

HOSPITALITY

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Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ's love.
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June 1992

Martin and Rodney: Kings Among Captors

by Ed Loring



RACISM is not a matter of the heart; prejudice is. Racism is not flesh and blood; it is a power and a principality (Ephesians 6) of this final age of European American hegemony in North America. Racism is power and privilege based simply upon the color of one's skin. White folk are racists because we live in a system that favors whiteness and crushes blackness. We live in institutions--like churches and schools--that teach us that white is good and black is bad. African Americans cannot be racists in North America although they can be as prejudiced as anyone else. But African Americans do not have the institutional power--political, social, or economic--to be racist. Whites are racists. Blacks are victims of racism.

RACISM is an addiction as Nibs Stroupe has taught us. The first response of an addict when confronted with her disease and love of the high the drug produces is denial. That denial is not a lie on the personal level; it is the belief system of the addict. Racism blinds white people to the realities of the systems of power and privilege and to the suffering of the oppressed. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises "recovery of sight to the blind." (Luke 4:18b) The white people defending our court system and arguing that the Rodney King case is sad but not representative of our system are blind. Racism's sinister fingers gouge out the eyes

of the beholder. Jesus Christ calls us to repent for God's way is at hand. To European Americans, repentance means seeing what we are doing to African Americans and fighting with all our hearts, all our guts, all our power, to abolish the white racism that infiltrates every level of our lives. We must uproot the racist system. Like Blind Bartimaeus we must cry out for the Black Jesus to heal our eyes so we may get on the road to justice which is the fight for equality among European Americans and people of color.

RACISM, even though it only belongs to the white world, also has debilitating and blinding consequences for African Americans. Often they respond to the pain and suffering, the oppression and death, by believing that the "white man" is the enemy, the devil. That analysis is more correct psychologically than politically. White racism does twist

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910 Ponce de Leon

HOSPITALITY is published 11 times a year by The Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row.

Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of The Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the following:

*Murphy Davis--Southern Prison Ministry
Ed Loring--Correspondence
Ed Loring--Resident Volunteer Co-ordinator; Guest Ministry
Murphy Davis--Hardwick Prison Trip
Phillip Williams & Dick Rustay--Volunteer Co-ordinators*

Newspaper:

Editorial Staff--Murphy Davis, Elizabeth Dede, Ed Loring, Dick Rustay, Gladys Rustay, CM Sherman, and Phillip Williams

Layout--Gladys Rustay
Circulation--Phillip Williams and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests

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white folk into a distorted form of God's image, often closer to the devil than to Jesus. But the principalities and powers which rule the hearts, minds, politics, and economics, of the American system are the loci of racism. White men could be killed or converted, but without a drastic change in the system--that is rooting out racism--the system would be little changed. The way out of racism for both we white racists and for Black victims of racism is to restructure our society along the lines of equality. Not an equality of opportunity, but an equality of power in terms of economics, politics, and control of institutions that shape human destiny (e.g. schools and banks).

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to non-violence, I believe. But we white folks must be slow to judge others because our white racism is among the most heinous forms of violence to stalk the earth since God flooded the entire world. White racism not only condemned Rodney King years before his arrest, not only devoured Dr. King's skull on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, but has been the basis of our social policies to Native Americans, the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the infant mortality rate at Grady Hospital, and the signs at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. Each reader who has any sight recovery (and about 20/200 is the best any of us white folk can claim) has their own list which calls us to conversion and radicalism.

Yet, it was only through violence that liberty was won for the African American slave. Every possible avenue to abolish slavery was attempted prior to 1861. The Christians converted hearts and the anti-slavery movement grew. People wrote letters to Congress, petitioned their churches, began alternative communities, and started a new political party. But in the end, it was the violence of war--violence that was already present in the racism of slavery--that secured liberty for the captives. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and slavery was ended although the Confederates fought for another 15 months. To be an advocate of non-violence and anti-war in 1861 was to be functionally pro-slavery. There was one way, and one way alone, that liberty was procured for the slaves in America: violent death-dealing war. But liberty was, by constitutional guarantee--granted the African Americans and others. Today, the only constitutional slavery we have in the United States is in prison.

Liberty is only one half of the pie of freedom in America. The other half is equality. Liberty without equality leads to poverty, dependence, and a new form of extra-constitutional slavery among African Americans. For whites, liberty and a disproportionate share of power over people of color has deepened the racism, violence, greed and blindness already inherent in the structures of the European American way of life.

After the Civil War there was among the Radical Republicans and former slaves a vision of equality. These leaders, small in number but powerful in vision, knew that

liberty must be joined with equality for slavery to actually cease in the land and for racism to be rooted up and burned away. So a covenantal promise was made: 40 ACRES AND A MULE. Land (see Walter Brueggeman, *The Land*) and the means of production (a mule) would be the basis of equality. For property rights are the sacred rights in the United States, and land and a mule would give access to economic power and a sharing of political might. The American Dream of 40 acres and a mule, which is the dream of equality for all of us, died. White racism awoke from the slumbers of the aftermath of war and said NO to equality among whites and Blacks. No land; no mules. You are free to buy your own land. You are free to purchase your own mule. Liberty, "yes;" Equality, "no."

Rodney King deserves the equivalent of 40 acres and a mule. So does every other African American in the United States. All people of color must find resources to demand and claim their fair share of the economic and political system. That is the basis of equality; and equality of actual power, goods, and cultural diversity is the only way to root racism from this wounded and frightened land.

