

HOSPITALITY

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

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Atlanta's Coming Winter

by Rob Johnson

Recently at a midweek church supper, I sat across the table from the volunteer coordinator for that church's shelter for homeless people. "Rob, can we send our guests over to the Open Door tomorrow night?" I just got a call from another volunteer who can't make it. I've already spent three nights at the shelter this month and November looks even more bleak....people seem to be burning out here."

That comment was enough to direct my thoughts for this issue of Hospitality. This is the time of year when we pause to look at the broad "Night Hospitality Movement" in Atlanta--taking stock before the winter begins. My intention had been to be as positive as possible. This should be the season to build up our enthusiasm. Given some ongoing criticism that the Open Door gives too much emphasis to "what's left to be done" versus "how much has already been done," I had further incentive to be up-beat.

But the October discouragement at one shelter has been only one of several signs of fragility within the Atlanta shelter movement. Perhaps by facing the blunt truth along with the accompanying signs of encouragement Atlanta's hospitality to the homeless can grow.

Maintaining existing church and municipal shelters is hard work. After several years more than one program has folded. The structures of some programs have actually invited disaster: crowding 450 people into one building with less than 5 people offering hosting could only create chaos. Other efforts have continued only by constantly recruiting new volunteers and/or replacing key volunteer leadership positions with paid staff. "Rehabilitation" of homeless individuals is extremely rare. And as a result idealistic volunteers can become discouraged when their shelter friends do not "progress" out of the shelters. Surely the reasons for stopping this ministry will continue to grow as the years go by.

We at the Open Door are by no means immune from all of this. Our community is coming out of a difficult year--growing smaller. Overworked, re-evaluating our identity and structure, we have tried to slow down. Struggling to be small and focused, we now have 18 guests (down from 25). Virtually no energy has been spent by us this year in recruiting and assisting new churches to open their facilities for the homeless.

Obviously others are in the same place. The Task Force on Homelessness and related Christian Council

Winter (cont. on page 2)

Winter

(cont. from front)

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staff have only been able to get one new church shelter opened this year. Perhaps time for research, administration of city/federal funds, and assistance to existing programs has kept those folks busy also. Similarly, the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless have focused on a variety of problems facing our friends. But still we are stagnant in offering basic shelter to the 5,000 people who desperately need it.

The bottom line (reflected on the graph on page 2) is that this winter we will have about 1365 beds for the homeless compared with 1442 last year. In terms of free space it will be 635 compared with 760. This assumes that a new 100-bed facility will be opening soon at the old Bryant School.

As we were last year, Atlanta is to be commended for making it's shelters smaller. But because more places have closed than have opened, for the second year in a row we will offer a net loss of hospitality.

The largest loss comes from the decision not to reopen the city's emergency shelter at Pryor Street. Again, the "shelter" offered to 450 people some nights was so minimal that many people on the streets refused to even consider going there after a while. The new "Phoenix Place" at the Bryant School should be better. There is a possibility of a second facility being opened with the same city/federal funding sources.

On another scale, though, the closing of all three shelters in Black congregations is a bigger loss. Turner Monumental AME, Power House Church of God in Christ, and the Southwest Atlanta Outreach Center at Calvary United Methodist Church have all closed. The sixty or so spaces lost do not accurately reflect the impact that those programs offered.

Let us close with rejoicing! We do have the wonderful evidence that Atlanta is continuing to create sanctuary for our urban refugees. Counting Phoenix Place, six new facilities will have opened in the past year. The Golden Harvest Mission on Melton Ave. has been serving up to 70 men and women since April. The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA is over 6 months old in its efforts to serve 25 women and children. Wheat Street Baptist Church has graciously given space to a street-people run "Dignity House" for 25 men. A place has been offered to 30 women a night for half a year, even though the program continues to look for a permanent location (now at the day-time Samaritan House building). And a new "Transition House" will allow 6 formerly homeless people to share space as they begin new jobs. In future issues of Hospitality we will give more detailed glimpses of these new efforts.

