

HOSPITALITY

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AT ADVENT:

Fencing Out the Vagrant Christ

by George Kraft

"Homelessness is not a fad," declared Maria Foscarinis of the National Coalition for the Homeless. Indeed it is not a fad. It is a growing, life-threatening, national disgrace. Today there are 25% more people without homes in the United States than there were a year ago. The fastest growing group among them is single-parent families.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Why is this happening? What are the causes of this tragic rise in the numbers of the destitute? There are many reasons why we are seeing more and more folks at the soup kitchen and the Butler Street breakfast. But perhaps the primary reasons for the increase in homeless people is the lack of affordable housing and the destruction of the small amount of affordable housing that exists. In Atlanta alone the unbridled development of office buildings and luxury housing all over town is causing rising rents and destruction of low-income neighborhoods. For instance, our city and state want to build a new domed football stadium at the edge of Vine City, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Atlanta. Where will the dispossessed poor of that area go? Many, unable to find housing as inexpensive as they now have, will join the swelling ranks of the homeless. And so the old story will continue: the rich will have a new playground while the poor will have even less than the little they have now.

Christ calls us to speak out against this economic oppression of the poor. His words compel us to put ourselves between the oppressors and the oppressed. Last Christmas Eve we marched downtown to call attention to the homeless who were being shunted to other areas because another playground for the rich—Underground Atlanta—was being developed. On Christmas Eve night, 1986, a life-size crucifix with Christ dressed as a homeless, black man was carried by a procession of advocates and homeless folks. It was brought to the fence around the Underground site and hung in the barbed wire that separated the developers' interests from the needs of the poor.

Jesus died so that all folks could be free and live meaningful lives. His Spirit is crucified anew with each person who dies as the result of an uncaring world. He is crucified with Nicholas Burke, two-years-old, who died in a fire at a local shelter; with B.R. Hogan, sixty-years-old, who died of hypothermia under a Cobb County stadium; with Paul Staples, thirty-one-years-old, who was shot trying to sell a doll; with Greg Jordan, in his thirties, who was burned to death while sleeping in a van at a labor pool; with Carole Pirone, fifty-three-years-old, who was raped and strangled and thrown in a vacant lot in Midtown. If they had not been without homes, all of these people probably would be alive today.

This year on December 21st we will demonstrate again at Woodruff Park in the center of downtown Atlanta. Crosses will be erected in memory of the folks who have died as a result of their homelessness, and words will be spoken so that all will hear that Christ came to save the poor and the homeless. We hope you will join us, or join together with your friends and neighbors in remembrance of these "the least of our brothers and sisters."

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ADVENT, CONT. FROM PAGE 1

In 1988 let us all follow the vagrant Christ as He leads us towards a better understanding of the homeless and a deeper communion with them. If every Christian in our land would get to know one homeless person, help them stand tall and regain their God-given human dignity, homelessness in America would be eradicated in short order. In 1988 we have a chance, if not an obligation, to see that our new government will reverse the present administration's attitude of oppressing the poor. Instead, let us seek to make housing and jobs available to everyone.

Too many fences are being erected between the rich and the poor. I pray that they do not create a gulf as wide as that which separated Lazarus from the rich man. It is up to us to raise high our voices with those of the poor, and with Christ himself, to let the powers know that homelessness, lack of meaningful work, ignorance, and poverty itself are no longer acceptable. Let us give, not only of our goods, but of our energy, our time, and ourselves to respond to these problems. Let us talk to, and more important, listen to our sisters and brothers without homes. Let us become one with them and welcome them back into the human family, the family of God.

So many of you all have been so generous to the people in the streets by making it possible for us to provide them with a place to eat, to rest, to get clean, and to put on clean clothes; I wish I could thank each of you personally. I wish you could share, in person, the thanks of an old man for a stocking cap and a pair of gloves; the gratitude of a woman for a basket of food for her family; the joy of a small child who gets a toy while eating in the soup kitchen. All of these things make it a real joy to serve the Lord by serving the homeless.

One of Christ's hardest sayings is that the poor will always be with us. Even so, I truly believe with all my heart that if each of us does all that we can, Jesus' Gospel of freedom and redemption and love can become a physical reality and God's love will reign the world over. I pray that in 1988 the numbers of the homeless will be reduced, and the soup kitchens, shower lines, shelters, and social workers will become obsolete. Through the power and grace of God, we can help to bring that time one day closer when all of humanity, men and women of all races, faiths, and social backgrounds, can live as one family with our parent God and our first brother Jesus. Thank you and may God bless you with a warm and loving Christmas season.

