

HOSPITALITY

Volume 4, No. 8

December, 1985

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ADVENT

by Murphy Davis

Advent is almost here. In the rare and delicious moments I have taken lately to think ahead, I've thought of Advent and how this most wonderful liturgical season will never be the same for me after the celebration of Advent in 1983.

The season is a celebration of all the best and most joyous themes: peace, joy, hope, love, light. If you can manage to overlook the tacky glare of Consumeramericanchristmas, the season is one of joyful anticipation: hope for the coming of God: the birth of a tiny babe who came and yet comes as the Liberator, the one who calls us out of our slavery and into the glorious light of God's freedom.

At the end of the first week of Advent in 1983, we were gifted with a visit from Jurgen Moltmann, a well-known German theologian who had spent the fall term teaching at Emory University. We had invited him for supper, and on the cold rainy Saturday in December, he sloshed into our house bringing immediate warmth with his wonderful contagious laughter and endless questions about our work and the plight of the poor in the USA. We ate supper and spent the evening in animated conversation. We had a great time and invited him to come back for worship the next night.

Sunday night he bustled in with a bottle of Liebfraumilch tucked under under his arm. We gathered for worship and excitedly waited to hear what he would say to us--this world-renowned theologian, author of many scholarly books (some of them very thick!).

Jurgen Moltmann told, very simply, the story of his coming to faith. When World War II ended, he was a 17-year old soldier in the German army and was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in England (or maybe Scotland?). As the days and weeks went by, he and others learned what they had not known: of the slaughter and death in Nazi Germany before and during the war. In face of the millions murdered, despair seemed the only real option. All of this happened and he had been a soldier in the German army. The world became a very dark and hopeless place. In face of such staggering evil, how could there be any reason for hope?

Someone came to the prisoner-of-war camp and distributed pocket-sized Bibles (in English!). As he spoke to us years later, Moltmann pulled the same little Bible from his pocket. It fell open with a slight touch to the book of the prophet Isaiah.

"I read this," said Moltmann:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined..."

Cont. on page 2 - Advent



FRITZ EICHENBERG © 1950

NATIVITY 1950

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined...
For the yoke of their burden,
and the staff for their shoulder,
the rod of their oppressor,
thou hast broken...
For unto us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Parent, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:2,4,6

"...and I shall never forget it. The world had become only darkness for me. But slowly...gradually...I began to see a very tiny flicker of a light. Advent is the time of remembering."

"You know," he said, "I understood eventually that unless it is dark, you have no need of the light. If you are surrounded by light you will not seek light. But when it is very dark...ah, the light! For those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, light is precious, light is life itself. God comes to us like that: a tiny flickering flame: a great light in the midst of the deep darkness of our lostness and despair."

It was good to hear this deep and personal sharing in our Advent journey. Little did I know how I would cling to that reflection for dear life, for the events of the remaining weeks of Advent shook my faith in ways that I could hardly have imagined on that night.

On December 15, in the middle of the third week of Advent, my very good friend whom I had visited for four years, John Eldon Smith, was electrocuted by the State of Georgia. Just ten days before Christmas. Smitty was a 54-year Pennsylvania man, well loved by his elderly parents, his young grandchildren, a number of close friends, and the other men on death row. His life was snuffed out by two jolts of 2500 volts of electricity, carefully administered by button-pushing guards who were "just doing their jobs."

The days that followed that killing found our community about the tasks of burial and comforting Smitty's family. It seemed that everywhere around us the electric chair was being celebrated. "Now we would all be safer. For this monstrous defective bit of sub-humanity had been stricken from the face of the earth." (Could they really be talking about that warm-hearted, funny little man I knew so well?) The cry for revenge grew more and more strident.

One week later we had made a feeble effort to pick ourselves up to prepare Christmas dinner for our homeless friends. The temperatures in Atlanta suddenly fell to zero and below. It was as cold in Atlanta--for a full week--as anyone could remember.

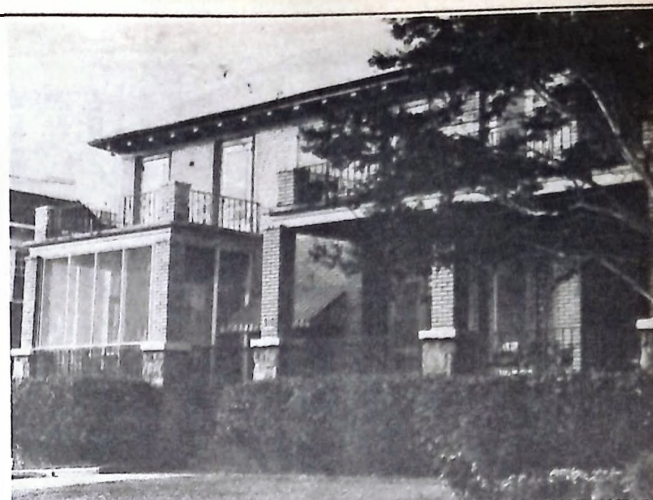
But it was Christmas. And so most of the soup kitchens closed because the volunteers needed a holiday. And most of the night shelters in town were unable to extend the hours of protective shelter because so few volunteers were available to be there.

In that fourth week of Advent, and even as we celebrated the Nativity of our Lord, twenty of our homeless sisters and brothers died in the streets and alleyways of our city. Some twenty bodies were found--frozen stiff in dark corners, abandoned cars, vacant buildings. Other homeless people lost legs, toes, fingers. Some of those who suffered and died that week were known to us by name. Others were not.

Cont. on page 3 - Advent



Rita Corbin



HOSPITALITY is published 10 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 following:

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Advent Meditations

by Ed Loring

Week One

I EXPECTATION

Even if we go through the deepest darkness
We will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with us.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect us.

Scripture: Isaiah 62:1-4

Jesus is expected. Mary is pregnant and the prophets have told us of a coming power and king for generations upon generations. Jesus is expected; we have marked December 25th on our calendars. New names will be given, fidelity will mark God's covenant, and kings will behold the glory of Christ the King who shall reign in Jerusalem.

Ah yes, but Jesus is unexpected. He is not the awful Judge John the Baptist expected. He is not the Davidic king Isaiah expected. He is not the simple hero Simon Peter wanted. No. Jesus will be born in a barn. He will grow up in Galilee and then come to Jerusalem on a donkey: And there Jesus shall die on an old rugged cross.

So now we are sent like Isaiah before us to "speak out to encourage Jerusalem;...not to be silent until she is saved." Let's go.

Cont. on page 3 - Meditations

Day and night we cooked hot food and fixed hot coffee and tea to take out onto the streets. We squeezed as many extra bodies into our dining room and the Druid Hills Presbyterian shelter as the space would bear. But it all seemed a mere drop in the bucket.