The other day someone here at the Open Door was reflecting that the 53 year-old Catholic Worker house in New York had to cut back to a three-day-a-week soup kitchen last year. So much for promises of growth and success over the long haul! Who knows what will still be open in Atlanta in ten or fifty years. We can only listen for God's call in our own lives and have integrity in our response. We can only pray that more workers will be sent to this amazing vineyard of homeless ministries. And we can only invite others to join us. God has already promised to give us the power and give us all we need to do Her will. Perhaps at least some of the numbers on the graph below bear witness to God's success. *

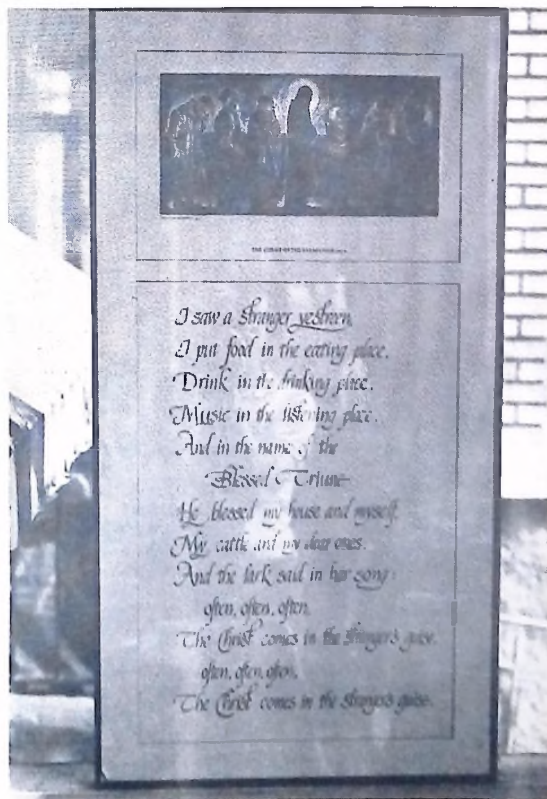


HOSPITALITY is published 11 times a year by The Open Door Community (P.C.U.S.), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts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

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Rob Johnson - Treasurer
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Manuscript Preparation - Rob Johnson, Tom Klein, John Pickens; Graphics & Art - Donna Pickens, Tom Klein;
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Circulation- Kent Arnold, Norman Gale and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests



Shelters and Space - Dec. '85

SHELTER FOR FREE

SHELTER FOR COST (\$3 - \$11)

Men	Both	Women	Family	Couple	Women/ Children	Men	Women	Family	Women Children
Clifton Pres. (30)	All Saints Episc. (50)	1st Pres (12)	MUST (11)	Temple (20)	St. Marks UMC (13)	Dignity* House (25)	Union Mission (90)	Help House (35)	Salvation Army (20)
Druid Hills Pres (30)	Central Pres (75)	Shearith Israel (16)	St. Bart. Episc. (18)		Phyllis* Wheatley YWCA (25)	Salvation Army (87)			Salvation Army Youth (17)
Gospel Light Rescue (30)	Com. of Hospitality (3)					Transition* House (6)			
Morning- side Baptist (20)	Golden* Harvest Mission (70)					Born Again Christian (10)			
Oakhurst Baptist (11)	Open Door Community (16)					Recovery Center (165)			
St. Anthony's Catholic (30)	Jonesboro Pres (45)					Union Mission (275)			
Trinity UMC (30)	SNOR (M.U.S.T.) (20)								
Phoenix + Place (Bryant St. Sch.) (100)									
<div>Closed in the last year: - Pryor Street Shelter - Power House Ch. of God - Turner Monumental AME - Calvary UMC *New in the past year +Being planned</div>									
Tot. 251	269	28	29	20	38	568	90	35	37
Last year 196	473	28	29	18	26	535	90	35	22
TOTAL (all space) - 1365						LAST YEAR - 1442			
Total free - 635						Total for Cost - 730			

MARIELITOS

by Patrick O'Neill

All at once a great hoard of prison employees began pouring through the steel door of C-Cellhouse. It was some kind of a "general alert" which had caused employees to stop whatever they were doing and converge on "C-House" to lend assistance. "There was a fight on the third tier," I heard someone say. A few seconds later a group of guards descended the narrow staircase carrying a wire-mesh stretcher. The body on the stretcher was wrapped in a prison-issue army blanket, his face covered over. I hoped the guy was okay. A few minutes later everything was back to "normal" in C-House. The excitement was over.

I was in C-House - in "the hole" (isolation) - because I had received an "incident report," (a written disciplinary charge) while at the minimum-security prison wing located outside the great walls of the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. I was out of my cell during the "general alert" because I had just been to the prison hospital to have some tissue paper tweezed out of my eardrum. I had been using the paper as an earplug to cut down the volume of noise which constantly echos throughout the five-tiered, cement and steel cellhouse. While trying to remove the tissue paper I accidentally lodged it too far into my ear canal causing me a good deal of pain. Most of the 1,850 Cubans being "detained" at the Pen have been living in "the hole," with all that noise, since October 1984 - 24 hours a day.

Relief from this daily routine is rare. Inmates confined in any of the Pen's five cellhouses are fed in their cells. According to a prison spokesperson inmates have an hour of exercise once every 10 - 14 days, and "at least" one shower a week. Inmates and their families say showers are not always so frequent.