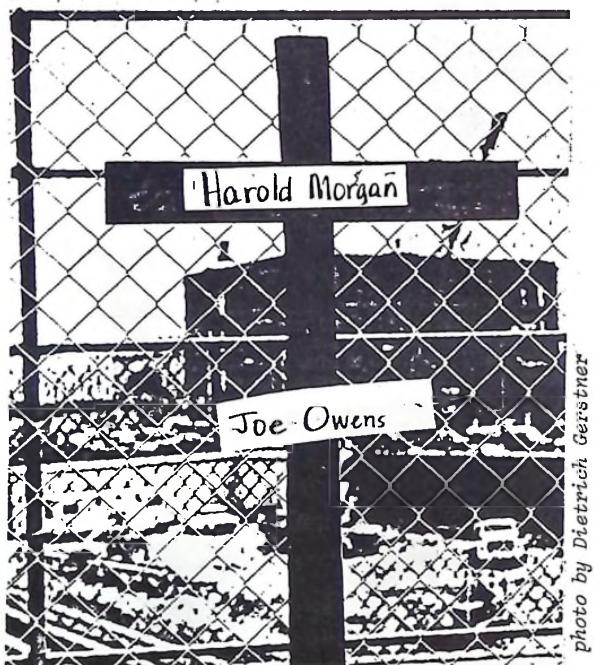


Photo by Dietrich Gerstner



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:

Murphy Davis - Southern Prison Ministry Director
 Ed Loring - Correspondence & Resident Volunteer
 Co-ordinator
 Joanne Solomon - Administrative Assistant (Volunteer
 Co-ordination, Hardwick Prison Trip)

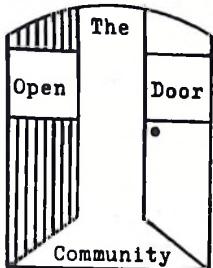
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You have to be very serious, full of a great desire to please your true love, and you have to have some understanding of the unfathomable wonder of life, to think of such a Christmas gift for him or her as a partridge in a pear tree.

On the other hand, it must be confessed that a partridge in a pear tree is not only a merry idea, but a little mad. It makes no sense at all - or all the sense in the world - depending on how you look at it, and that's Christmas... foolish stories about a manger and a cross and such things....

- A.J. Muste



WINTER APPEAL 1987

Dear Friends,

Winter is upon us, and we need your help. For our homeless friends, winter means much more than taking the sweaters and blankets out of storage and firing up the furnace. For many people on the streets, winter means death. Already since the Fall, four people in Atlanta have died from exposure, and one of our friends nearly lost his arm to hypothermia.

The lines of cold and hungry people have increased at our Butler Street Breakfast and at our soup kitchen, so we face the rising cost of increased food bills. Winter brings more desperately cold people to our door, asking for a hot shower, a pair of gloves, a knit cap, some dry socks, a pair of shoes, a sweater, or a coat. We must meet the higher bills as we try to heat enough water to provide a hot shower for each of the thirty-five people who waits at our door. We must stretch the funds to buy the much-needed gloves, hats, and socks that just might keep a friend from freezing to death, or from losing fingers, toes, arms, and legs.

Just as our friends come to our door and ask for the things they need, we must come to you and ask for your financial support. We have not been able to pay all the bills for the past month, and yet winter is not the season to introduce austerity measures to our homeless friends. Please help us.

We live in thanksgiving and hope. We are thankful for the life and work that God has called us to, and we give thanks for the gifts that you have given us in the past that have enabled us to answer God's call. We have hope for the future, especially as we await God's greatest gift—the Christ—who came into this world as a homeless baby. May we all respond to the presence of that homeless Christ in our lives.

Blessings and Peace,

Rannie
 Robert Garrett
 Tina Allman
 George Z.
 Jim Wyse
 Shirley L. Jones
 Shirley L. Jones
 Robert Antonio
 Murphy Davis
 Joanne Solomon
 Betty Jones
 Shirley L. London
 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., N.E. • Atlanta, Georgia 30306-4212 • 404-874-9652
 Chris Shulick Johnny Williams

Running With the Ball Again

by Ed Loring



Willie London took the long way around to The Open Door, but since he has entered into our lives he has become a special friend and a most dependable co-worker. I am especially thankful to Willie because he, like Joe Bottoms, works each day in my office with me.

When Willie was very young, he moved to Athens, Georgia. He grew up there and graduated from Burney Harris High School in that university city. His social experience was "ordinary", he believes, for a Black child in the dark days of segregation and the violent times of the civil rights movement. Willie was an outstanding running back on the high school football team; he enjoyed pressing weights also. Willie, often quiet and pensive here in the house, only laughed and nodded his head when we spoke of lost loves and young manhood glories.

One morning in July 1985, Willie rolled over from his crouched position, well-hidden in an abandoned building in downtown Atlanta. He stretched, yawned, and ran his hand down his leg. Suddenly, he realized he was covered with small shreds of fiberglass. Only the day before he had worked long hours at a fiberglass factory—a piecemeal, short term job he had gotten through a local labor pool. Willie got up and sneaked out of his sleeping place, for many among our 8,543 homeless friends do a little jail time when the police catch them scurrying from their catholes. He headed for the first time to the Open Door Community for a shower and a change of clothes. He had heard of the place, but he had never been there. Before long Willie stood on the front steps of 910; he was told that this day was not a shower day and there was no help for him or his glass-covered body and clothes. The Open Door was shut. Accustomed to hearing "No," too ready to receive rejection, perhaps, Willie returned to the city streets, itching and aching from the previous day's labor.