The time has come to change some lyrics and slogans. What about:

"Equal at last!
Equal at last!
Thank God Almighty!
I'm equal at last."

OR

"The land of the free,
and the home of the equal."

WHITE FOLKS, listen. There is only one way to undo the racism that binds us to violence and death. We must fight the powers and principalities that are over us and within us. The battle is for the actual equality of power among us all in American society.

God calls us to be about such a vision in our land. The earth cries out against us and Abel's blood is upon our hands. But the cross of Christ empowers us to march along together. Follow the Black Jesus who will give sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, justice to Rodney King, new life to us all. Our God yearns for our liberty and equality. Our God is in anguish for our white racism. The Holy Spirit promises each of God's children 40 acres and a mule (Acts 2 & 4).

Wake up!

WE NEED
A
REFRIGERATOR



Holy Week

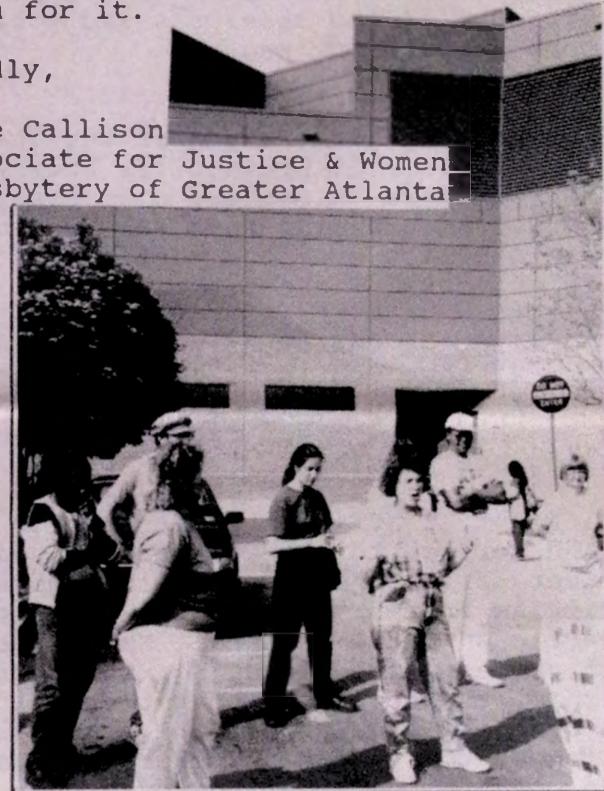
Dear Murphy and Ed,

I want to commend all of you at the Open Door for your Holy Week program. All the way from the organization to the love and support of the entire community--the experience was powerful and moving. I really appreciated the send-off and reception by the entire community. The love and thought that goes into the week is very apparent. The experience is almost impossible to interpret because so much goes on around you and inside you. I want to write it all down very soon both to sort it out and to remember it in its entirety. I won't need to worry about remembering it overall because my understanding and reaction to poverty and homelessness will never be the same.

The Holy Week experience is really a profound service that you offer to the presbytery and the community. I sincerely thank you for it.

Fondly,

Anne Callison
Associate for Justice & Women
Presbytery of Greater Atlanta



GLADYS RUSTAY

Anne sharing her Holy Week experience during worship at the city jail.



GLADYS RUSTAY

Our whole community was strengthened and given hope by Al Winn (far left) as he spent 24 hours on the streets with us during Holy Week.

Neighbors of the Open Door Community

by Stan Foster

Editor's note: Stan Foster, M.D., is a long-haul leader at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church and a friend of the Open Door Community since its opening on Christmas Day in 1981, when the Foster family ate with us. Although he voted against the use of police power and surveillance in the posting of the property, Dr. Foster is the primary interpreter of the session's sad action. We welcome Stan to our pages.

As a long term friend of the Open Door and as an elder of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, I share this piece with Hospitality readers. Recognizing that our institutions are in conflict over the posting of the Druid Hills property, I share this personal perspective with three convictions: 1) that in conflict we can experience truth and grace, 2) that God is at work on Ponce de Leon and will in his/her time make his/her way known, and 3) that reconciliation and healing are possible.

First, I affirm the Open Door's support of and service to the disenfranchised. I further affirm the Open Door's rights as Christian brothers and sisters to express objections to the posting. Many aspects of that protest, the picketing, the sharing in worship, the concerns about the ordinance, the breaking together of the bread and the taking of the cup in shared communion have been open, honest sharings of concerns.

Second, I express concern that in its fervor, the Open Door has utilized incomplete, misleading and occasionally false messages on picket signs and in Hospitality, has invoked a "Willie Horton" style of journalism, and has unjustly criticized two pastors leading a community of faith through challenging times. As a believer that a full sharing of the issues will better enable Hospitality readers to understand our conflict and to be better prepared to address similar issues in their own congregations, and will contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation, it is important to put the current conflict in context.