"What's the condition of that guy they carried out yesterday?" I casually asked a guard who I'd seen on duty during the alert the previous day. "He's dead. Hung himself," the guard replied. "I thought it was a fight?" I inquired. "No, he hung himself. He was still warm when we brought him out of here, but we didn't catch him in time."

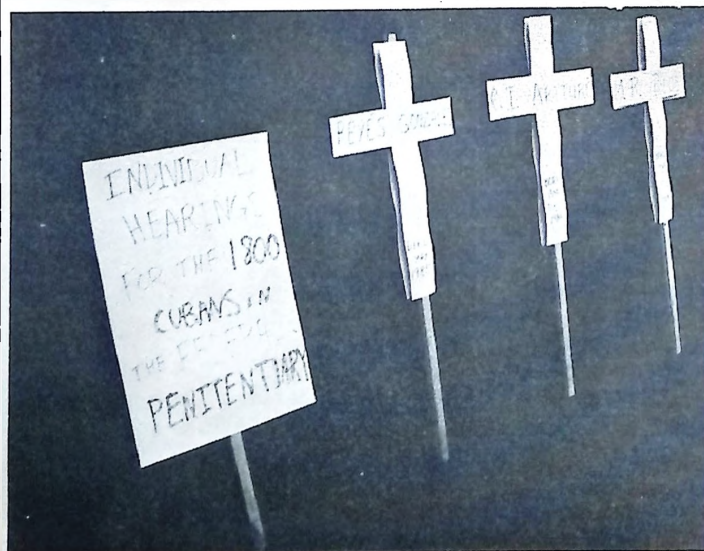
Gerardo Leyva-Rodriguez, 28, was the second suicide (that I knew of) in 10 weeks. We buried his unclaimed body in the prison graveyard along with the other 19 men who have died young at the Pen since the so-called "Freedom Flotilla" sailed to the United States from the Cuban port of Mariel in 1980. Many of the Marielitos, (in reference to their home port) have been in the Pen for the entire five years. Most of the men are considered persona non grata (an unacceptable person or undesirable) by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. This means they are permanently unwelcome in the U.S. Since the Cuban Government refuses to accept them for deportation, they have nowhere to go; hence they are being indefinitely imprisoned.

It's the indefinite imprisonment, more than the physical conditions, which is the greatest problem for the men. But the combination of the two is a mixture which causes the deep sense of hopelessness and despair which can ultimately push these men to the brink. I have no figures on the number who try unsuccessfully to take their own lives, but I have heard from reliable sources that the numbers are very high.

The insensitivity of the U.S. Government officials and judges, who hold the fates of the Marielitos in their hands, is enough to drive anyone to despair. Louis M. Richard, Atlanta district director for the INS, has repeatedly made comments to the press which demonstrate how little concern he has for the lives of these men. In May Richard told an Atlanta reporter that meeting with the Cubans at the Pen was "not like going



The Last Resort



to a boy's school" and that he could only find 14 or 15 men out of the 300 cases he reviewed who were "potentially worthy" of release in the U.S. In a Sept. 15 interview with the Atlanta Constitution-Journal (conducted while hundreds of Marielitos were on a hunger strike) Richard said: "I do have a boxful of letters from people who think their darlings ought to be paroled...I haven't looked at any in a couple of weeks. I've got a lot of other things going on."

In January the U.S. 11th Circuit Court of Appeals dealt one of its many crushing blows to the Marielitos. Said Robert S. Vance, the court's presiding judge at the time: "The Government can keep them in the Atlanta Pen until they die."

In the year I have spent as a federal prisoner in Atlanta I have been most shocked, not by the cruel insensitivity and violence of "The System" towards the Marielitos, but rather, by the almost total lack of

Marielitos (cont. on page 5)

Marielitos

(cont. from page 4)