Work is a basic hunger of the human heart. Without good work we cannot be good people. God has created us to express a basic dimension of our "imago dei" through works that lead to nurture, healing, justice, and worshipful play. Unemployment, underemployment, and works that produce injury and harm are social sins, and societies that thrust their members into bad work are visited from time to time by the God of justice.

Willie did more than run with the ball in high school. He worked. He was a dishwasher, busperson, and waiter at the Davis House Restaurant throughout his high school days. His mother, too, knew the travail of labor considered by the majority in our society to be unworthy of coverage under the minimum wage laws in the 1950's and 1960's. She was a domestic for a white family before being employed by a local motel in Athens, Georgia.

Willie did run the ball into college and entered Savannah State College in 1966 on a football grant. He began as an art major but later changed to mathematics. A knee injury ended his football playing, but after graduation he was fit for the draft. The Vietnam War was raging.

Something changed for Willie London, or if not changed, at least became evident during the terrible war years. He saw no battle firsthand, but he began to slide away from himself at times. By 1973 the bottle and not the football had Willie running. He was running hard and perhaps desperately toward a goal line that did not exist.

The downward spiral in an upwardly mobile society is excruciating. A Black man wandering with an alcohol soluble anchor is a lost man in this white controlled society. In 1975, three years after leaving the army, Willie was shipped off to the V.A. Hospital for help with nerves and addiction. Then Willie moved back to Athens for jobs on the assembly line and bouts with unemployment, homelessness and alcohol. Finally in 1979 he was sent by the courts to a halfway house for alcoholics, prisoners, and others coming out of Georgia's institutions.

Out of the halfway house, Willie was running again like a young man with the goal line in view. He was ready to "go for it" and had a sense of purpose and direction. Thirty-two-years-old in 1980, Willie was now ready to move ahead. But he could find work nowhere. He put in application after application, but everywhere he turned he heard the familiar and death-dealing "No" which had broken him in earlier life. So Willie did what thousands and thousands of poor men and women must do: he re-enlisted in the military. This time it was the Navy.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," said the homeless Jesus one day up on a mountain top. "You shall be called daughters and sons of God," this gentle brother continued. "Yes—children of God! Now, I have known some peacemakers who disdain those who join the military services, but let me remind you that as you listen to this tale of sorrow and hope that is the story of Willie London, never, again I say never, judge the poor and oppressed for their choice of the US military—the world's greatest death machine. Three options lie crouched near the door of the poor person's house or cathole: first, the streets—that hell of homelessness; second, the prison—that hell of the houses for the poor; third, the military—that way up and in for the weak and poor... but the price? "Blessed are the poor," says Jesus on the plain, "for theirs is the Kingdom of God." How odd.

In 1981 Willie was running with the ball called life. He felt good. He said, "No" to the toothless hag, who from time to time peered out of the liquor bottle and tried to smile at him. Running in 1982 and 1983, Willie saw the ancient lands of Italy, Turkey, England, Belgium, and he did duty in Beirut.

Willie's time was up in April 1984. He did not re-enlist but now wistfully reflects, "I probably should have." Willie still held the ball snugly in the crook of his arm when, in 1984, he returned to his civilian life in Athens, Georgia. But again he could find no work. He searched, he hungered, but nothing came from the seeking, knocking, and asking. Finally in October he made the big decision: "I'll go to Atlanta."

RUNNING, CONT. FROM PAGE 4

"Without a dream the people perish," says the writer of the Proverbs. I, too, have dreamed of carrying the ball through the streets of the Big City where just behind the large walnut door awaits endless opportunity for the one who will only work hard. Willie London, with a dream in his heart of a life of regular work, a house, perhaps a family someday, and, yes, an ever-deepening sobriety which only those who have tasted the mystical haze which is drunkenness can seek; this Black man--slave yet free--came to the city General Sherman once burnt to the ground in the name of human liberation and God's just judgement.

Willie ran to the Falcon Hotel where he slept for \$48.57 per week. Willie ran to the labor pool where he made \$18.00 on a good day of full work. Willie ran and ran and finally ran out. The stumble became a fumble: downward and streetward finally to the city jail so drunk, so lost, so hung over he remembered nothing, and now everything--even that most precious pink military ID card--was gone.

Willie slept restlessly, when at all, in abandoned buildings, and in the winter months, on the floors of friendly Christ-filled churches. Again it was the labor pool, the alcohol, the filth and hopelessness that ate up his human dreams and devoured his shrinking life.

In April 1986, Willie wandered back to The Open Door. Word was that the Druid Hills Presbyterian Night Shelter was open a month longer than most others. He did not get in at first and retreated to the nearby weed patch. Then one night, Willie got a ticket and he traded the wet earth for the church floor. On the morning of April 16, 1986, Willie stood in our shower line. Gentle Norman Heinrichs-Gale came up to Willie and asked, "Would you like to live with us?" "Yes," Willie replied.

Eighteen months later Willie, whom I love so deeply, sits beside me as we do an interview for this article. "The Open Door?" I ask. "It's as much of a family as family can be," he says. "I like it because I need it," he concludes.