During the 1970's when many churches were fleeing to the suburbs, Druid Hills decided to stay and minister. Ministries to the needy started in 1972 when Dr. Lila Bonner Miller recognized that mentally ill resettled from State Hospitals to boarding houses in our neighborhood were going hungry on Sunday. Out of this concern developed the Sunday afternoon Community Fellowship, a time



of worship, fellowship, and eating for 120-150 needy in our community. Recognizing their need for healing and with support from Trinity Presbyterian Church, a Thursday Art Therapy program for deeply disturbed was initiated. In 1982, at the request of the Open Door, we made available McIver Hall for a night shelter at Druid Hills. Over the next 3-4 years, you empowered us to take ownership of the shelter. McIver was remodeled at considerable expense to facilitate this ministry of hospitality. Through the grace of God and the sacrificial support of 15 area churches, the Night Shelter at Druid Hills provides shelter and hospitality to 30 homeless males from November to April. Recognizing the unique spiritual needs of the homeless, "Coot's" class was organized to provide Bible study and fellowship to 20-50 needy on Sunday mornings. Over the last six months a few class members have responded to personal pastoral invitations and are attending Sunday worship.

While Druid Hills' efforts to serve represent God at work and are small in terms of need, they provide the background for the current conflict. Following are the ministries and the annual estimate of service:

Night Shelter: 4,000 nights of shelter
Meals: 17,000 meals
Worship: 7,500 sharings in worship
Art Therapy: 1,200 hours of creativity
Child Development Center: 20,000 days of nurture

Over the last few years, Druid Hills has become a sanctuary for the increasing number of the homeless on Ponce, including individuals who have been asked to leave the Open Door Community. While this has involved a large number of needy, looking for a place to rest and sleep, it has also included an increasing number of alcoholics and addicts. Discussions with the homeless provided an increased understanding of the issues and identified a small subgroup as responsible for the problem. Attempts to refer these individuals for care failed. Needles became increasingly prominent on the east side of the church building. Sale of drugs was observed outside the window of the Child Development Center. Chronically ill

alcoholics became obstructive and abusive in the area of the Child Development Center playground. Arrests targeted at those breaking the law failed to solve the problem.

At a session retreat in September of 1991, the loss of order on our church property was identified as an increasing concern, a conflictual issue in terms of meeting human need, witness, and safety. After a six month period of study by the Outreach Division in which alternative strategies to meet human need in a healthy environment were studied, the Session voted to post the property. This was done to control illegal activities and to provide surveillance during the evening hours when church staff were not on the property. In taking this action, the session affirmed its continuing support to its Outreach Ministries, the Night Shelter, the Community Fellowship, and the Art Therapy.

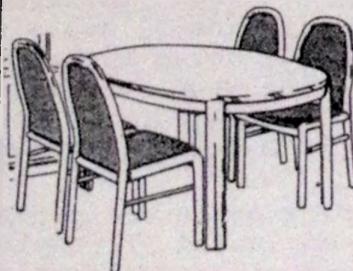
Druid Hills is taking seriously the concerns of the Open Door Community and others expressed over the ordinance involved in posting the property. The Outreach Division is exploring other options to meet the needs of hospitality, health, and safety. Frankly, the Open Door's threats to "escalate the protests if the signs were not taken down" and the articles in the April and May Hospitality have not contributed to the communication and dialogue that are needed to resolve conflict.

As communities of faith in conflict and in disagreement, I petition for the following:

1. That we all recognize that we are children of God trying to serve in our imperfect ways.
2. That we ask in Bible Study and Prayer for God's wisdom and guidance.
3. That we at Druid Hills recognize the legitimacy of the Open Door's concern over the particular ordinance by which the property was posted.
4. That the Open Door recognize that the matter of the posting was and remains a decision of the Session of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church.
5. That we both work to replace anger, hostility, and accusations with prayer and dialogue.

None of the above will be achieved on our own. It will require the work of the Holy Spirit. □

**WE NEED A
DINING ROOM TABLE
FOR A FAMILY OF 5!**



A Question

by Herbert Allen

Editor's note: Herbert Allen is a friend who lives on the streets of Atlanta. We are thankful for his voice, which echoes the thoughts and feelings of many who wander the streets with nowhere to go.

In response to the support given by the members of the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church for the new law which forbids members of Atlanta's homeless community from using their church parking lot as a resting point, I have one question: which particular state of sin would these good people have the Atlanta community see them as having fallen into? Would they prefer to be seen as breaking the first and most important commandment by electing the local police department to be their god (which they did when they decided the law would bestow higher blessings and more protection than our omnipotent God would in the resolution of their parking lot problem)? Or would they prefer to be seen as breaking the second most important commandment where we're instructed to love our neighbor as Jesus loves us, and as we, indeed, love ourselves? It's their choice. Which "class-action" sin would this group of God's children prefer to be guilty of . . . having a false god, or demonstrating a lack of charity?

I agree that the homeless situation offers a fair amount of stress to any group trying to help, but I disagree that it offers more stress than a segment of the Body of Christ is spiritually equipped to handle without secular or municipal help. Neither fear nor intolerance speak well of a maturing relationship between the church and our loving God. Our God would have protected and blessed both groups in this situation had God been asked in earnest. The way it stands now, the Druid Hills congregation has withdrawn a measure of protection from their homeless brothers and sisters and it makes me wonder what will be the result when God withdraws a measure of protection from them (read Matthew 25:34-36). If these are truly the end times, and God is separating the tares from the wheat, how many more tests can the Body of Christ fail before we, too, lose our inheritance within God's kingdom? Come on, Christians! Stand! Shake off the dust from our middle class minds. Get out of "matter" and get into the "Spirit" of our God. □



Druid Hills Presbyterian Church And The Homeless Poor: The Consequences For Us All

by Murphy Davis

On March 2, Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, by a decision of its session (the church's governing body), erected signs to post their property against the homeless poor. The decision was made, we are told, after some months of wrestling with the ongoing problems between the congregation and a growing number of homeless people who are in an increasingly desperate situation. The church experienced all the very real problems which accompany homelessness, including human waste on the grounds of the church (since homeless people do not have toilets), numbers of homeless people hanging around and sleeping on the property, and other behaviors caused by varying types of intoxication.