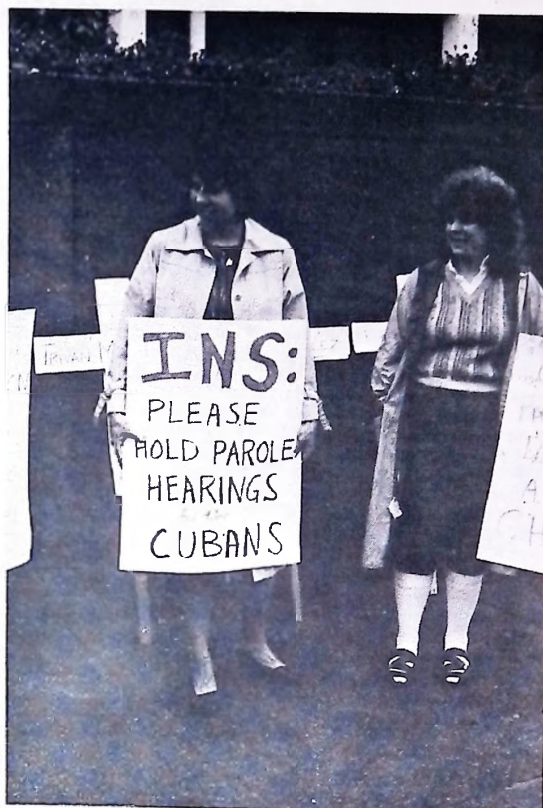
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public outcry over the plights of these men imprisoned behind those ominous penitentiary walls. I have read so much about people protesting roads, books, apartheid - even the formula of a soft drink, - yet only two, small almost unnoticed vigils have been held in the last year to protest the injustices being faced by the Marielitos.

In a very real sense I view the Marielitos as modern day "outcasts." In a Biblical vein these men are truly the "least of God's children." Unwelcomed in their homeland. Unwelcomed by foreigners. Brutalized by oppressors. Kept in isolation, with no one willing to speak up for them.

As saddened as I am by the lack of public support for the Marielitos, I am also encouraged by the great faith of those men. On two occasions, groups of Cuban prisoners have mounted non-violent efforts to call attention to their suffering. On Oct. 13, 1984, a group of approximately 100 Marielitos staged a nonviolent vigil with bedsheet banners asking for "Liberty" and "Freedom." The prison courtyard vigil was broken up by riotgear-clad prison guards. A subsequent lockdown of all Cuban prisoners was the impetus for the so-called "riots" which occurred later in Oct. Even then, property damage was the major result; no guards were seriously injured, no hostages taken. Several prison employees admitted to me that the Marielitos could have caused injury or death if that had been their goal. Even while being oppressed severely inmates took their frustration out on inanimate objects. In Sept. of this year as many as 500 Marielitos participated in a hunger strike - another self-sacrificing effort to bring some relief. All who refused to eat were force-fed by means of nasal tubes - a painful process.

The lockdown is now almost a year old and despite some relaxing of restraints placed on the Marielitos, the legal situation is perhaps at its all-time worst. Their incarceration could go on for years if public pressure is not exerted on INS, prison officials, and the courts.



Despite the complexity of the Marielitos' situation, I believe many options exist for solving their problems. Here are some suggestions:

* Since deportation is not feasible, it is essential that the U.S. government re-evaluate the legal status of the Marielitos. Indefinite incarceration is a human rights violation and should not be viewed as a viable option.

* All the Marielitos should be granted new INS hearings to determine the status of their cases. If it is determined that an inmate has completed his sentence for the offense charged, he should be immediately released with the necessary assistance to help cope with the post-release transition period.

* If the findings of the hearing reveal an inmate has allegedly committed a more serious offense, his case should be referred immediately to a Federal Court for a special jury trial to prove such charges. Each person should receive the same legal rights afforded any U.S. citizen.

* If understaffed in their Atlanta offices, the INS should request additional help from Washington to expedite the hearings.

* Radio Marti, an unnecessary propaganda tool which only weakens U.S. - Cuban relations should be shut down. There are already several similar types of radio stations, privately operated by Cuban-Americans, that broadcast anti-Castro messages from southern Florida to Cuba.

More suggestions relate specifically to the situation at the U.S. penitentiary:

* The year-old lockdown of the Marielitos should be ended immediately. The men should be permitted to return to daily work assignments and have all privileges returned (eg. religious services, daily recreation, showers, meals served in cafeterias). The lockdown is, in and of itself, contributing to the depression, despair, and hopelessness already being felt by the Marielitos. Lives will be saved by ending this cruel policy.

* All mentally ill inmates should be transferred to hospitals which are better-equipped to treat them.

* During the waiting process, the Marielitos should be given the option to be transferred to other federal or state prisons nearer their homes or next of kin. This privilege is afforded U.S. Federal prisoners in most cases.

* Better pre-release programs should be offered to help the Marielitos with the normal problems experienced by aliens in a new land. English should be taught by competent instructors.

* All confiscated personal property should be returned to the Marielitos. Any lost or destroyed property should be replaced or paid for.

Letters of support for the above proposals should be sent to:

Rev. Jack Hanberry, Warden
U.S. Penitentiary
Atlanta, Georgia 30315

and to Mr. Louis Richard
Immigration & Naturalization Service
75 Spring Street Rm 1408
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Letters-to-the-editor of local and national papers will also help.