Willie is running the ball again. He is at home here and we are at home with Willie. He seldom leaves the house for the dragon still waits behind the concrete wall for him. Willie works each day, giving us love and hope as he answers the phone and door, or as he sorts the checks and addresses the thank-you letters.

Willie London--Black man wandered in this world--broken and healing--is a sign of joy and hope among those of us who have the holy privilege of sharing life and fighting death among the homeless.

POEMS

Broken Dreams

As children bring their broken
toys with tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to
God because God is my friend.

But then instead of leaving God
in peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
with ways that were my own.

At last I snatched them back
and cried, "How can you be so slow?"
"My child," God said, "What could I do?
You never did let go."

It's not Enough

It's not enough to have a dream
unless you are willing to pursue it.
It's not enough to know what's right
unless you are strong enough to do it.
It's not enough to join the crowd
to be acknowledged and accepted.
You must be true to your ideals
even if excluded and rejected.
It's not enough to learn the truth
unless you also learn to live it.
It's not enough to reach for love
unless you care enough to give it.

by Shirley McClain

Shirley McClain has been a member of the Open
Door community for four months.



Fritz Eichenberg

Recognizing God Among Us

"Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature -- her eternal power and deity -- has been visible in the things that God has made, if you recognize them." Romans 1:20

Recently I read these lines of Paul's letter to the Romans in my lectionary that is used by Protestants all over West Germany. Reflecting on it I suddenly was struck by the presence of the seemingly insignificant word "if" that introduces the last part of the verse.

Isn't it true that we Christians more often than not tend to proclaim God's eternal power and deity, God's might and omnipresence and then are unable to find this very God in our daily lives. Why can't we see God's mighty acts in our world and history?

Don't we all sometimes wonder whether we really worship the same God who led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, who struck down the Phillistines and fought on the side of God's chosen people thousands of years ago? Why doesn't God give us right now, as this nation is limping from one crisis to another, such clear instructions as Yahweh gave then to the Israelites on those two stone tablets with the engraved ten commandments?

Did you ever ask yourself these questions? Many people must have done so and have come, one way or another, to the conclusion that God is either dead or irrelevant for their day-to-day lives. The absence of divine thunders and trumpet blasts, lightnings and smoking mountains (see Exodus 20:18) and other dramatic signs of God's presence seems to prove it.

But Paul suggests in Romans 1:20 something very different: our own blindness keeps us from recognizing God's works in our time. When we start to complain about a lack of evidence for "God's eternal power and deity," it is not a matter of God's absence from our history, but of our inability to feel and see and testify to her presence in this day and age. We can rest assured that our ancestors had no better vision either. Very likely the majority of the people then were as blind and deaf as most of us are now. It took such exceptional prophets as Moses, Isaiah, or Jeremiah to perceive God's actions in their times, and obviously only precious few people listened to them. How else could we explain the disobedience of God's people throughout the history of Israel?

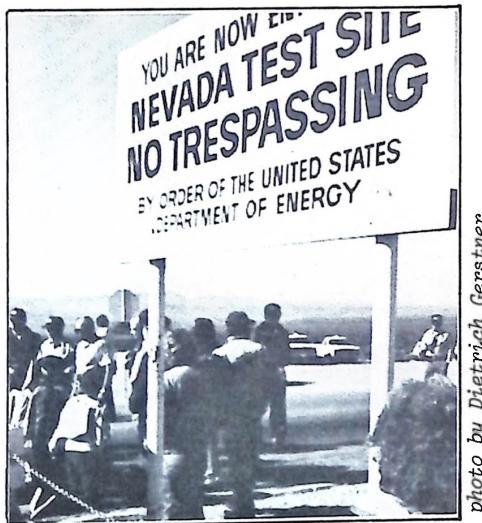


photo by Dietrich Gerstner

Recently I traveled to Las Vegas, Nevada where an international Catholic Worker gathering took place to commemorate what would have been the 90th birthday of Dorothy Day. About 500 people, representing 40

by Dietrich Gerstner

communities, came to celebrate this modern-day prophet and saint and the history of the "Movement" she founded in 1933. We exchanged news about present communities. And we spoke out and acted against the nuclear arms race. The tremendous turn-out of participants at the gathering was certainly a reward for the folks from the CW houses in Los Angeles and Las Vegas who worked hard to prepare, organize and host the weekend. We participated in workshops on CW economics, history of plowshares actions, and other topics, training sessions in non-violence, and, of course, we visited the famed casinos to explore the possibilities of quick fund-raising for our soup kitchens and other ministries. And, we all had the privilege of listening to such exceptional and prophetic voices as Cesar Chavez (United Farm Workers), Shelley Douglass (Ground Zero, Center for Non-violent Action) and Dom Helder Camara who served as arch-bishop of Olinda and Recife in northeast Brazil from 1964-1985. Each of the speakers had encouraging and inspiring words to say to the Catholic Worker Movement. Says Dom Helder Camara: "Your movement will be the biggest demonstration of the non-violent movement."