The congregation of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church is our neighbor. We are grateful for the many ways they have, over the years, reached out to people in need, especially with the strong and visionary leadership of Dr. Lila Bonner Miller. We enjoyed a partnership in the formation and first several years of helping to operate their winter night shelter for 30 homeless men. Such a rich history makes the current decisions and the ensuing conflict between us all the more perplexing and painful.

On the afternoon of March 2, Atlanta police officers drove into our backyard and told the homeless men and women in our yard that they had to leave. "It's all right with the Open Door for us to stay here," protested someone. "Sorry," they were told by the police. "This is public property and we're here to tell you to get out, or be arrested." Two days later a police officer told people sitting in our front yard to move on. During that week our soup kitchen dropped to half of its normal size. It was a sweep, and homeless people were efficiently, and by an obviously concerted effort, moved out of our neighborhood.

What happened on Ponce de Leon during the first week of March is increasingly the situation for homeless people in our city. They are told: "Move out," "Move on," "Get away," "You can't stay here!"

Space is shrinking in the city, and it is increasingly criminal for the poor simply to exist. When they are discovered in the wrong places, they are arrested and taken to the bulging Atlanta City Jail (Atlanta now has the highest tuberculosis rate in the United States, and the city jail is one of the major incubation areas for the spreading of the disease.). We could not, we cannot, we will not sit silently by as the homeless poor are brutally shoved from place to place like garbage. We especially will not sit silently when one of the institutions pushing and excluding them is the Church of Jesus Christ.

We had many conversations with the pastors and members of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. The signs stayed up. So on Ash Wednesday the Open Door Community held our community worship on the steps of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church to begin Lent by remembering that we are dust and need God's guidance and protection. On March 8, we began to picket in front of the church for 30 minutes before 11:00 worship and for 20-30 minutes after worship. After four Sundays of picketing we were asked by the pastors to stop our picket for two Sundays so that they could work to get the signs down.

We stopped the picket for two Sundays. The signs stayed up. And so for one Sunday of April and four in May, we have continued the picket. It is not much: a small effort to give substance to the suffering of the homeless poor who have been frightened and threatened away from the church.

The suffering of the poor is so hidden, so invisible, to people of privilege. And our private and public policy works to keep it so. One aspect evident here of the privilege of power is that church members have made a decision but will never experience the consequences of their decision as it is experienced by the poor. Our task must be to give some substance and voice to their suffering.

We have made many mistakes. Our pain and anger lead us at times to be less than patient and kind. But of this we are sure: whatever we discern through prayer and reflection, as tactics or ways to discuss this situation, we know that we must not be silent in the face of such injustice.

The Particular Problem: The Posting of Church Property

1. The posting of church property is a contradiction of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Welcome and Hospitality are basic to the gospel. We serve a welcoming God who is our Shepherd and "gives us everything we need," according to Psalm 23. Jesus Christ is the one who has already "broken down the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2)

Further, the church is called to have a particular bias toward welcoming the poor and condemned. Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ shows himself in the "undesirables": the hungry, the naked, the stranger, the sick and the prisoner. Inasmuch as we welcome and serve the least of these we do it to our Lord. When we post church property against the poor we literally use the law to exclude God from the premises: literally, that is, if the scriptures are to be trusted.

Yes, there are limits to what we can do. We are humans and not God. Therefore, we do not operate soup kitchens 24 hours a day, or work without rest, or serve without any expectations of those whom we serve. Those who attempt to serve the poor without limits and sabbath rest burn out and go away quickly.

But the posting of church property is an across-the-board exclusion of people on the basis of racial and class distinctions.

Those whom we are most specifically mandated to serve are the ones most specifically excluded.

Dorothy Day used to refer to intoxicated people as "Christ in his most distressing guise." It is hard to deal with people who are high on drugs or alcohol. But it is not an insurmountable problem. And banishing everyone because "some" have caused problems is cruel and unnecessary.

2. The church's willingness to forfeit authority over its grounds to secular authorities (the police) is an indication of a loss of spiritual and theological resources for resolving our problems.

This is not meant as a pious or self-righteous observation. On occasion, as rarely as possible, we call the police to help us resolve a conflict at the Open Door. We do it always with heavy hearts and only after exhausting the alternatives. But there are times, especially when violence is involved, that we must ask for the intervention of civil authorities to preserve the safety of all. But always we see this as a failure. If society were more just, and we were all more loving and patient, we could resolve our conflicts without coercion. We strive always to create a world--as Dorothy Day would say--in which it is easier to be good.

It is a very long jump to ask the police to **take over** the governance of church property. The particular ordinance that the church has posted is one that turns over to the city police the authority to--at any time, under any circumstances--come into the parking lot to question, move, harass, or arrest anyone. The church has given up the discretionary use of police services and moved to the around-the-clock presence of police power.