* Patrick O'Neill, 29, is serving a 3-year prison sentence stemming from his participation in a Plowshare action against the arms race on Easter morning 1984. Patrick visited the Open Door Community in July while on a 5-day furlough. He can receive letters at:
O'Neil 03831-018
Federal Prison Box 150160
Atlanta, Georgia 30315-0182

Dear Editor

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at the Open Door:

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

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

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

Rejoice!

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

Thank you!

It won't
be LONG
NOW

John Cole Vadicke

Here it is! The answer to our prayers for a 15-passenger van...the result of your overwhelmingly generous response to a funding appeal earlier this summer. As hoped, we now have spacious, reliable transportation to the Hardwick prison, Butler Street breakfast, community retreats to Camp Calvin, and for weekly trips to the Food Bank. Our continuing thanks for all the support which has come from so many of our friends.



7 Street Scenes

by Ed Loring

Waiting on Bus #2

5:25 AM. I was standing at the dark corner of Ponce de Leon Avenue and Barnett Street. Across the street a lonely prostitute waved to the fast moving eastbound traffic. The wind blew cold even in October. The lightless liquor store stood silent waiting for the thirsty day to bring the broken through its sinister doors. I sat down on the cold concrete wall.

Beside me crouched a man hovering in a blanket. We slowly acknowledged each other's existence. Then we waited as MARTA buses roared down Ponce de Leon toward their daily loads of human cargo. In a few minutes I asked him how he was doing. "Bad, bad," he sadly replied as his balding head now peered from under the blue blanket. He had dug ditches all day the preceeding day but had nowhere to turn after work. Someone on the streets had suggested that he try the Open Door, so he had come to 910 Ponce de Leon late in the evening. Although the door was shut, someone gave him a blanket with an invitation to use the concrete porch that night for a bed. When he woke his legs were cramped and he could not walk without severe pain and misery. He told me that he had a chance for the same job at 7:00 AM. if he could only get to Peak Load Labor Pool. But his legs would not work. "I'm just trying to get to my family in Florida," he told me.

5:45 AM. Bus #2 stopped for me. I climbed on with a wave of the hand and a hollow hurt in my heart. He was left with the lingering darkness of the early morning sky, and legs that did not work because he had worked so hard.



An Interpretation of the Hovering Blanket

Stiff legs
bent back
He
sleeps on concrete.

Awakes
walks
toward the labor pool.

5:15 AM
drops water in the alley
lights his cigarette
and waits
for his hunger to hide
beneath his ribs.

Arrives.

"Go get into the brown van.
Hurry up!"

"Where we going?"

"Man, do you want work today?
I said get in the brown van."

I
shuffle into the
darker morning.

Street (cont. on page 15)



Open Door Schedule

WE ARE OPEN...

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

OUR MINISTRY...

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

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES - Monday, Wednesday, Saturday - 9:00 - 10:00 am

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

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 7:30 pm. BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Wednesdays 7:30 - 9:30 (Nov. 6, 20, Dec. 4, 18)

FELLOWSHIP MEAL - Alternate Wednesdays 6:30 - 8:00 pm. (Nov. 13, 27, Dec. 11,)

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

The Attitude of Homelessness

by Jim Carter

It was on Tuesday evening, September 24th that I was part of a small group that attended an all-night vigil in Central City Park. We were there in solidarity with the homeless. While city officials debated over such weighty matters as whether to spend million plus on a library, whether to reopen the infamous underground Atlanta, and whether much money would be spent on the road around Carter's library, people walked for miles to get a single ninety-eight cent hamburger, one cup of coffee, and a bag of peanuts. And we even ran out of those. Not one city official, from the mayor on down (or should I say the mayor on up, because "travelin' Andy does so little for the destitute) bothered to join and lend their support. Why should they? These homeless people are not voters. Remember, some of you older folks, we are living in a town that was one of the beacon lights during the days of Civil Rights. We have gone in twenty-five short years from a city too busy to hate to a metropolis too calloused to care.

But, in the long run, we cannot blame the political forces in this area. All of that lies in the realm of the secular. And while I would not go so far as to accuse the commissioners of Atlanta of being under the power of Satan, I doubt that even worthy political agendas are often part of God's Kingdom. So to fix the responsibility for the almost two million aimless and wandering people in this country, we must look squarely at the American church. The homeless haunt us as we sit in our padded, air-conditioned sanctuaries, listening to our ministers refusing to touch the subject. If you attend a church that is not providing either a soup kitchen on it's premises, operating an emergency shelter, or providing volunteers for the first two, you are attending a church that is Christian in name only. To claim more is to mock God. There are maybe ten churches that provide soup kitchens in the Atlanta area, and this winter, optimistically, there will be thirty shelters. Many of the other 1500 "bodies of believers" may send some money, and that is needed, but in any significant way, they are silent.