Advent of 1983 was a time of death and intense suffering. Nothing--nothing in all of my background as a white over-educated Christian; nothing in my studies; nothing in my spiritual instruction or pastoral counseling--nothing had prepared me to meet with such utter failure, grief, and suffering.

Up to that point we had spent a number of years in the work against the death penalty and organizing on behalf of homeless people. And there, in a period of two weeks (Christmas, yet!), we were shown that we could point to nothing but failure and broken hearts. I could not pray, for I had no idea what to say to a God who would allow such suffering among people I knew and loved. For many months that followed, my body was bone-weary and my heart seemed sore to the touch, and I felt the only thing I knew was utter confusion.



But again and again, Jurgen Moltmann's simple story rang in my ear. "Unless it is dark, you have no need of the light." I knew for sure that it was very, very dark. I also knew that I had never had such a deep longing for the light.

I deeply believe now that God sends us of the First World to share the plight of the world's suffering people precisely to create this longing. When we pad ourselves and protect ourselves from the tragedy that is the common experience of most of the world's people, we live in a world that is artificially lighted like the blinking lights of a Christmas tree: the slightest trauma and the light goes out. Until that time we are hardly inclined to seek light, because we think we have enough of it.

"Unto us a child is born..." Oh, how we long for that child who is the light of the world. When John the Baptist, that rough-and-tumble Advent figure, is in prison, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Without a pause, Jesus said, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

When we grope in the darkness, we seek light. When we grope through death, we seek resurrection. When our lives are lived in solidarity with the poor and oppressed of the earth, the light shines on us in the promise of good news that comes to the poor; in restored sight and hearing; in the cleansing of disease; in the leaping and dancing of our lame legs.

Expectations diminish. Hope grows. We are not abandoned: God is with us! *

Prayer for the Week

Let us pray this week for those who this Advent do not expect Jesus. For those who live without hope and who do not care about the living or the dead.

Let us pray this week for fidelity in our covenant with God. May we be loyal and faithful to Christ Jesus in all our sayings and in all our doings.

Let us pray that our children will not confuse Santa Claus and God the Holy Parent.

Week 2

II WHO IS THIS CHILD?

The Lord prepares a banquet for us
Where all our enemies can see us;
The Lord welcomes us as honored guests
and fills our cups to the brim.

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

These verses constitute an early christological hymn confessing who this Jesus, born of woman, crucified by Rome, was. From the moment of Jesus' birth the question of who is this one emerges. Shepherds tending their flocks by night and Herod tending the affairs of state by day, ask the question.

As we read these verses in Colossians we learn of the cosmic significance of the carpenter. The visible likeness of God; the One through whom everything was created; the head of the church and the source of the church's life; and the One who is bringing back the whole universe to God by his death on the cross.

Most important among our Christmas images is a mild child in a manger. But let us not forget that Christ is not simply another one in a long line of prophets and reformers; nor is Christ one made to suit our reformations and value systems. No, this One Lord is Lord of All, God himself is with us!! And this God is above us and before us. Let us bend our knees and bow our heads. Amen.

Prayers for the Week

Let us pray this week for those whose God is too small. For those who are faithless; for those who seek to create God in their own image (which we all do).

Let us pray for the birds of the air and the animals upon the earth, giving thanks for their beauty and liveliness; and asking that the cold weather not harm them.

Cont. on page 4 - Meditation



Rita Corbin

Week 3

III YOU GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN YOUR HANDS

The world and all that is in it
belong to the Lord;
the earth and all who live on it
are God's

Scripture: Titus 2:11-15

During Advent we note the theme of the universality of God's love; and we see that God's light shined on all people including us Gentiles. Here in Titus we hear that God's salvation is for all humankind--that everyone is included by God's grace. Does that mean that everyone is automatically saved? Is there a place named hell where unbelievers suffer for eternity? If salvation is universal why bother with the Church? With discipleship?

Let us listen to the Word: For God has revealed God's grace (that is Jesus the Christ) for the salvation of all humankind." No matter what the answers to the above questions are, it is very clear from scripture that God wants everyone reconciled to God and neighbor. Jesus Christ died for and rose for...everyone.

Out of God's love and friendship for us all, we are instructed to give up (yea, and be over against) the values and lifestyles of secular society - what Titus calls "ungodly living and worldly passions." Discipline is not a lonely struggle to observe certain rules; rather, discipline is a shared style among the recipients of grace who work together to ward off the demons of worldliness. Let it be so!

Prayer for the Week

Let us pray today for all who have not heard the good news of God's reconciling work for all people through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray for all those who work in soup kitchens and for all those who stand in the line in front of our home

Week 4

IV HAPPY BIRTHDAY

To you, O Lord, we offer our prayer;
In you, Our God, we trust.

Scripture: Luke 2,1-14

Well, it has happened. We have waited through Advent--longed deep in our hearts--and now the time has come.

There is so much to say, so much to tell; but one thing that interests me just now is the simplicity of it all. A child is born. Stars flicker and angels sing. Shepherds begin to move toward Bethlehem. No doctors, no hospitals, no telephone calls, no fast trips in an automobile. Mostly things are quiet, even the cows low. And yet a Savior is born --Christ the Lord!

Perhaps during this next year we can learn to live in the manner that Jesus was born. Sort of quiet and calm. Not rushing too much...listening to angels in the sky and cows upon the earth. Don't be afraid. Let's try and see.

Prayer for the Week

Let us pray with thanksgiving upon our lips for the birth of Jesus Christ our Lord!

Let us pray for those who this Christmas are hungry, cold and lonely. How many names can we put with our petitions?

Let us be filled with thanksgiving for the excellent work that Rob Johnson does as our treasurer and that Joanne Solomon does as our administrative assistant.

*

Dear Editor

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at the Open Door:

I write to tell you that to hear of your ministry there fills me with joy and hope, and I keep your work and the people you serve, and all of you, in my prayers. I have only recently read the October '84 issue of Sojourners, and the article about the Open Door was the first I read. I was filled with so much excitement! All the things you are involved in are concerns of mine also, and that there is actually a mission being active in so much is thrilling and amazing!

I am working with Habitat for Humanity of Americus, Georgia, overseas. I am in Ntondo, Zaire, for a 2 year term. (This is the reason that almost every magazine I read is 6 or so months behind!) You have probably heard of Habitat, as there is a project in Atlanta, and Habitat is in so many countries overseas. I am involved with, not the direct building of houses, but with community development. We're in a small village 90 miles south of the equator. Right now its early morning and there's a heavy rain so everything stops - nobody comes to work, no beggars at my door, so I take this time of uninterrupted quiet just to commend you all in your work.

Thank you so much! I pray for your ministry that God continues to bless it and the people you reach see Christ there.