In the Presbyterian Church, each congregation is charged with the supervision of church property (which technically belongs to the Presbytery, not the congregation). Is it not breaking that trust to forfeit the authority to police?

Lee Brown, the former Public Safety Commissioner of the City of Atlanta (now Police Commissioner of New York), used to say that our society uses police as janitors. Any time we have something we find unpleasant or unmanageable we call in the police to "clean it up."

Surely Druid Hills Presbyterian Church had at its disposal the counsel and aid of the larger body of Christ. But rather than asking for assistance from Greater Atlanta Presbytery, any particular Presbyterian Churches, the Christian Council, or any other church or community groups who minister to the homeless (and who struggle with similar problems), the church invoked (by law) the assistance of the police.

This raises many complicated legal questions about the separation of church and state, the tax exempt status of the church, etc. But it seems that the important question is one of Biblical theology: Can we really **believe** the promise that when God truly calls us to a ministry, God also provides us with **everything** we need to do it?

3. The particular ordinance (Atlanta City Code 17-1007) posted at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church is a part of the larger package of "Vagrant Free Zone" ordinances. These are laws sponsored by the downtown business community, passed by the Atlanta City Council and generally supported by the Mayor. They have one and only one purpose: to clear the downtown area of the poor and especially the non-white poor--more specifically, young African American men.

Before City Council passed this law last summer, it was opposed by Concerned Black Clergy, the Task Force for the Homeless, and many other civil and human rights advocacy groups. It has been compared, along with its companion "nuisance ordinances" to the Black Codes of the Reconstruction South. Moriba Karamoko wrote in the September Hospitality that this particular ordinance shares three similarities with the Black Codes:

1. They project a view of the oppressed as criminals.
2. They are concerned with the enforcement of laws to protect the property of rich white folks.
3. Supporters of such laws deny that they are designed to punish and control Black people.

The law, by any measure, is a bad law. It is based on racist assumptions and class hatred. It is a radical expansion of police power (never in Georgia law has there been a law to give such broad discretionary power to individual police officers). And it is a travesty that the church would join with oppressive secular powers in using and sanctioning such a law.

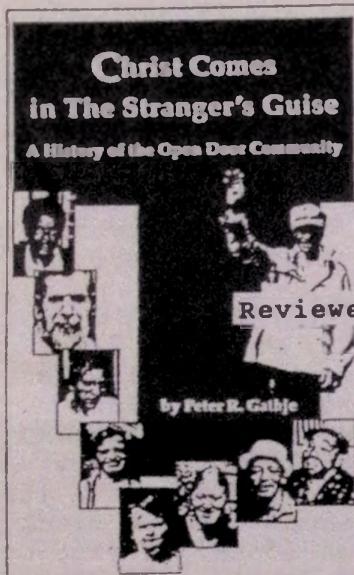
It is necessary to add, however, that even though there are particular problems with the ordinance posted at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, it would not be a sufficient remedy to replace it by posting a "regular" trespass law, or by using armed security guards. The basic problem remains: the harassment and exclusion of the poor as a class from church grounds, enforced by city (or private) police, is a contradiction of Biblical theology.

4. The decision on the part of 29 white session members to post church property against the poor is inherently racist.

Probably no one on the session of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church would think of themselves as a racist. But surely racism is more than just a matter of the individual heart. Racism has to do with the shape, structure, and effect of our institutions (the powers and principalities, if you will) to hurt, deprive, harass, control or punish people because of their skin color.

Again, our church friends would say that the posting is not particularly directed at African Americans. But this is a fact: we live in the second poorest city in the United States and the majority of poor people here in Atlanta are African Americans. I must take seriously what a colleague in Concerned Black Clergy said about the signs at the church: "When I see that sign, I get a clear message: 'N---r, stay out!'"

(continued on page 9)



Reviewed by Charles McKelvey

By Peter B. Gathje

Charles McKelvey is Associate Professor of Sociology at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina. He is the author of Beyond Ethnocentrism: A Reconstruction of Marx's Concept of Science (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), a book which draws upon the writings of Marx and Catholic philosopher Bernard Lonergan to argue that scientific objectivity is attained through encounter with the oppressed. He is also the author of The African-American Movement: From Pan-Africanism to the Rainbow Coalition, which will be available through General Hall in January. He is presently undertaking a study of the Christian Commission for Development in Honduras.

Peter Gathje's Christ Comes In The Stranger's Guise describes the lives of four people who were profoundly influenced by the events of the 1960's. In his account of the history of the Open Door Community, Gathje describes the moral and intellectual development of the four founders of the Open Door: Ed Loring, Murphy Davis, Rob Johnson, and Carolyn Johnson. All four came of age in the 1960's, and all were involved in Civil Rights and anti-war protests and demonstrations. They emerged from their experiences determined to live in a manner that rejected the "idols of national security, of conspicuous consumption, of putting profits before people, of race and class." They sought to live lives that were rooted in religious conversion and Christian commitment. Their quest led them in the late 1970's to offer shelter for the homeless at the Clifton Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. Building upon this foundation, with the belief that the Christian faith is lived in community, they established the Open Door Community in 1980.