The churches ignore Jesus' first recorded words as an adult as he came with a message to transform the world. It might be interesting to quote those words at this point, as they seem to lose little of their power even when taken out of context:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, and announce the time has come when the Lord will save the people.

Luke 4:18-19

As far as we know, that was it, in its entirety. Luke tells us that Jesus sat down, handed the scroll to an attendant, and said only, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read." The world and the church have never been the same since that moment. Even now, almost 2000 years after this first sermon, the church fails to fulfill one of its major rolls: the role of shepherd. In Atlanta, as in other cities, there are glowing and inspiring churches that take the gospel seriously and provide friendship and hope. But there are so few. The unthinking statement that we live in a Christian nation is to ignore reality. We live in one of the most violent countries in the world. No matter how we scurry to start new buildings, refurbish old quarters, add new and more comprehensive Bible studies, and increase membership past the point where a person is lucky if they have a word with their pastor once a year, we are only glossing over our empty hearts. Conventions that deal with inerrancy of the Bible, that work to reconvene factions of the same church, and that focus on national issues instead of their neighborhood, are only smokescreens. God is not fooled. God may not even be present, except in a sorrowful way.

So we are afraid of the homeless and the idea of homelessness. A volunteer has said that the insight came to him that he is only a divorce and a job away from the streets. The corporations and the computers eat people so heartlessly and spit them out so easily that the street population is constantly changing. It

is in getting over our fear of the homeless that God captivates us. This knowledge--that works itself slowly into our hearts--is that in spite of the horror of the streets, most of our friends are survivors. In a city that would hope they would go somewhere else, with new eyes--with eyes of admiration and love.

There is a fascination about homelessness once we have begun to dare look at it. Many will remember the TV show called "Bronson" that was popular a few years ago. Perhaps the plots were a lot of fluff and Bronson lived too well for a road-person, but what many of us will remember is the opening scene of every script when he pulls up on his motorcycle, helmet and glasses on and a small knapsack on the carrier. Immediately, a well dressed executive type pulls up beside him, and before the signal can turn green, the salesman asks, "Where are you heading?" Bronson revs his engine and replies, just as he begins to turn left, "wherever the day leads." As he speeds off we are left with a look of intense longing on the corporate one's face. Hokum, yes. The road and the street is not that glamorous for very many. But it speaks to the deep-seated longing in so many of us who are Christian to live as free and as unencumbered as our faith will let us.

I would like to share with you where I believe I am with this attitude about homelessness. I am aware that some of the things I will say, since they have not been tested, will require much more faith than the written word. I can only pray that God will strengthen me from day to day as I walk this road; that where I am terrified the Lord will take away the fear and where I claim too much that I will be pulled up short.

I began to see at Peace Pentecost in May that there is no way to achieve a true home on this earth and, at the same time, be part of the Blessed Community. We have a place to sleep, yes. But if the lovely carpets and the rich furnishings begin to become ends in themselves, then where I dwell is no longer a place of rest, but an idol. I had my first preview of this many years ago. Although I could not have verbalized it at the time, it was my first glimpse of the knowledge that I was homeless. My wife and I had built a lovely, four bedroom, split-level, centrally air conditioned home in Decatur, Georgia. It was our pride and joy. Like many suburban couples, we spent much time doing the yard bit and speaking learnedly to others of homestead exemptions and good fertilizer, etc. Even the name of the area we lived in was "fitting"--Copperfield Circle in Easterwood

Attitude (cont. on page 9)



Attitude (cont. from page 8)

Estates. One night as Helen, her son Charlie who lived with us, and I sat contentedly watching TV, a wave of terror swept over me. I looked at those two people I loved so deeply, at the very plush den we had worked so hard to buy, and I knew it was all transitory. Nothing in my power could cause it to remain static. You can be sure I quickly erased that from my immediate memory, but I had seen the reality of life.

Years have passed since that night, and I have lived in a number of places since then. We sold that house and my wife and I managed motels in Six Flags, Ga., Texas City, Texas, and Fresno, California. God began to give me a preview of the rootlessness that is a part of our biblical journey.

When I became a resident volunteer at the Open Door two years ago, I saw the homeless men I worked with at the Druid Hills Presbyterian shelter as "my boys." I romanticized the concept, as if God was incidental to their care and my "work" carried the weight. Then came a period of seeing folks as broken and beaten down and as God's children. I talked with them, but it was largely superficial. I was still a bedroom-occupying, stable R.V. and they were living where they could. Unconsciously I wanted that distinction to be maintained.



