

Dear Mr. Teepen,

You were most kind to write such a thoughtful answer to my June letter. As you might imagine I have done a lot of thinking and soul searching in the last few weeks. When it is very hot and I am very tired my old head doesn't work too well. I only wish that the pain that we get from seeing so much suffering and hopelessness around us would diminish like so many other senses. I have always relieved my tensions by "doing something about the issue, even if it were wrong." Now my lack of strength makes me immobile.

As I struggle the clouds lift and things seem to sort out. HOUSING stands out as THE basic problem.

HOUSING precedes everything else.

Housing precedes employment. A man cannot move beyond the slavery of the labor pool when he has no roof to go home to; no safe spot for his extra clothes; no way to be clean and prepare a cup of coffee.

Housing precedes sobriety. I agree completely that we must have more treatment centers for drugs and alcohol. The rich have a chance but the poor have scarcely any at all. But Tom, when the treatment becomes available, in time it is over and let's say successful--the woman or man has to leave for their own place. If no affordable housing is available--back to the streets and it all starts over.

Housing precedes education. We are continually fighting for shelter children to be allowed to be in school. All sorts of road blocks are thrown up when the kids don't have a permanent address. That is the least of it. How can they study? How can they do their homework? How can they lead any sort of normal life?

Providing housing is expensive and the public and the politicians seem very reluctant to talk about subsidies for the poor. The realtors have such a strong lobby. The name of the game is "Blame the Victim." I wish I could do just one little tiny thing to help, but I can't. I truly don't wonder that Mitch Snyder hung himself. I am thankful that he is finally at rest.

From conversations in the beauty parlor and the restaurants and around about, I believe the Imperial Take-over helped raise the consciences of many people. Thank God no person was injured. I visited my new friends in the shelter the city provided. I went home sick. Every person had a cot or a pallet. The city workmen were buzzing all over the place trying to make basic repairs to a building that is scheduled to be torn down. The repairs could have been made to any one of dozens of buildings that could have been permanent SRO housing. Would not the temporary rental of the rooms at the Atlantan Hotel have been cheaper? The offer the city refused sounded good to me!

It isn't just the cost, is it, Tom?

Thanks again for your letter. We'll hope and pray that the Mayor lives up to his promises. I feel that he played a little dirty pool in the negotiations. I hope I'm wrong. I want him to be a great Mayor.

Let me know if I can ever be of service.

Sincerely,

Frances Pauley

Editor's note: The following letter is a copy of a letter to Mayor Jackson written by Esther Rechtman on June 10, 1990--eight days before the Imperial Hotel Take-over.

Dear Mayor Jackson,

Many years ago when you first ran for public office (I believe the Senate seat against Talmadge), my son Neal, a Grady High School student, went by bus to your campaign headquarters to see if you needed help. On his return home, he said that you had plenty of volunteers, but you needed money, so he gave you a dollar.

We have been watching your career with much interest all these years and now as a citizen of Atlanta, I would like to share the feelings I have about the homeless in our city.

Whenever I'm downtown and I see the old Imperial Hotel, I'm truly saddened to think that it could be remodeled and become an SRO residence. It would remove an eye sore and provide much needed housing. There are also many vacant lots on Ponce de Leon that would be a reasonable location for an SRO building. I also feel that there would be a great many volunteers willing to provide some of the labor for this project.

I understand how very complicated the problems are, but people have landed on the moon and solving this sad situation should be a reasonable challenge for intelligent people.

I would like to hear from you regarding this need in our community.

Sincerely,

Esther Rechtman
Atlanta, GA

Mayor Maynard Jackson
Atlanta City Hall
Atlanta, GA

re: Homelessness in Atlanta

Dear Mayor Jackson,

I applaud the efforts of the homeless and the Open Door Community to convert the Imperial Hotel into temporary housing. This underscores our city's urgent need for short-term housing for our estimated 10,000 homeless citizens as well as for SRO's and other "bridge-the-gap" type housing which will allow the homeless to get back into the conventional housing market.

Please make the elimination of homelessness a priority of your administration, and please act quickly. Such a basic human need should take precedence over the outlay of city funds and energy being used to promote the Olympics, the Super Bowl, or Underground.

Sincerely,

Karen Henize Geiger
Atlanta, GA

Dear Ed,

Let me give you my personal thanks for your taking part in the demonstration of the homeless at the Imperial Hotel. You called attention correctly to an eminently sensible solution, if only the possible author of it could see it that way. Mr. Portman could do himself and the business community a whole lot of good, and vulgarly, it would be good publicity for him, to alter and refit the old hotel as a single-person occupancy hotel for the homeless. I saw that you suggested it. I had thought of it as the glaring and obvious solution for this one immediate problem and an example. Of course, the city has to go ahead quickly with this kind of help, not to mention the federal government.

Cheers for your good efforts.

Elizabeth Stevenson
Decatur, GA



WE ARE OPEN. . .

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00am until noon, from 1:30 until 6:00pm, and from 7:00 until 8:30pm. The building is open from 9:00am until 8:30pm those days. (Both phone & door are not answered during our lunch break from noon until 1:30.) Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are open from 7:00am until noon. Sunday afternoon our door is answered until 5:00pm.

OUR MINISTRY. . .

SOUP KITCHEN--Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-12 noon

SUNDAY BREAKFAST--Sunday morning at 910, 7:15am

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST--Monday-Friday, 6:45am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES--Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9-11am
(Be sure to call; schedule varies)

USE OF PHONE--Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon, 1:30pm-5pm.

SHELTER REQUESTS--Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon.

BIBLE STUDY--Alternate Tuesdays, 7:30-9pm.

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household & volunteers/supporters), Sept. 7-9.

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

NEEDS

- Carpet
- * * Men's Work Pants * *
- Men's Work Shirts
- Men's Underwear
- Grits
- Cheese
- Mayonnaise
- Multi-Vitamins
- MARTA Tokens
- Men's Large Shoes (12-14)
- Coffee
- Non-Aerosol Deodorant
- Hams and Turkeys
- 35mm Camera
- Telephoto Lens

From 11am til 1pm, Monday through Saturday, our attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11:00 or after 1:00, it would be helpful.

Newspaper Requests--If you or a friend would like to receive HOSPITALITY, please fill in this form and return to Willie London at the Open Door Community, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Open Door Community Worship

We gather for worship and Eucharist at 5:00pm on Sunday evenings followed by Supper together.

Join us!

During the month of August worship will be held at 910.

Four times each year the Community has a weekend retreat outside the city. This replaces our evening worship at 910 Ponce de Leon Ave.

HELP WANTED

The Alderson Hospitality House, a Christian community in the Catholic Worker tradition, is looking for a couple or persons to assume responsibility for the operation of the ministry. The Alderson Hospitality House provides lodging, meals, transportation, advocacy and moral support for those visiting loved ones at the nearby Federal Women's Prison. Willingness to clean/maintain large house, cook meals, provide a warm welcome to many people and a commitment to justice work are essential. Room and board, stipend, vehicle provided. Alderson is in the heart of Appalachia--beautiful mountains, rich culture, many challenges! Located 5 hours from Washington, DC. Contact John and Dee Cole Vodicca, Alderson Hospitality House, Box 579, Alderson, WV 24910 (304) 445-2980.