Rejoice!

Love, Janet K. Leckrone
Depeche Speciale
Ntondo via Mbandaka
Zaire, Africa

Friends,

Hospitality is sometimes an expensive publication to read (Not reading it would be more expensive)! With continued deep appreciation for your witness.

Kathy Young



Watching a Friend Die in the Electric Chair

John Spenkelink and Seven Years on Death Row

by Thomas O. Feamster Jr.

Editors note: Tom Feamster is a friend of the Open Door Community who was a pastor and friend to John Spenkelink for the several years preceding John's death in Florida's electric chair. Last year Tom wrote this article for The Voice. We share it here with his permission. Tom is currently pastor of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Louisburg, North Carolina.

John Spenkelink was executed by the state of Florida on March 25, 1979. The memory of that day is very present in my mind today, because I have just written a Christmas card to John's mother, Lois, and his sister, Carol, in California. It seems ironic that I write my thoughts and feelings about that time in my life on the celebration of the birth of the one we call the Prince of Peace.

This recording of events is from the perspective of a fundamental view of the Christian faith. Fundamental in that the God whom we worship in the Judeo-Christian tradition is indeed a living and forgiving God. One of the ways in which we know of the intensity of that love is in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. I am convinced that we must view events in our lives through the vision of this Jewish carpenter, removing as best we can our personal biases and innate fear of our own death. I do not write to "pull on anyone's heart strings" or to touch emotion to sway thoughts one way or another.

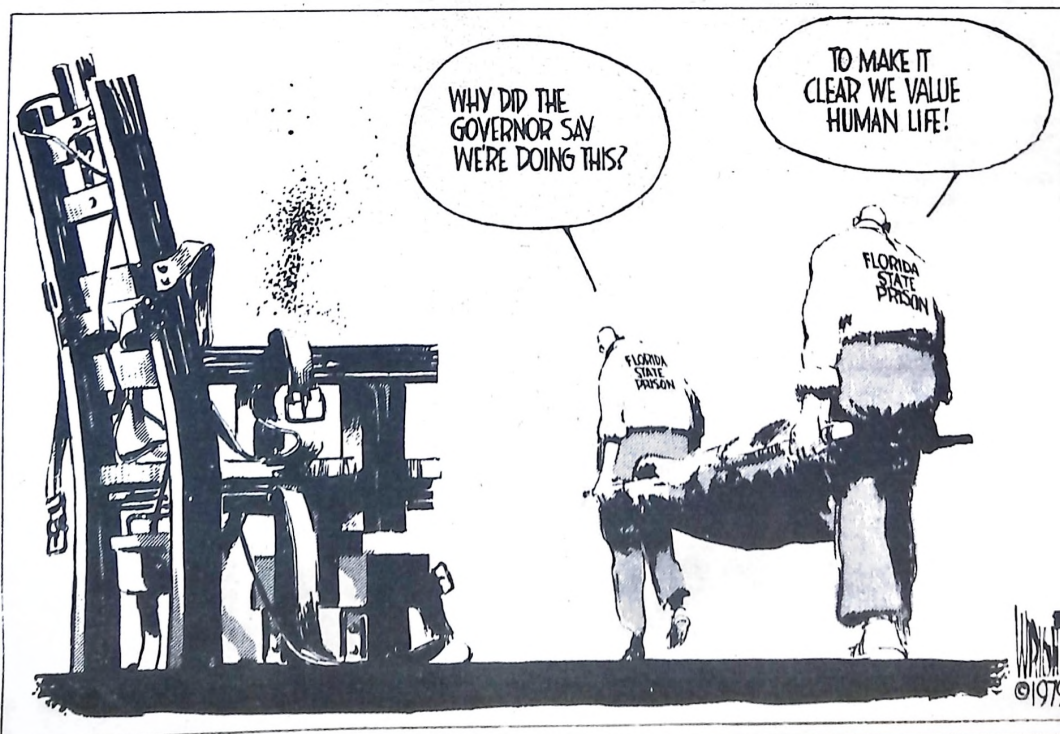
Indeed, only to feel sorry for John Spenkelink, his family, or victims of violent crime is to miss the mark. Jesus certainly exhibited personal feelings as he went about living his life of faith, so vividly portrayed as he wept with his friends at the tomb of Lazarus. However, at the center of the life of Jesus was something much deeper, not to be equated with feelings or thoughts but with purpose. Put simply, that purpose was to unite those around him with themselves, their own brokenness and separation from God, so that healing could take place. Only to the degree that we can rid ourselves of the bondage of revenge, retribution, hate, and anger that so fills the heart of all of us will we be able to see the deeper purpose of transformation in the life and ministry of Jesus.

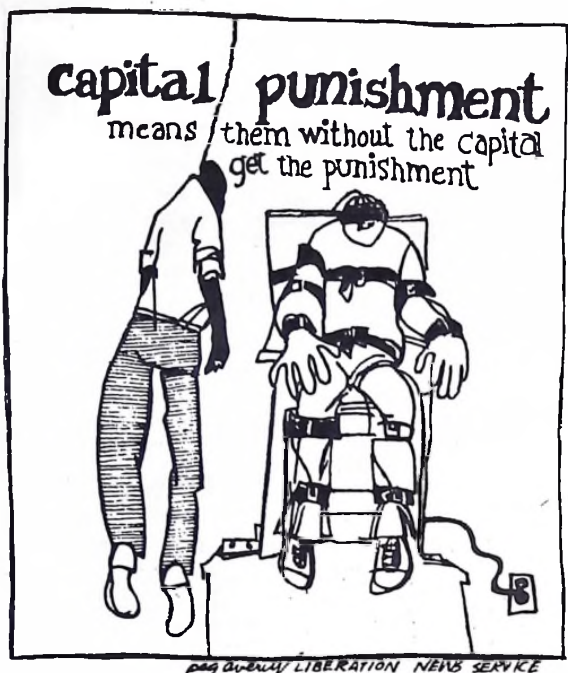
John Spenkelink was raised through his teens in California. To say that he "grew up" in California would be a misnomer. He grew physically, but his emotional growth was stunted, I suspect, from birth. John was a rebellious child, who developed a very poor self-image through his teen years into young adulthood. His life took on a self-destructive bent following his discovery of the body of his father, who took his own life by asphyxiation in the family automobile. John was 13 at the time. By the time he was 16 he was a full-fledged heroin addict, having been in and out of a good number of juvenile detention centers in California. His story is not unlike the stories of the majority of men and women incarcerated in prison and on death row across the United States.

At age 24 John walked away from a minimum security prison in California and began drifting across the United States, ending at age 31, strapped in a chair wired with electrical current that would shoot 7,500 volts of electricity through his body, until he was left lifeless, smoke smoldering from his burnt flesh.