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This past July I went to Florida for a two-week vacation and the first eight days of that time I spent at a monastery. I was wrung out, probably close to being burnt out. I slept and ate and watched TV, and gradually I began to feel human once more. I came back to Atlanta refreshed, with a week more to rest, which I did at a friend's house. I did only one thing that week of a structured nature. I did my usual two-hour stint at Samaritan House, a day shelter for the homeless at St. Luke's Episcopal. I go in on Thursdays at noon to run the shower.

Shall I tell you of the freeing insight that God gave me that day? I suddenly saw all these friends as friends. I saw their loneliness, and I have since begun, where possible, to talk at more intimate levels concerning such things as where folks sleep and how they cope. I saw the despair and the bleakness, but I also saw these hopeless people washing their bodies and drying their clothes on a huge fan, playing cards and laughing, and I knew that all my life I have been homeless. I realized for the first time why I resisted riding busses. When I was in a car I could carry my portable home with me. But if I was on the rail, I was without a home, even if only temporarily. I went back to the Open Door and walked back into my room and looked at it with new eyes. It had become only a space that I was momentarily occupying. The bed was simply an object to sleep on; it no longer was attached to me in any way.

I began to know that afternoon that I would never again claim a particular place as home. If I lived in a place for the next twenty years, it, in and of itself, would be merely that--a place to live in.

My prayer for us who try to be disciples in God's kingdom is that we can begin to follow the guidance of Noah and Abraham and Sarah. The author of Hebrews writes of these elect of God:

Those who say such things make it clear that they are looking for a country of their own. They did not keep thinking about the country they had left; if they had, they would have had the chance to return. Instead, it was a better country they longed for, the heavenly country. And so God is not ashamed for them to call God by name, because God has prepared a city for them.

Gradually, then, the seductiveness and comfort of an earthly home begins to lose its power over us, and we start to become "strangers in a strange land." It is at this point, I believe, that we can begin to find our true home in what Henri Nouwen calls, "The House of God." *

Family

by Jim Carter

A good night at home:
Music playing---
People sitting around a foursome of tables
Modeling in clay and painting.
It seems there is so much love here.

This is sanctuary.
In a world that is violent and scary,
Where Master Charge and American Oil are not much different
Than the Contras or the Terrorists or the Mafia,
This little space is bathed in God's light.

Daily on Atlanta streets people are knifed and raped.
The homeless are bludgeoned by their peers and the police.
They are arrested for urinating when there are no bathrooms.
They are rapped on the ankles for sleeping in the library,
When there are almost no shelters.
They are squeezed out by the new Hiltons and Mariotts.
They are ignored as if they did not exist.

The church has abdicated God's work,
And the city has never known enough to care.
Here and there little groups like ours attempt to be obedient.
We fail again and again as we try to be disciples;
Only Christ and prayers hold us together.

A good night at home:
People sitting around a foursome of tables
Modeling in clay and painting.
No one speaks of the cancer that pervades us.
Oh, God, will we be here tomorrow
When our lonesome brothers and sisters are hungry?

Night Vigil

by Eva Dell Neel

It was a night I won't forget so easily, the night we slept in Central City Park, - but for Atlanta's homeless it was just another night on the streets.

Until this night I had always secretly romanticized about street living; I had equated it with absolute freedom. My fairy-tale was being quickly altered as the night progressed. By 8pm the air was brisk and most of us joining this action of solidarity were draped in two shirts and a jacket. I felt silly shivering when I noticed many young men in short sleeves.

I never thought in my street fantasies about practical issues like using the toilet. Around 11pm when several of us needed to locate some facilities we were turned away from even fast-food places (we were told they were "locked"). This is one of the on-going battles of the homeless.

By 8pm the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless (AAH) had given out posters and had formed a semi-circle at the front of the park. They stood under a big banner saying "Shelter for the Homeless, A Human Right." I decided to mingle in the crowd and talk with the people.

The first man I talked with was John Jacobs, a street-person in his thirties. He talked about God in a very personal and hopeful manner. He said of God: "He's the only man I know who helps me when I'm down and out. God helps me, he shows me where to stay."

The vigil was beginning. Murphy Davis started playing her guitar and singing "This little light of mine..." everybody joined in a four part harmony.

Ed Loring came forward to speak first. He talked about the significance of actions of solidarity. It's a word which indicates oneness in relations or nature. So, here we were on a brisk September night trying to feel what it is like to be homeless.

Murphy Davis led us in two more songs, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn us around," and "Ain't gonna study war no more." Both songs gave focus and impact to the moment. We were there to make a political statement; we were not participating in a people versus people society.