Gathje's book reflects careful research and reflection. The author, a student at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, did volunteer work with the community and spent a summer in the community as a resident volunteer. He also extensively interviewed past and present community members. He effectively uses quotations from these interviews in the book, and especially valuable in this regard are his quotations of Murphy Davis and Ed Loring. This is an invaluable book for anyone who would like to understand the Open Door Community. It is also an important case study of Christian commitment to social justice in our time. It reveals the conflicting currents of U.S.

society from 1960 to 1990 and the enduring contributions of those who have been actively involved in those conflicts on the side of the oppressed.

The Open Door is a community, where people of different economic backgrounds and races live together, sharing meals and work responsibilities together. The community includes people of middle class background as well as former prisoners and people who formerly were living in the streets. In addition, the Open Door is a community of service. The Open Door takes seriously Matthew 25, and accordingly, it provides meals, showers, and clothes for the homeless. It visits prisoners on death row, and assists family members in visiting their loved ones in prison. Through voluntary poverty and service to the poor, the community endeavors to live out its belief of solidarity with the poor.

But the Open Door Community does not confine itself to voluntary poverty and charity. The community, in addition, has a strong tradition of social action on behalf of social justice. Gathje documents the many activities of the community in this regard, including a 1982 demonstration calling for the city to open shelters; 1983-84 confrontations with the city government, in which the Open Door called for the construction of public restrooms and for a suspension of arrests for public urination until restrooms were provided (and during which Ed Loring carried a toilet into City Hall and read the scriptures while sitting on it); demonstrations during 1987 in protest of the replacement of Plaza Park by Underground Atlanta; a 1989 protest at the opening of Underground Atlanta; a 1990 occupation of the Imperial Hotel in order to dramatize the need for low-cost housing for the poor; and silent vigils at the state capitol before every execution. In relation to these activities, the Open Door seeks to educate, explaining that homelessness is a product of social policies that benefit the wealthy, and explaining that U.S. policies toward the homeless and the prisoner reflect fundamentally unbiblical attitudes toward the oppressed. In all this, the Open Door stands as a powerful indictment of mainstream U.S. Christianity, which reduces the Christian ethic to a narrow personal moralism and which is far too much at ease with U.S. culture.

In spite of his articulate support of the goals of the Open Door, Gathje does not present a naive account which overlooks difficulties inherent in such a community. He discusses the extent to which community members bring into the community previously learned biases of race, class, and gender, making the establishment of genuine community a constant struggle. He describes difficulties in regard to the distribution of authority in the community, including the tendency for persons of middle class background to have more authority, in spite of significant steps toward the development of equality. And he notes that the community emphasis on a theology of the cross can suppress joy, an important factor in the decision of Rob and Carolyn Johnson to leave the community. But his realistic assessment of these difficulties does not undermine his clear portrayal of the achievements of the Open Door in its journey to create Christian community.

(continued from page 7)

If the signs are intended to mean something else, what is it? Who are the police being asked to arrest in the yard of the church? Some of the elderly members of the church? Could it be a young white couple from Virginia-Highlands coming to visit the Wednesday night supper? No, probably not. The church has been clear that it is desperate for new members. In fact, some at Druid Hills have spoken clearly of the fear that "new members" would be frightened off by the presence of poor and homeless people. It is painfully clear that those who are not welcome in the yard of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church are the poor and this means especially African Americans. Middle and upper class white Americans are frightened by young Black men (a fact borne out by the success of George Bush's Willie Horton campaign) and so we have moved more and more to having the police and criminal justice system control the movement of young Black men.

The recent events around the beating of Rodney King and the jury's exoneration of the police officers could only take place because white people and people of privilege have repeatedly refused to stand over against the institutions of power and privilege (our institutions) as they push, exclude, oppress and punish people of color and the poor.

We must, we must in concrete and specific ways stand against racism on the part of individuals and institutions. The time is long past for white people to learn about the violent and debilitating effects of racism and to take action against it.

The Broader Issues For The Church

1. We Presbyterians are not a pluralistic church, but we live in a pluralistic culture.

The Presbyterian Church is an upperclass church and is 90+% white. There are very few poor Presbyterian congregations and church growth has taken place over the last twenty years in the suburbs. Many urban churches have shrunk, closed their doors, or followed their members to the safety and calm of suburbia.

Our church does not understand or know how to strategize for, interpret theologically, or deal with the problems of the city. So a shrinking church like Druid Hills is left on its own to struggle with perplexing, and at times, overwhelming problems. Without visionary leadership from the wider church they are left to their own devices or the counsel of secular neighborhood groups and associations.

Perhaps it could be said that the signs at Druid Hills represent the suburbanization of the American Church and American theology. It is time for the church to face the beauty and the horror of urban reality. And then we must develop a new theology, a deepened spirituality, and structural and economic resources to support vital creative ministry in the city.

2. Our theology of reconciliation is often separated from a class-race-gender analysis and thus becomes shallow and off-center.

Many people have expressed pain over the division and conflict between the Open Door and Druid Hills Presbyterian Church and the desire that we be reconciled. We appreciate this concern and share the hope for our reconciliation.

We also hope that privileged Christians can learn to be pained by the real divisions--the death-dealing divisions: those between rich and poor, between white and people of color, between women and men, between the homeless and the housed.

Poverty, racism, and sexism are causing indescribable suffering and death right under our noses, but few middle class Christians feel any urgency to change our lives or take decisive action. Rather, we cling to an ideal of reconciliation that is really an insipid, "Be nice and don't rock the boat," which in fact then becomes a word in favor of the deadly status quo.