I met John in the Spring of 1977. He had been on death row for five years previous to our meeting. Over the next two years I spent a few hours each month visiting with him in what was called the Colonel's room, a visiting area used exclusively for death row inmates and their visitors. We talked mostly about the meaning of life and explored ways of reflecting on the experiences of our personal lives and the experiences in the lives of historical figures in the Judeo-Christian tradition. We talked a lot about the faith of Abraham when he was confronted by God with the sacrifice of his son Isaac. We talked mostly about Jesus of Nazareth, about his humanity, how he was confronted with the realities of life, and how he dealt with the violence in the community that executed him.

Cont. on page 6 - Watching





Over the several years that John spent in Florida's death row, he adopted some new perspectives on life. Part of the reflection for the two years that I spent with him was a maturing process of a new way of picturing himself particularly and of picturing life in general.

I was not the only person visiting him. His family, lawyers, and others working feverishly to stop the insanity of capital punishment were frequent visitors to the prison - compassionate people, who were able to see the victimization of all actors in the drama. Victims of a system caught up in "getting even" or in the words of so many, "an eye for an eye."

Early Friday evening, March 18, 1979, I was taking a ride on my bicycle. When I returned home there was a message from my daughter, Abby, by the telephone in the kitchen. "The governor signed the death warrant. They're going to kill John!" she wrote. I had always known that it was a possibility, but the reality of being a participant in such a brutality was always in the future. I had come to know John beyond a headline in a newspaper. I knew he was more than "KILLER'S EXECUTION SET." I believe for the majority of people, when someone commits a heinous crime, that person ceases to be a human being and becomes the crime itself. In other words, for many people, John was a "killer," not a human being with the God-given senses of us.

I immediately went to the prison to see John. I met David Briarton, the superintendent. He was visibly nervous. This was the first time he was involved in carrying out the death penalty. He refused to allow me to see John until the next day. I spent the rest of that Friday counseling and being counseled by the cadre of friends that had grown around John over the past seven years.

The week preceding the execution will have to wait for another writing. It was a week of coming to grips with the stark reality of a system moving, however slowly, towards its own demise. How often during that week I thought of the Old Testament prophets, most especially the prophet Amos, as he screamed to a people that had become self-serving and completely out of touch with their faith. Their symbols, very much like ours, had become shrines of the elite and the privileged:

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:21-24

One would search in vain to find a person of means put to death in the United States.

John received a temporary stay of execution on Wednesday morning at 1:30 a.m. We were sitting in the "holding room" when the news flashed across the screen of the television set placed there to fill time for the guards while waiting for the execution that had been scheduled for 10:00 a.m. Friday. The excitement of the reprieve for those of us close to John, most of whom were standing vigil in a field across from the prison, was short-lived. The next morning the full Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and the execution was rescheduled for 10:00 a.m. Friday.

John asked me, if the execution were to take place, to be a witness. My response was that I didn't think I could do it. He said to me, "If I can walk into that room and sit in that chair, you can be there. I need to see a friend when I look out at the witnesses."

I agreed, but I had no idea where the courage was going to come from. All of my religious talk suddenly became empty words!

I was allowed to stay with John until 8:00 Friday morning. He took his first and only Communion at five minutes to eight. He then asked if we could pray for the governor, but he requested I not mention that he had asked this, because people might think he was trying to get sympathy. We then embraced, as best we could with bars separating us, and I was escorted away.

At 10:00 o'clock I was taken to the "death house," as it was called, to witness the brutalization of a brother. I walked into the room. There were two rows of chairs, six in the front and six right behind them, with twelve state witnesses. I stood in the back of the chairs with David Kendall, John's lawyer and friend. We faced a "picture window" with a venetian blind in the down position, closed so that we could not see John being strapped into the chair. However, we heard the maneuvering, and my mind began developing metaphors of the event taking place on the other side of the window. I pictured the warden and guards strapping their brother into a chair and placing a dome-shaped metallic hat on his head with electrical wires protruding out of the top. At that moment my metaphor was interrupted by the words of my Lord as he screamed into the silence of that room: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

At the moment the blinds were raised, my eyes met John's. After that split-second visual contact, his eyes seemed to roll to the right. The warden pulled a mask of some sort down over John's face and immediately gave the executioner the signal to pull the switch. The first jolt of electricity, 2,500 volts, passed through John's body; his body jerked slightly against the straps that bound him to the chair, and his left hand curled into a half-open fist position. After that first jolt the warden signalled the doctor to check John's heart beat. The doctor opened the front of John's shirt listened with his stethoscope, turned and signalled the warden that John was not dead. The warden signalled the person at the controls to pull the switch again, 2,500 more volts of electricity through the body of this human being. The same procedure with the doctor. By this time smoke was curling up from the searing flesh of John's left leg. Another signal from the doctor, once again a nod to the executioner, and 2,500 more volts through John's body to extricate any trace of a beat from his desecrated heart. It was finally over. After 13 minutes and 7,500 volts of electricity, my friend was reduced to a heap of burnt flesh at the hands of his brothers and sisters. "And Jesus wept!"

John Spenklink was on death row at Florida State Prison for seven years. I went to his clemency hearing before the cabinet and governor in Tallahassee. I listened as David Kendall spoke eloquently about John, his early life, and most especially about the changes that had taken place in his life over seven years of incarceration. His words fell on deaf ears. I am convinced that John's death was as much political as retributive. I am also convinced that the person whom we executed on March 25, 1979, was a person whose life had changed.