photo by Dietrich Gerstner

Celebrating Dorothy Day's birthday:
Dom Helder Camara at nuclear test site

To live up to this great statement a crowd of 500 ventured out into the desert to the Nuclear Test Site on the following day. That place, where the United States, in preparation for a nuclear war, regularly explodes nuclear bombs that have up to 150 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb, is very overwhelming. A sense of darkness and evil lingers in the bright desert that conceals the nuclear scars in its womb. But Dom Helder had reminded us the day before that "a Christian does not have the right to lose hope." And so, close to the fence of the test site, we held a prayer service, followed by a big demonstration, including a mass-action civil disobedience against the madness of the nuclear arms race. 220 people were arrested for trespassing on DOE property or for blockading the only access road leading to this abyss of death and alienation from God's all-encompassing love. I believe Dorothy Day would have seen this as an appropriate way to celebrate her birthday.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was truly tangible during that weekend in Nevada—in the coming together of 500 Christians who spend their lives doing God's works of justice and peace; in the celebration and joyful dancing on the evening of Dorothy Day's birthday party;

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photo by Dietrich Gerschner

in the faithfulness of the people who were arrested for obeying God's commands to stand up and say "No" to the destructive powers and principalities that rule this world and to say "Yes" to life and embrace it in all its goodness and fullness; in the hopeful smile and in the humility of archbishop Dom Helder Camara; in the use of inclusive language during the celebration of mass which more truthfully addressed God as neither male nor female, but as a God of all--women and men, boys and girls.

This CW gathering was a powerful reminder of the Pentecost event and a strong witness to the Spirit of God acting in these times as it has been acting among, for, and through us ever since the creation of the world. At the same time it pointed to the less spectacular works of love and mercy to which all of the participants returned after the colorful weekend of celebration and non-violent direct action. For it is in the daily service to our poor sisters and brothers where we can discover God anew over and over again. God works in these days through faithful people as agents of her justice and truth, both in prophetic actions of resistance and in the works of compassion and mercy for those who are oppressed and exploited. Wherever people leave their comfortable places--to go and feed the hungry, to provide hospitality to their homeless sisters and brothers, to visit prisoners in city jails or on death row, to comfort mourners (whether they mourn for loved ones murdered in a homicide or killed by a revengeful State), to visit the sick, and try to change unjust and oppressive structures--there the will of God is done. To moan about the miserable condition of this world and not to do something about it means that we have not listened to God who calls us to be peacemakers and seekers of justice. God's invisible nature is made visible then through such seemingly little things as sharing soup with a hungry brother, visiting an imprisoned sister, or praying and pleading for the life of a brother on death watch awaiting the electric chair.

Particularly in this season of Advent and Christmas when we anticipate and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ we are reminded that it is not self-evident that we recognize God in his eternal power and deity among us. God came into this world, not as a king charging on a chariot, but as a tiny, vulnerable baby born in a stable. The birth of a child certainly is a mysterious yet "normal" event that happens thousands of times around the globe on every single day. But God acted miraculously through this child born homeless and in poverty for the salvation of all humankind. Then, 2,000 years ago, very few people understood the meaning of that birth. This also seems to be the case today, despite the glitter and glamor that symbolize this season in our contemporary culture. How else but by our denial of God's concern for all of humanity, which is expressed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, could we allow children, made in the image of their Creator, to languish in the streets, slums, prisons and other ghettos of this nation and world? It is our inability to perceive that God is present in those children, be they still young and pretty or already grown-up and downtrodden.

To witness to this God of the Incarnation and to her living word, and to celebrate God's works in our history, 500 people from all around the country had traveled to the desert of Las Vegas and the Nuclear Test Site. God's invisible nature became indeed visible in their gathering at those places of darkness and death. And God's eternal power and deity continue to be revealed in the God-movement towards the Realm of Shalom that these faithful people and their communities of service and resistance represent.

Truly, God is with us,
God is among us,
God is present, here and now.

Recognizing this we are able to rejoice together with the psalmist: "Great are the works of the Lord; they who study them take delight in them." (Psalm 111:2)

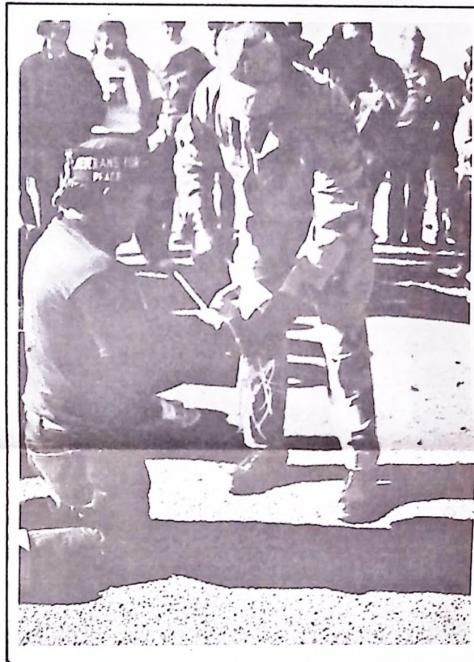


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FRITZ EICHENBERG

HAWKS

The writer of Revelation reminds us of a dragon that exists who with its tail "dragged a third of the stars out of the sky and threw them down to earth. He stood in front of a woman (who was soon to give birth) in order to eat her child as soon as it was born. Then she gave birth to a child who will rule over all nations."