"Justice will come," said a Rabbi, "when those who are not injured are as indignant as those who are." It is time to learn to get more indignant over policy and practice that causes suffering and death than we do over a breach of middle class manners.

3. We must discover new resources for understanding what it means to "Present our bodies as a living sacrifice," or, as Jim Wallis translates it, "Putting our bodies where our doctrines are."

We have heard from some sisters and brothers in the church who agree that the signs at Druid Hills are awful but who think we are wrong to picket the church.

We have tried to be clear all along that we are not ultimately committed to any particular form of protest. We have asked and continue to ask now for other ideas. But we have heard little in the way of alternatives.

Meetings and letters and proposals have not worked. The homeless poor are still excluded and threatened by the signs at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church.

The next step in this journey for justice will be to undertake a week-long chain fast for justice and reconciliation of all God's people.

Will you join us as we struggle with how to present our bodies as living sacrifices?



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And then we need to ask, Why?

We are going through massive changes in the social, cultural, political, and economic landscape of the United States--and it's being done without our acknowledging what we're doing. Why?

On the local level people are increasingly tired of, and frustrated by, the ongoing and growing presence of the poor. And so we use police and jails to sweep the poor out of our sight, never bothering to ask, of course, what happens to the least of these after they're swept from our neighborhoods.

Our neighbor Presbyterian Church has decided to arrest any homeless poor who come uninvited into their yard. Sanctuary is shrinking and our private and public policy is increasingly hateful toward the poor.

Underneath the numbers, of course, is a well of human suffering and social disintegration that is simply beyond description--hundreds of thousands of shattered lives and hopes, broken families, and broken dreams. And built shakily on top of it, is the privilege of a shrinking number of people. Ah yes, perhaps keeping quiet in such evil times is the smart thing to do.

But there is no need for us to be afraid of facing this because we have the rich resources of a Biblical faith and a great cloud of witnesses that would look familiar to any Georgia prison warden: Jesus, the prisoner--sentenced to death as a common criminal; Rahab the hooker; Mary Magdalene the psychotic; Jacob the thief; Moses the murderer; David the murderer; Saul the murderer.

Don't you think God must sometimes chuckle? All the stories of scripture and we still don't get the point.

God loves to come to the most broken, the most wasted, those least likely to be fixed or rehabilitated or "mainstreamed," and say, "You!"

You! Tell Pharaoh to let my people go!

You! Find the Risen Christ at the empty tomb and run, tell the others, proclaim the Resurrection!

You! Plant my church. Go to the ends of the earth!

We have the story! We know it!

We just forget that it has anything in the world to do with the culture and politics of today. And so the story sits on a shelf and shrivels for lack of vitality.

The prophet is clear enough about the stakes here. If you don't turn to God--if you don't plumb the resources of your Biblical faith to sort through the political baloney that misleads everybody and continually sacrifices the poor for our

corporate lack of imagination--then Yahweh will come like a fire. And friend will it burn!

And I want to tell you the fire is burning. We've denied it; we've been quiet; we politely pretend it's not there, or that it won't touch us, but it's burning.

We're running from a lion--straight into the jaws of a bear. We've been zealous, frantic to keep our neighborhoods safe, and now in the safe sanctuary of our home we put our hands on the wall and are bitten by a snake.

So are the consequences of a corporate life based on greed and fear--based on a willingness to keep quiet and to give our silent consent as the poor go down the tubes and pretend it has nothing to do with any of the rest of us.

Keeping quiet in such evil times is the smart thing to do!

Why is it smart for you?

Why does it make so much professional sense for you to turn your head from the reality of prisons in our midst? Why do the people you and I know not talk about it? Why is it impolite for you to begin to ask questions about Episcopalians and Catholics and Presbyterians in the court system of DeKalb or Fulton or Clarke County--or whatever county?

It's your question. It's my question. It's our question.

Why?

Life Is Full Of Ironies Department

At a recent meeting of the Ponce de Leon Improvement Association, on the first Tuesday of April, two police officers present at the meeting were talking afterwards. One of them made the statement that they now arrest people for jaywalking on Ponce. He described how when the police see an undesirable person on the street, they say, "Move along!" Then, the police get on their radio and notify the police up the block to watch out for someone coming in that direction. When the police see the person break a law, like jaywalking, they take them to jail.

The policeman speaking defended these police actions by saying how hard they were working to clear the streets of the poor and the homeless.

(Contributed by one who regularly attends the Ponce de Leon Improvement Association meetings.)

On a recent Sunday morning, as we were picketing in front of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church, a police vehicle slowed beside our line. A white officer turned toward us, thrust his thumb in the air, and shouted: "Good job! Thank you!" Then he rode on his way.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear sisters and brothers:

It was with sadness and some anger that I read the account in Hospitality of the picket by the Open Door Community at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. The essay by Elizabeth Dede and the captions to the photos that accompany it raise more questions than they answer. Please help me to understand this decision better.

Sister Elizabeth mentions no attempts by the Open Door Community to meet with the session of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church. Perhaps such a meeting did take place, or perhaps an attempt was made to have such a meeting. The essay does not say. I sincerely hope that the Open Door Community did not "reluctantly" picket the Druid Hills Church before every effort was made to talk with those who made the decision to post the church property.