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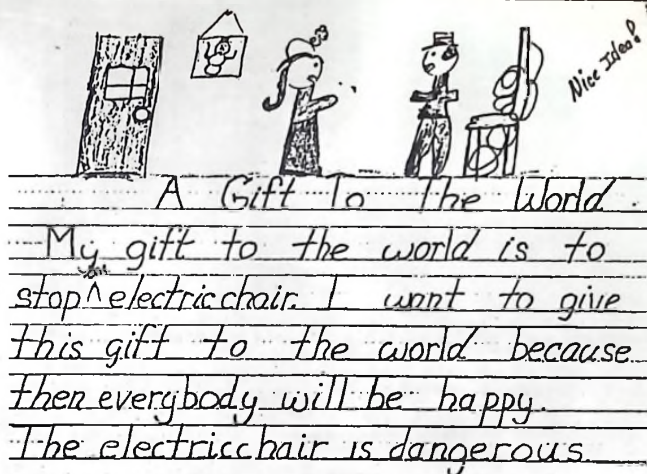
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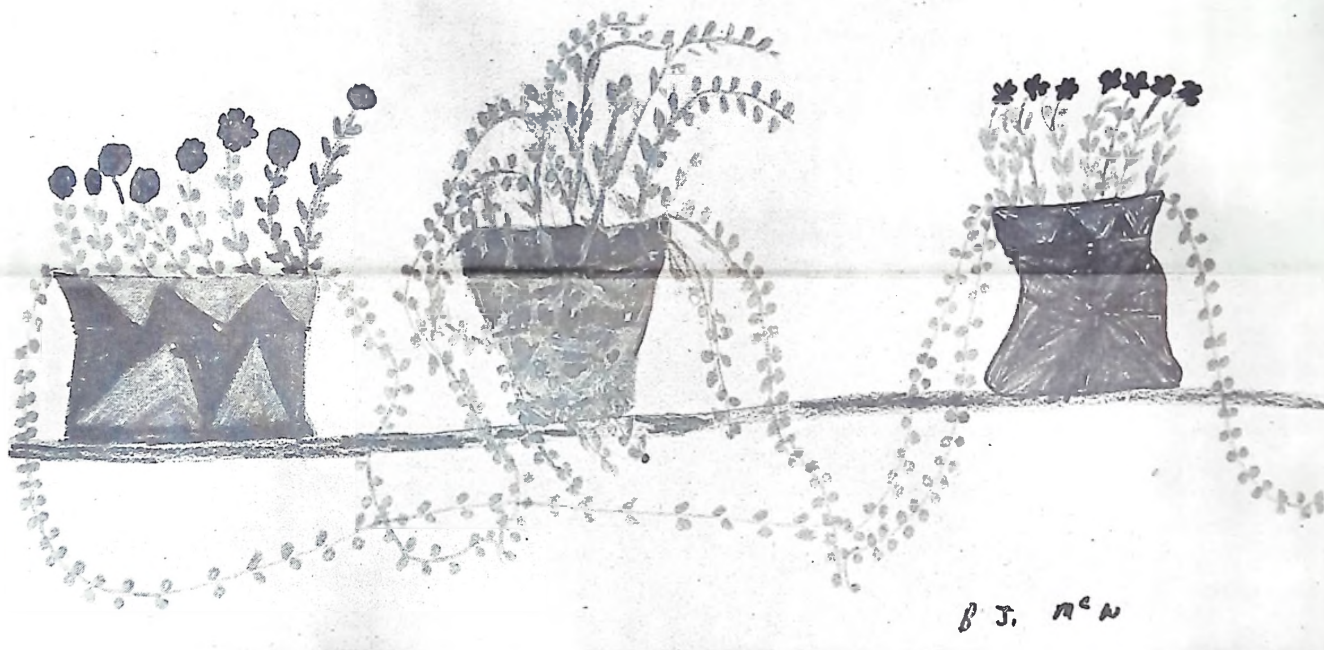
I have struggled to find a way to understand how my brothers and sisters in the Christian faith can find justification for such an atrocity as the pre-meditated killing of another human being. I have no trouble understanding the state system. It is much less trouble to put people to death than to use the resources necessary to participate in alternatives. I will never believe that a country with technology to send people to the moon is unable to develop a system for dealing with people who commit crimes other than by killing them.

Finally the death penalty is not really the issue. The issue is systemic. We live in a violent world where throughout history people have raced toward self-destruction. For the Christian and those in other religious persuasions, hope is not found in man/woman's simple expertise in resolving the individual and corporate violence of the heart, but in the mystery of a transformed heart, touched by a loving and forgiving God that allows us to see ourselves as the same flesh, the same blood, tied to one another by the Logos. May God have mercy on our souls.

*



Molly Batchelder's first grade teacher in Chicago asked her class what gift they would like to give the world. This was seven-year old Molly's response. (Molly is the granddaughter of Mary Alice Rankin, the associate director of the Illinois coalition Against the Death Penalty)



Betty McWilliams

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 - Monday, Wednesday, Saturday - 9:00 - 10:00 am

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 (Dec. 4, 18, Jan. 1, 15, 29)

FELLOWSHIP MEAL - Alternate Wednesdays 6:30 - 8:00 pm. (Dec. 11, Jan. 8, 22)

ALL-DAY RETREATS - Every 6th Sunday (for our household & volunteers/supporters) - Dec. 8, Jan 19 (call for details)

Standing on the Rock

by Ed Loring

Early one morning last July, I stood upon the harsh concrete of the sidewalk beside Edgewood Avenue. Butler Street CME church had closed its basement for renovations, so we were serving the Butler Street Breakfast to 150 folk on the sidewalk. As soon as we began, various protests from Hugh Spalding Hospital, the Edgewood Ave. Blood Pressure Clinic, and others began. Once the Atlanta Police called and asked me what in the world we were doing eating breakfast on the sidewalk. When I explained, the caller thanked me and told me how much he appreciated the feeding of the hungry which we do. He reminded me, as other police folk have also noted, that those of us who feed the hungry and shelter the homeless help everyone in the city by responding to basic survival needs. Those who protested our sidewalk cafe style (standing room only!) feeding were not opposed to the actual feeding hungry men and women. The complaints were that these children of God were visible, ugly, noisy, and crowded the sidewalk. How long would it be before we were back downstairs in the basement of the church where early morning commuters would not see them? Two weeks was the estimate and most were willing to endure, although the threats toward us escalated once or twice.

One morning as the breakfast line was about to end I had an experience that continues to bring me and this little, fragile, loving community a wealth of clarification.

First a very handsome and well mannered young Black man approached me and asked who was responsible for this feeding. After I told him that Monday was my morning for the Butler Street breakfast, he informed me that he was a recent graduate from the Emory Dental School and had an office just a few doors down. He began to tell me the various reasons why the poor blacks must be forced to leave the area. His fundamental point was that the local business association had already begun to organize around this issue and we were seen as responsible for so many hungry people. Why else would we be feeding 150 people each morning?

Just as I began to develop an unpopular thesis that neither shelters nor feeding ministries create homelessness nor hunger, another young Black man approached me yelling at the top of his voice. He said that we had run out of hard boiled eggs before he got there and that this proved we didn't care anything about the poor. He went on to observe that we just used the poor for our own interests and he hoped we would never bring our lousy breakfast down their again. By this time the doctor was at my right hand telling me that I would hear from the business men before long and the hungry man was at my left hand telling me to get out of that area with my dirty old grits and eggs.

Wow!! Now that was a Biblical moment when the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing!! After the two men left - going in opposite directions on Edgewood Avenue - Ann Fitz came and gave me a simple word of encouragement. We then cleaned up the sidewalk, got into the tired old van, and returned to 910 Ponce de Leon.