In November, in the South, along stretches of highway that cast shadows across occasional creeks, rust-colored and called by old names that have outlived the Native Americans who understood them as veins in the body. You might see them: perched alert and beautiful silent and deadly with only snow white breast-feathers being rustled gently as a wind blows through gray branches. They post an aggressive watch waiting for the smallest betrayal: a tiny movement in the grass or, easier still, waiting for the highway to kill the small bird, or mouse, that was too slow, too unaware, not alert.

Enter the city in November and you might see him: Sitting alone with his senses dulled by the cold no longer noticing the double-breasted people with collars of long gray coats turned up against the wind, they have descended from many stories up where, for hours, sharp eyes have counted the seats of a stadium beautifully modelled and layed-out on a smooth conference table.

He is dark and blows into his hands and mumbles something about "getting out of the hawk" and then disappears.

Struggle strain to see him Try as hard as you can not to let him out of your sight And when you learn his name share a meal and together awaken your senses—keen and sharp— becoming more watchful than hawks for the small light that betrays a night without stars.

by Mark Harper

Let the Children Come to Me

Ed Loring
The Open Door
910 Ponce de Leon Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30306

Dear Ed:

I always enjoy getting and reading Hospitality, and appreciate what all of you are giving your lives to at The Open Door.

Last spring while helping to judge a writing contest for children in the Gwinnett County School System, I was surprised and pleased to find that a few of the children had written not about pets and spaceships, but about homelessness and the world's problems.

I have gotten permission from three of those children to submit their pieces to you for possible inclusion in Hospitality. I don't know what your policy is about publishing unsolicited pieces, but I think these three could do a couple of things. First, they could show your readers that children hear what we say and see what we show them about the world—even children as isolated as Gwinnett County children can respond to exposure. Second, it would do the schools in Gwinnett County good to receive an issue of Hospitality and know what you are doing in the city. If you can use them, I'll be delighted.

Shalom,

Patti Houck Sprinkle

I am a street person. I sleep at the Marta Station. All of the police push me around. When they do I get on the Marta and ride to another station. No one will sit by me because I smell. I go to the city dump and look for food. All I ever get is sour milk and rotten bananas. I go to the playground. The kids like me there. I make my house out of boxes. It is not as warm as your house. I have to sneak a ride on the Marta because I do not have enough money. Boy, do I wish I had a home like you do!

Brad Bowling, Grade 2
Annistown Elementary

Brad was a second grader last year at Annistown Elementary when his class decided that instead of exchanging Christmas gifts, they'd buy ingredients for sandwiches and take them to a shelter. After meeting some of the homeless people and talking with them, Brad wrote his own version of what it is like to be a homeless person. He was so excited about winning a school writing contest with the story that he's decided to become a writer! Did you notice who he felt would be a homeless person's only friends?

A Day in the Life of a Homeless Person

"It's time to get up," I think as I lay half asleep in a cardboard box. As I wake up I think how I'm going to survive. Should I beg, or steal, or should I just lay down and die of hunger? These are questions I ask myself every day.

First, I try begging for food or money, but people just walk by me like I'm not there. The only time people say anything is when they just say, "Get a job!" or when they tease me. I've tried to get a job before, but I have no education or nice clothes. I'm lucky if I can find bread crumbs in a garbage can or on the sidewalk. It's just not fair. I see people walk by me in nice clothes and fur coats and here I am in torn pants, a ripped shirt and I have not taken a bath in over two weeks. When I do take a bath, it is either in a cold lake or in rain water.



It's 7:30 and time for dinner. I go to the nearest garbage can and it looks like we're having old cheese and an apple that's been bitten off of a couple of times.

After dinner my stomach still growls of hunger. Time for bed, so I cuddle up in my cardboard box with an old blanket and hope I'll live through the night.

Kari E. Lance, Grade 5
J.G. Dyer Elementary

Kari was in the fifth grade at J.G. Dyer Elementary School in Lawrenceville last year and saw a television program on homelessness one morning before school. When her teacher assigned her to write a story about another person, she wrote of what she had learned--and felt--that morning.

When Will it End?

When will it end?
The murders committed in all kinds of places.
The prejudice existing against all types of races,
Terrorism and violence, the shocking scenes we see,
The plagues and new diseases with high mortality.

The starving countries where there is no hope,
With the spreading famine, can they cope?
Our brothers who fought in the Vietnam War,
The MIA's that we cannot ignore.

The threat of World War III in the back of our minds,
The destruction of the earth and all humankind.
The problems we face will be our fate,
Can we stop for everyone's sake?

What can we do,
Can we make amends?
When will it cease,
When will it end?

John Neumeyer, Grade 9
Shiloh High School

John was a ninth grader at Shiloh High School last year when he composed his poem question, "When Will It End?"