My own congregation is deeply involved in work with homeless people. These efforts involve both public and private dimensions. I have learned in this work that there are many facets to the problem of homelessness-- not the least of them the fear that people who are not homeless have of those who are and the resentment created by advocates for homeless people whose tactics produce more heat than light.

Ours is a downtown congregation. We also have folks sleeping on our property at night. So far we have resisted suggestions from the Police Department that we post our property. Still, I don't kid myself that allowing folks to sleep in the breezeway is any form of ministry to homeless people.

On several occasions I have had to scoop human excrement from that same breezeway and disinfect the area early on a Sunday morning. I don't think that the church janitor should be required to perform that task. I have also had to counsel the staff of our preschool--the first racially integrated preschool in the city--who have been fearful of their safety because of the presence of homeless people. More than once I have had prospective members say that because we host a meal to homeless people on weekends, they will not come back to our church. They find the presence of homeless people too discomforting.

All this is to say that there are many dynamics in a church's struggle to be faithful. Most people of faith truly struggle with how best to be our neighbor's keeper. That struggle is not helped by confrontational tactics such as pickets and self-serving essays.

Ms. Dede's essay speaks in noble terms about what she learned from John, a homeless, mentally ill man. She says she first met John when he was sleeping on the back porch at the Open Door Community. What she doesn't say is why John sleeps on the porch of a community with the name "Open Door." Was the door closed to John? If so, I suspect there are good reasons why.

I suspect the answer why John was on the porch is complex and has to do with the limitation of resources, John's own choices, the symptoms of his illness, and the need to balance the moral requirement both to do good and to do no harm. I think that, if you had sat down and talked with the folks at Druid Hills, they would tell you much the same about their decision to "close the door" to their parking lot. There is likely more to their story than the "posted" sign, just as there is more to your story than a man sleeping outside a house that is supposed to be "open."

Please don't tell your readers how "reluctantly" you came to a decision to picket a Christian church with signs that read "Shameful" unless you also share how you came to this reluctant decision. It would not be fair for me to picket the Open Door Community for excluding John from a bed on the other side of the "Open Door." That would be to cast the first stone. Based upon the little bit of information in Ms. Dede's essay, I have to wonder if your decision to picket was a way of casting the first stone yourselves.

In the past, Hospitality has been refreshingly free of self-righteousness. You seem to me on this occasion to be wallowing in it. As a Christian community and as a community supported by Presbyterians, you have a responsibility to be agents of reconciliation within Christ's body as well as in the world. If picketing this church was a last resort, you owe it to your readers to say why. If it was not, then you have no moral right to call the church's actions "shameful."

On several occasions our church has been threatened with pickets because of a stand we have taken on abortion or homosexuality. On those occasions I have asked the would-be protesters to worship with us and talk with us first. The pickets never materialized, but the conversations were indeed helpful.

Maybe you did the same with Druid Hills. If you did, I wish you had told your readers about it.

Please help me to see where I'm wrong. I admire your overall witness and do not plan to cease doing so over this matter.

Sincerely,

Brant S. Copeland
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church
Tallahassee, FL

Dear All--

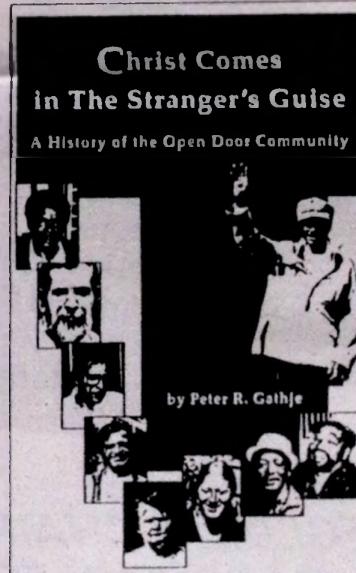
Please accept my small gift in appreciation for your good work. I was especially touched by the January issue of Hospitality about Warren McCleskey. I take courage in knowing the Lord's work continues in such despairing circumstances.

Keep up the good work.

Peace,

David Dunne
Chicago, IL

**Your donation
will assist us in
feeding the hungry
and
visiting the prisoner.**



Please send a \$10 donation to:

Phillip Williams
Open Door Community
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30306-4212

for a copy of our 10th Anniversary Book, or call 404/874-9652.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____, State _____

Zip _____

WE ARE OPEN...

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

OUR MINISTRY...

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

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

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST--Monday-Friday, 7:15am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES--Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 2-4pm
(Be sure to call; schedule varies)

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

SHELTER REQUESTS--Wednesday-Friday, 9am-noon

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

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household and volunteers/supporters),
July 24-26.

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



NEEDS

JEANS

Men's Work Shirts
Men's Underwear

Quick Grits

Cheese

Mayonnaise

Multi-Vitamins

MARTA Tokens

Men's Large Shoes (12-14)

Coffee

Non-Aerosol Deodorant

Toothbrushes

Toothpaste

Shampoo

FOLDING CHAIRS

CARD TABLES

From 11am til 1:30pm, Monday through Saturday, our attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11:00 or after 1:30, it would be helpful.

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

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Open Door Community Worship

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

Join us!

May 31	Worship at 910 Billy Neal Moore, preaching
June 7	Worship at 910 Houston Wheeler, preaching
June 14	Worship at 910 Moriba Karamoko, preaching
June 21	Worship at 910 Dick Rustay, preaching
June 28	Worship at 910 Liz Spraggins sings Gospel and Jazz