Since that July morning I have often pondered that message and experience. I think the symbol is simple. God is love and God's love reaches out to all of us. The young Black dentist with his dreams of a downtown office free from the urban and racial problems of hunger, homelessness, and hate has a vision and hope surely not foreign to the God of Exodus and a Promised Land. Nor is God distant from the cries of despair from a hungry and wounded Black man who reached out toward the white woman holding the pot that a few minutes earlier was filled to the brim with hot eggs lovingly boiled and was now empty. God is love and God is struggling and hurting in this city to bring us together - dentist, poor, black, white all of us into a life which shares our resources so that no one is hungry and no one is homeless.

But while we do this work, this ministry among, with and on behalf of the poor, we must beware. Neither the dreams of the professional to make it in American society nor the despair of the wounded who cry out in anguish as they perish on our city streets are places on which we may take a stand. As I stood there on the Edgewood Avenue sidewalk with the dentist and the hungry man - for opposite reasons - telling me to get out and that we were the cause of the problem, I came again to experience Jesus Christ - the Rock, the firm foundation - the only place to stand while feebly following Jesus, while hungrily feeding the hungry. *



Ade Bethune

Guru Nanak

by Gogi Basi

9

Note: During America's "Thanksgiving Week" (November 25 - 29), a special spirit of sharing will be undertaken in the Open Door's feeding ministry. An Atlanta "Sikh Study Group" is underwriting the cost of all of our meals for homeless people this week. Natives of India, our recent Sikh neighbors are reaching out to share some of their resources with the hungry of our city. An important inspiration for these religious folk is the hospitality extended to the poor centuries ago by their teacher, Guru Nanak. We welcome this interfaith witness, remembering the spirit of sharing that at least received token expression on that first Thanksgiving day in America. Here, Mr. Gogi Basi of the Sikh Study Group shares a bit about their religion and call to feed the poor.

Nanak, normally referred to as Guru Nanak by all those who know of him, was born in 1469. The word Guru means teacher; in the case of Nanak it means a religious teacher. A person following the teachings of Guru is known as a "Sikh." The Sikh people all over the world will celebrate the birth anniversary on November 27, or on Sunday immediately following that day, by worshipping God - the Creator - and by sharing.

Guru Nanak preached the worship of God and the supreme act. He said that it is impossible to fully describe God through words. To state some of God's attributes Guru Nanak writes:

"There is only one God, that which is Omnipresent. God's name is Truth. God is the Creator, present in everything, without fear, devoid of animosity and is free from the events of birth and death. God is God's own creator and can be reached through the blessings of a teacher."

Guru Nanak emphasized that the worship of God, through singing God's praises, even though a supreme act, is only part of the whole. Truthful living is the other part. He writes that Truth is high, but still higher is Truthful living. Truthful living encompasses all aspects of the life of an individual.

According to Guru Nanak, every happening in this universe is in accordance with the will of God. We must accept the will of God and live accordingly. That is part of Truthful living. The other parts include:

- a. Worship of God and only God. God is supreme and everything else is secondary. Guru Nanak opposes the worship of all secondary persons, deities, or idols. As such Guru Nanak opposes rituals. According to him the worship of God is of the essence and not the method, place or body posture or movements.
- b. Sharing. They alone have found the right way who earn through toil and share their earnings with others. It is best exemplified through a story from Guru Nanak's own life. Guru Nanak was given a sum of money and asked to invest it in a venture he thought would bring the highest returns. He used this money to feed a group of hungry people.
- c. Treating everyone with equal respect. God is the creator of all life on earth, therefore whom can we call bad, and whom good? God is present within all and hence we must treat everyone accordingly. Guru Nanak crosses the boundaries of religion by saying, "The one who grasps the Truth, realizes there is but one religion of all humankind; as God is one and has ever been the same."
- d. Using Nectar of Truth as the only intoxicant. They who deal with the nectar of Truth do not cherish insipid worldly wines. Guru Nanak forbids the use of intoxicants in general.

Above are some of the parts of truthful living. In Guru Nanak's philosophy worship of God and Truthful living are the best acts that a human being can perform.

Guru Nanak's followers conclude their daily service with a plea: Through Nanak, may Your glorious name, O God, be ever in ascendancy; and may all prosper by your grace.

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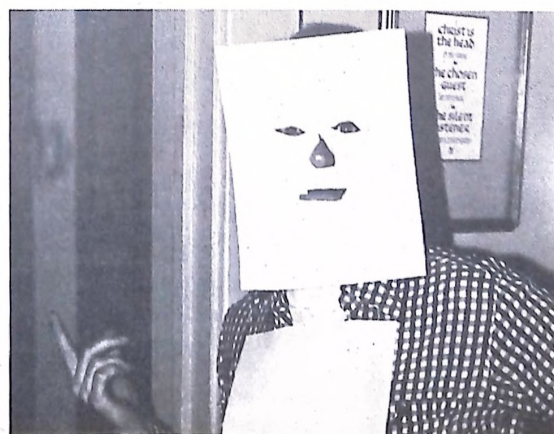
AAH Report

Beginning October 23rd, and during the month of November, the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless have held their regular, semi-monthly meetings at the Butler Street C.M.E. Church in downtown Atlanta. We have gathered together following the early morning breakfast that is served there daily to over 150 street people by the Open Door Community.

It was decided to hold our meetings at the Butler Street Church in an effort to not only provide a more accessible location for Atlanta's homeless, but to give them an opportunity to become more directly involved in advocacy efforts for the homeless.

Our first two meetings have been a time of listening, learning, sharing, and gaining a closer sense of solidarity. It is hoped that our homeless brothers and sisters will experience a greater voice in issues directly relating to them as we join together in seeking vital and meaningful dialogue and discussion. It is hoped, as well, that more of our homeless friends will actively participate in the A.A.H. and that leadership from among the homeless will emerge and further strengthen their voice.

The A.A.H. will be meeting again at the Butler Street Church on December 4th at 8:45 a.m., and we invite any interested or concerned individuals among our readers, and elsewhere, to join with us. If you would like further information on how you can become involved with the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless, please feel free to call us at 876-6977 or 874-9652.



Eat Your Vegetables *

by Jim Carter



Me and the dog just won't eat squash; we
know it is no good.
No matter how you dress it up, it's not a
decent food.
We've seen it baked and fried and raw and
even put in pie,
But no way that you disguise it can fool
our practiced eye.

I'm worried though, about some things, and I
will tell you this:
That broccoli, that strange green plant
always tried to miss,
Has now acquired a brand new taste - I even
ate it twice.
I smacked my lips and licked my fork, and
said "that's very nice."

And yesterday I passed my plate and got
some orange stuff,
Cooked carrots! Ugh - can you believe a man
would eat that fluff?
But wait - this had a tangy taste I'd
never known before.
With puzzled brow, I ate it all, and even
asked for more.