Grace and peaces of mail

October 10, 1987

Dear Ed,

Greetings unto you in the name of God. I hope all is well with you and the Open Door Community. I hope you remember me. I stayed there for three weeks in April until I obtained a job. Presently I am confined in the Georgia Diagnostic Center. I received a 90-day sentence and pray, if it is God's will, that I will be released in 30 days.

I find myself at a loss for words to express my mental anguish and frustration at the overall atmosphere here. I work in the kitchen, delivering trays to death row. Ed, day by day each step becomes more difficult, pushing the carts down the long corridor to the men. As I enter the cell block where they are held, I feel a cold wind of hopelessness and destitution completely foreign to humanity. Even though it is the same building, made out of the same brick and steel, you can feel the utter separateness.

Today, a ray of sunshine appeared, but it lacked the luster of true sunlight, blessed to the rest of humankind. I will never forget this feeling, and pray that God will guide the men on death row. God is the true judge.

November 1987

To the Open Door Community:

The contribution of 102 new toboggan caps is a result of the death of my aunt. She cared for the homeless and less fortunate. She was a woman of small means, but she left some of her small estate to me, and in her honor and memory, I would like to share with the Open Door Community.

God Bless each and everyone.

A member of Roswell Presbyterian Church

November 9, 1987

Dear Friends at The Open Door,

It is always moving to read Hospitality. It helps me feel connected to the things I most value. You are so real--that helps deepen your message.

My own work is with a crime victim program based in one of the poorest areas of Philadelphia. While reaching out to the victims, we try to assist organizing efforts in any way we can. I'd enjoy hearing about various kinds of organizing by and for homeless people and prisoners, and ways that you fit into that larger picture--maybe a future article?

Blessings as you serve Christ.

Helene Pollock

November 22, 1987

To The Open Door Community:

I just wanted to write you and thank you all for letting my wife ride down to see me at River's Institution. My wife's name is Bernice Huntley and my name is Robert L. Huntley

I wanted you all to know I'm praying for you, and it makes me very happy to write to you and thank you from my heart. May God bless you all and I'll keep praying for you.

Robert L. Huntley



Thanks

Every now and then, one of our friends will come by and leave a donation of clothes or food, and then slip away quietly, without filling out a donation slip. Often these generous people receive only a quick "Thank you" at our door, and then they are gone.

If we did not get your name or address for a thank-you note, it does not mean that your gift was not deeply appreciated. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all of you who have used your time and resources to remember us and your brothers and sisters who are less fortunate.

From the hearts of all of us here at 910 -
THANK YOU!

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR THE HOMELESS



December 21, 1987

Today in America, record numbers of our fellow citizens go without the basics necessary for human survival: a bed to sleep in and a meal to eat.

On and around December 21, groups will gather together in areas around the country to pledge an end to this natural tragedy, to remember those who daily struggle for a decent place to live, and to commemorate those who have died because of homelessness.

We believe that:

Decent shelter, affordable housing, and adequate food are fundamental rights in a civilized society. Homelessness, which continues to rise each year by at least 25% nationwide, is unacceptable. Federal, state, and local initiatives are need to shelter all those who need it. Housing which is affordable for everyone should be this nation's #1 priority. The pain, struggle, and even death caused by homelessness to our brothers and sisters will not go unremembered.

Please join all of us around the nation in a day of action for America's homeless poor.

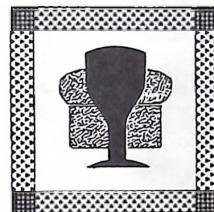
RALLY OF REMEMBRANCE DECEMBER 21, 1987
11 A.M. WOODRUFF PARK ATLANTA

KEITH SUMMA (404) 885-1361
NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

GEORGE KRAFT (404) 876-6977

Open Door Community Worship

We gather for worship and Eucharist from 5 - 6:30 pm. on Sunday evenings followed by supper together.
Join us!



DECEMBER 6	WORSHIP AT 910
DECEMBER 13	WORSHIP AT 910 WALT LOWE PREACHING
DECEMBER 20	WORSHIP AT 910 A SERVICE OF READINGS & CAROLS
DECEMBER 24	CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE
DECEMBER 27	WORSHIP AT 910
JANUARY 3	WORSHIP AT 910
JANUARY 10	CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH THE OPEN DOOR WILL JOIN IN THE ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION AND WORSHIP SERVICE FOR MARTIN LUTHER KING WEEK 4-6PM
JANUARY 17	COMMUNITY RETREAT DAYSpring
JANUARY 24	WORSHIP AT 910
JANUARY 31	WORSHIP AT 910

Every 6th Sunday the Community has a full day retreat outside the city. This replaces our evening worship at 910 Ponce de Leon Ave.

Open Door Schedule

WE ARE OPEN...

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm and from 7:15 pm to 8:30 pm. The building is open from 9:00 am until 8:30 pm those days. (Both phone & door are not answered during our lunch break from 12:15-1:00. Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are closed until 1:00 pm. Please do not make unscheduled drop-offs of clothing, food, etc. on Sunday mornings. Sunday afternoon our phones and door are answered from 1:00 until 5:00 pm

OUR MINISTRY...