"What's going on," I quizzed the Lord, "Can
taste buds really change?"
I went and bought green beans last week,
I knew that that was strange.
And I had prayed that God above would
teach me to eat right,
But broccoli, and carrots too, without a
bitter fight?

So now I sit and pet the dog, with worried
mind and heart.
I do my best to comfort him, but we have
grown apart.
His eyes are glazed, his head is down; he
thinks I am a meanie.
He cannot trust me anymore, I may next
eat zucchini!!

* A plaintive cry uttered by millions of parents
each evening at dinner as their children devour their
hamburgers, jello, pie and bread, and flush aside the
spinach and english peas on their plate.



Retreat

by Rob Johnson

I still can't believe it. After six days, a group of well-educated paid volunteers had to end a prison simulation game years ago because the pretend setting became too brutally real. College students acting as guards in a social psychological experiment became downright mean within 24 hours. Well-adjusted people playing prisoners had emotional breakdowns within three days. It seems that the basic over-controlling rules so typical of most prisons were enough to shape dramatically the actions, feelings, and even self-perceptions of actors in a very short time.

If all this happened in a pretend setting, you've got to wonder what happens in a real prison. How could one run a "compassionate" correctional facility? What about me? What capacity for brutality lies hidden inside? Can I discover and even confess that there is a controlling guard within me...and then be freed to serve rather than control my neighbor? What does Jesus' death, resurrection, and presence in the Eucharist have to say about power, control, and reconciliation - in prison and elsewhere?

These were just a few of the reflections explored by the Open Door "family" on our recent Sunday retreat to Camp Calvin. The focus for our time away was a provocative slide/tape show about the "Stanford Prison Experiment" conducted in 1971. As a graduate student in social psychology in the mid 70's, I was already familiar with this well-known study. It is one of many research projects that have revealed how powerful roles, rules, and authority figures are in shaping our behavior. All of us were moved by the presentation. In some new ways, I believe we sensed the importance of tapping into God's power. Given the pressures to conform to the world's ways, how much we need God and each other to resist becoming callous oppressors.

One thing about our retreats: we do become renewed by God's power. Despite the dreariness of a rainy day and the harshness of our study topic, we were uplifted by other "realities"- the warmth, colors, and smells of the lodge's fireplace...songs, food, and children's laughter...a game of Scrabble in which Jane spelled "excolling" (50 point bonus!!) on her first turn... John's half-court basketball shot in a game of "mule" that went in !!! only to be repeated for an incredulous audience minutes later!!!! Woow!!!!!! Free time was not structured. Each of us made those delightful choices about being alone or playing together or doing a bit of both.

I really enjoy our every-six-weeks retreats. They offer a challenging blend of structure and formlessness; responsibility and freedom; dependence and independence; focus and drifting. Some of us like these dichotomies in differing proportions. My six-year old daughter Christina and I took a walk in the rain near the lake. I could have strolled for an hour; she got cold and bored in fifteen minutes. Later inside we got more in sync. A game with a tennis ball had us sliding around on the tile floor in our stocking feet. We both lasted about twenty minutes, ending in giggles hugging each other.

At the prior retreat, Christina had participated in her first footwashing service. Then, tears had come to my eyes as her small hands washed my big feet. This time tears came to my eyes as my big hands washed her small feet. On a day when my intellect struggled with issues of control, power, and oppression, it was fitting to end the day by kneeling at the feet of my daughter. The hug that we shared (before she moved on in the circle to wash the black feet of our dear childcare helper, Renee) gave me so much hope. I know that Christ can help us break down the walls that separate us all - parents/children; guards/prisoners; Americans/Nicaraguans; sinners/God. *



Gifts

by Eva Dell Neel

"Will you come home for Christmas?" my parents asked. "I won't be able to this year," I said, "that's our busiest time of year."

I felt a little sad about the announcement as I thought of a brightly decorated tree, Christmas Eve services, stockings and candles and goodies galor. I love Christmas. I love mechanical elves and fake snow. I love Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer", and "Frosty the Snowman" and I love Santa Claus. I don't even mind hearing Christmas Carols playing in elevators, stores, or even over the phone during the Yuletide season. I guess I'm one of those modern saps who enjoys mixing the Christian and secular celebrations into one big ball.

Well, this Christmas season will be different for me. This Christmas will be one of sorting through hundreds of bags of donated clothing, of making hundreds more sandwiches and an extra pot of soup or two; it will be the chance to be the innkeeper at this shelter-like community and to say "Yes, we have room for you; or no, you'll have to find another place." (That will be harder as the temperature drops and more people need a place to live.)

I think the closest I ever came to touching the lives of poor folk during the holidays was when I helped my Dad take groceries to people who needed them, or delivering turkeys for the local bank, or setting an extra place at the table for the person who had no close family. But I never had to experience a Christmas without two or three packages to open. Actually, I've only imagined what it might feel like to have very little to give or receive at Christmas.

The person who struck me most deeply was an old friend who came from a very poor family. She remembered her best Christmas was when her father brought oranges home for everyone (what a contrast to packages stacked around a Christmas tree).

Even though I won't be home for Christmas, it is still celebrated with whimsical expectation and the giving of gifts. Perhaps the gifts aren't wrapped in colored paper or stacked beneath a tree. Maybe they will be as tangible as an orange, or a smile, or a pair of warm socks for cold wet feet. Or the gift could be something intangible like a cheery "hello", or a good story or someone just to sit with you for a while.



Christian Witness at Kings Bay Submarine Base (Future home of the Trident Submarine) St. Marys, Georgia

Feast of the Holy Innocents December 27 & 28, 1985

For the past four years an ecumenical group from the Southeast has gathered at Kings Bay Submarine Base at St. Marys, Georgia, to witness their allegiance to Christ and their opposition to nuclear armament. The date for the planned witness was chosen because it marks the church's remembrance of King Herod's slaughter of the innocent children in his attempt to kill the infant Jesus and maintain his security (Matt. 2:16). Today the major world governments are poised and ready to kill millions of innocent children (and adults) in an attempt to maintain "national security." Nuclear weapons proclaim a false sense of security. We know that there is no security in plans for mass murder. Weapons of death are just that, death producing not life giving. As people of faith we are called to love our enemies and to seek their well-being rather than plotting their death. We feel that if we claim Jesus' way as the way to follow, we must publicly affirm our allegiance to God by denouncing the possession or use of nuclear weapons.

We hope to communicate to those who work on the base that we feel kinship with them as sisters and brothers in Christ. We do not oppose them, but we do oppose governmental policy that puts "faith" in weapons of war. We come to Kings Bay to seek Peace through the Prince of Peace.

This two day witness will begin at 8 p.m. on Friday, December 27, with a candlelight witness at the main gate of the base.



Trident Submarine: Our Auschwitz?