SOUP KITCHEN - Monday-Saturday, 11-12 noon; Sunday 3-4pm

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST - Monday-Friday 7:30am SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES - Tuesday, Wednesday,

Friday - 9:00 - 11:00 am (Be sure to call-- schedule varies) USE OF PHONE - Monday-Saturday, 9am - 4pm.

SHELTER REQUESTS - Monday-Saturday 9am - noon.

BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Tuesdays 7:30 - 9:00pm (call for winter schedule)

WEEKEND RETREATS - Every 6th Weekend (for our household & volunteers/supporters) - January 15, 16, and 17.

NATIONAL MARCH AND RALLY FOR THE HOMELESS

Atlanta, Georgia February 27, 1988

WHY WE MUST MARCH

To anyone who works with the homeless in this nation, it has become very clear that we are in a crisis situation. More and more beds are put in shelters, and when they are full, more shelters are opened. The number of soup kitchens continues to grow and grow, just like the lines to get in. At the same time, we see affordable housing being destroyed right before our eyes, almost as a spiteful act toward those with nowhere to go.

On the state and local level, efforts to solve these problems are often ignored by local politicians, while church groups, non-profits, advocacy groups, and private citizens struggle to keep people alive.

We can't go on like this much longer.

WHERE CAN WE TURN?

Daily we struggle to find the resources to feed and shelter those in the streets. Those things that we know we need simply aren't available. The apartment for the man we know could keep a job, if he only had a home; the daycare for the mother who could return to work, if she knew her children were cared for, and safe; the community-care residences for the mentally ill who are so often turned away for lack of bed space; we know what is needed, we just haven't been able to get it.

The last seven years have wreaked havoc with social services in this country. Parents are forced to choose between food or shelter for their children, a choice no one should have to make. The disabled have been systematically cut off from benefits they sorely need, the elderly can no longer survive on their meager Social Security checks, and the minimum wage hasn't gone up in 6 years, while the cost of living rose over 30 percent in that same time.

The federal government's abandonment of the poor was predicted. The current administration made it very clear that the poor had no place in the "New America." But the residents of that "shining city on the hill" never realized that their doorsteps would become home to millions of Americans. It's time to demand federal action to end homelessness.

OUR DEMANDS: THE FIRST STEP

Mindful of the fact that this will be a long battle, we must be forceful in our demands, and pragmatic in our approach. We know that this crisis will not be solved in the next year. We must fight to return honor and dignity to those now homeless, and establish a system that will never allow this tragedy to happen again. Therefore, we look at both long and short term solutions to the homeless and housing problem in this nation.

First, we must address the disastrous shortage of affordable housing. Since 1981, the federal budget for public housing has been slashed by 75%. This is a disgrace. We must expand funding for federal housing programs to a responsible level, not less than the amount authorized by Congress in 1981. Next, we must immediately pass legislation that guarantees decent emergency shelter to all homeless Americans, so that no one who asks for shelter is turned away. Shelter providers in every city and town know that each winter, some go without, because we simply don't have the resources.

Finally, the federal government currently has programs designed to assist the homeless that simply aren't being enforced. It is one thing not to have, but to have resources, and not make them available is simply a crime. We must demand that programs that should be helping the homeless, actually are.

We know that these are only the first steps that must be taken. But they will surely relieve much of the current misery, and will put us well on the way to making homelessness a thing of the past.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The 1988 elections present us with a unique opportunity to air our concerns, and enact change. The above demands, put to each of the presidential candidates, serve as a foundation. This is the starting point for what is needed for tomorrow. By airing our agenda today, we will be assured of being heard in the future.

We must use this opportunity to bring together all those who are concerned about the destitute poor in this country. We must form a contingent of advocates and homeless people, businessmen and shelter providers, government officials and working class people. We must speak with one voice to be heard over the din of platitudes. The National March and Rally presents us with this opportunity.

SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

For More Information, contact:

Keith Summa
National Coalition for the Homeless
970 Jefferson Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30318

Thank you, Mark!
Welcome, Ruth!

by Dietrich Gerstner

Mark Harper became lay-out editor of Hospitality last year. He was challenged by this job, but our readers testify that Mark has mastered this task exceedingly well.

Now we say "Good-bye" to Mark and wish him well on his continuing journey apart from us. It was wonderful to work with him, and we will miss his talents as artist, writer and editor for our small publication. Thank you, Mark!

Ruth Allison will take Mark's place as the new lay-out editor of Hospitality. We are excited about Ruth's interest in taking on this new challenge and look forward to the special gifts we know she will bring to this work. Welcome, Ruth!



photo by Rob Johnson

NEEDS

HATS

COATS

GARDEN TOOLS

HEAVY DUTY LAWN MOWER

WASHING MACHINE

LAMPS CHAIRS TABLES SOFAS BEDS

Please bear with us...

From 11am - 1pm Monday- 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. Thanks.

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

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____