On Saturday, December 28 at 10 a.m. we will gather for a peace walk to the base, worship together, and those who have participated in the Kings Bay civil disobedience training will enter the base while others maintain a legal witness outside. Following the worship & witness we will gather for a common meal, reflection and recreation. We hope to end our time together on Saturday evening with a discussion of the formation of a Southern Life Communities. There will be activities planned for the children.

We invite other peacemakers who are able to join this Christian witness to do so. See enclosed letter and additional information.

Please Post

For More Information Write: A.B. Short, Community of Hospitality,
305 Mead Rd., Decatur, GA 30030 or call (404) 378-7840

Registration Form

Name _____ Address _____

Return to: A.B. Short, Community of Hospitality, 305 Mead Road, Decatur, GA 30030, (404) 378-7840

Please check and return as soon as possible:

- ☐ I am interested in the Kings Bay witness and plan to attend.
- ☐ I am interested in participating in the peaceful nonviolent civil disobedience and will attend the training session on Nov. 15th and 16th. Attendance is required for all planning to do CD.
- ☐ I am interested in being part of the discussion concerning the formation of a Southern Life Communities.
- ☐ I am willing to help with child care activities.
- ☐ Other:

Kings Bay Schedule

Friday December 27th

- 4:00-7:30 pm Check in and information at cottage #3 - Crooked River State Park. See enclosed map.
- 8:00-9:00 pm Candle Light witness at main gate of Kings Bay Submarine Base.

Saturday December 28th

- 9:45 am Meet at Kings Bay Village shopping center at corner of Georgia Hwy 40 and Georgia Spur 40.
- 10:00 am Begin Peace Walk to main gate of base.
- 11:30 am Worship Service ending with commissioning of those who will prayerfully enter the base.
- 1:30 pm Common meal at Crooked River State Park, in the group shelter.
- 3:00-4:00pm A time of reflection on the day.
- 4:00-5:30pm Intergenerational recreation.
- 7:30-9:00pm Southern Life Communities discussion.
- 9:00 pm Informal discussion continues.

OTHER NOTES

Possible accommodations: Crooked River State Park, 3092 Spur 40, St Marys, GA 31558, (912) 882-5256. Gate locked at 10:00pm, campsite \$6.00 day.

Rodeway Inn, I-95 & Ga. 40, Kingsland, GA, 31548, (800) 228-2000.

Riverview Hotel, 105 Osborne Rd., St Marys GA, 31558 (912) 882-3242.

One local church has offered their area for sleeping bag space. Check in at registration cottage #3 for details.

Please don't seek information through the State Park employees concerning the events of the weekend. Seek information through the organizers who will be at Cottage #3.

Be sure to bring rain gear. The past two years have been quite different in terms of temperature and conditions.

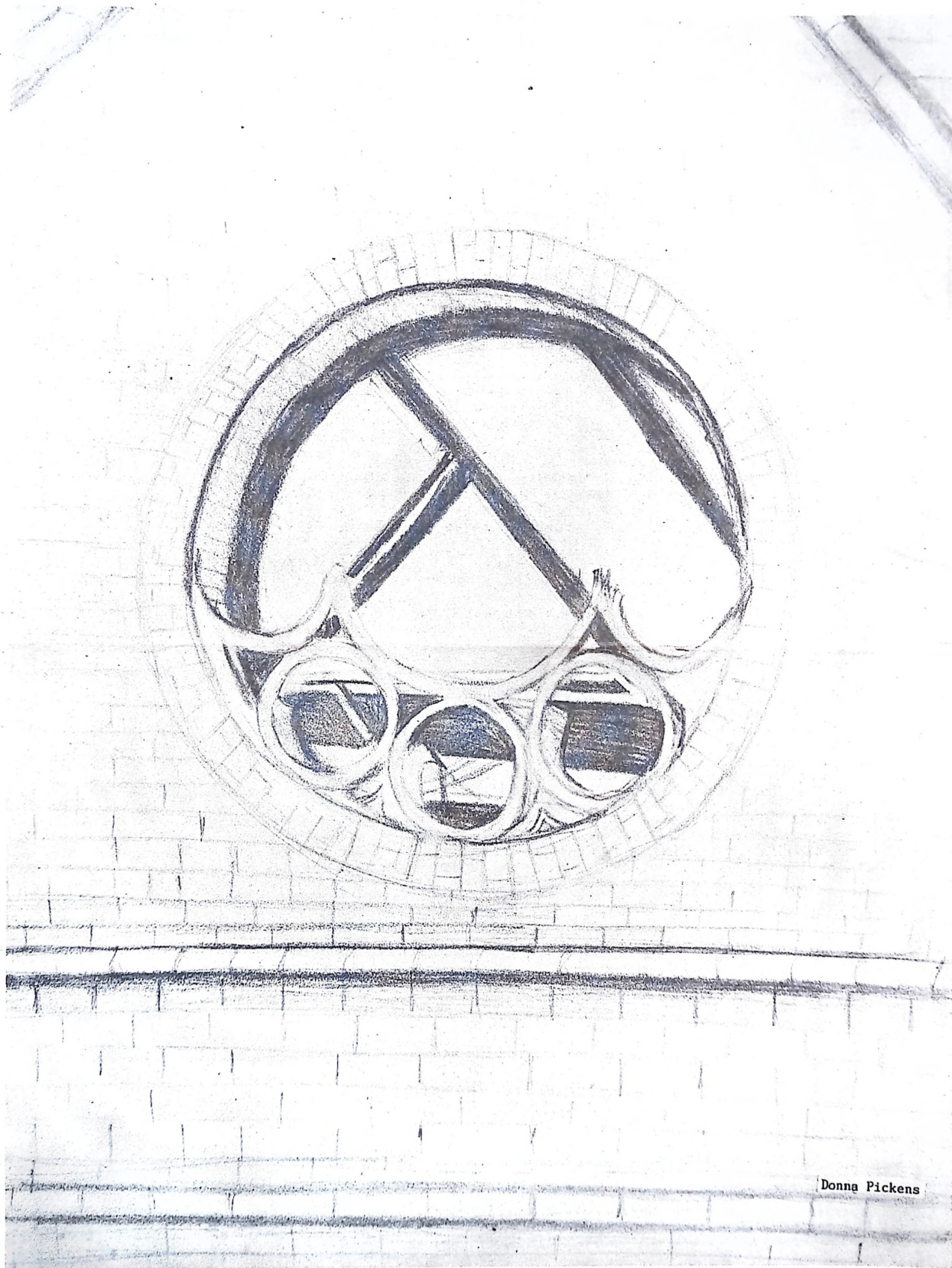
Also bring banners which reflect the theme of "peace and non-violence".

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

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____



Donna Pickens