John Pickens, criminal justice lawyer and AAH committee person, spoke to the issue of Atlanta's recent business renovations and public face-lifting investments. "The city has a bond issue for \$500,000 to make it prettier. Why don't they spend that on the homeless?" Pickens asked.

Recent feature articles in the Atlanta Constitution referred to "derelicts" hanging around public libraries (people they want to steer elsewhere).

Pickens asked, "Who's derelict?" "The city!" he answers, "the city's business community is derelict."

"Tell the truth!" someone shouted, "Speak it!"

I was feeling angry and energized by the time Murphy Davis said, "the fact that we have to be here, that we have to do something silly, illustrates the mixed-up priorities of our government." She continued, "when unemployment goes up our government builds more prisons and jails."

"Speak it!"

"Human beings in this society are disposable. Here people have to go hungry and homeless; they have to steal food and eat from garbage cans."

"This winter," Davis said, "people will lose fingers, hands, toes and legs."

I looked around me at the broken and bandaged people in the park. I wondered how winter would be for them in their present condition. Davis seemed to answer my question.

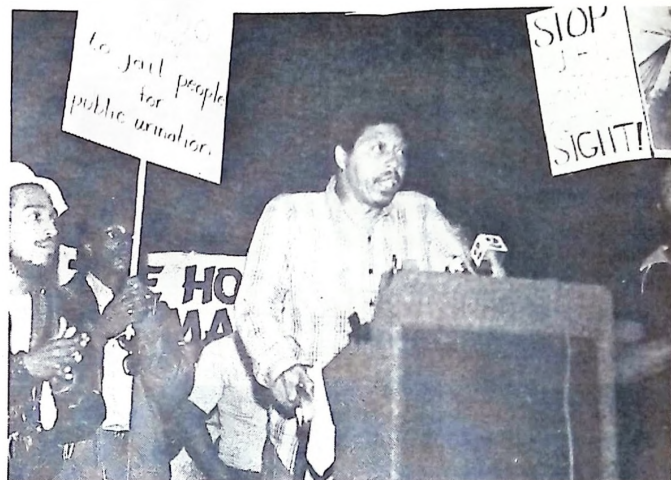
"People will die," she said, "because the city is too busy with money to help."

"Who are the derelicts?" Ed Loring yelled.

Eric Kocher, Legal Defence attorney and AAH committee person brought forward more issues of the homeless. For example, many homeless are arrested for incidents of trespassing or public urination when they have nowhere else to go. Also, most homeless folk find it difficult to receive food stamps because they have no address.

The Channel 2 camera lights were shining bright, as were our hopes that maybe the city would hear our cry, would notice our small plea for change.

I learned quite a lot that night - like where the homeless sleep: "under bridges, the back of a truck,



bushes, abandoned buildings and weed patches." I heard about the terrible condition at the labor pools. People earn \$25 per day for hard labor or at hard risk jobs.

By 10:30pm the van full of 300 hamburgers arrived. It seemed that 300 hamburgers didn't feed the hungry crowd. Some people didn't get one, others held out hands for more.

By midnight the coffee and blankets arrived. They added a cozy element to the otherwise long cold night. I spent most of the night talking to a man, who like thousands of others, came to Atlanta looking for a job; but with little money in hand, and minimum pay, has been unable to get an apartment.

He said, "I used to do OK, I'd look at the people hanging around in town all night and wonder what was wrong with them; now here I am."

There was a smell of alcohol and urine clinging to the air in the park that night as I tried to settle myself into sleep.

I awoke cold, tired, and uncomfortable on the lawn of Central City Park - feeling a little more compassion for the thousands of homeless men and women in Atlanta's boundries. *



11 Comes the Dawn

by L.C. Dorsey*

"Comes the Dawn" is the title of a poem written by Donna Talbert of Parchman State Prison in Mississippi. It was written in September 1983, the month of Jimmy Gray's execution - the first in nearly twenty years in that state. A line in the poem reads: "And you begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes open..." This line is significant to opponents of the death penalty in view of the increased executions in the country and the startling news that the U.S. has now surpassed Russia and South Africa in incarceration rates. The powers have decided to lock up and kill those persons who cause fear in the community. Unfortunately, these strategies have not made the community safer for the average citizen. There are no promises that executing two or twenty people a week will make safer communities. Thus, it is fair to say that the state is exacting vengeance...with the blessings of many good upstanding citizens and in the name of the people of the state.

The process of killing offenders began in earnest in 1976 after a moratorium, when the U.S. Supreme Court voted that the death penalty was not unconstitutional. At that time, a hand full of lawyers, organizers, and clergy began an incredibly one-sided struggle for the lives of the men, women, and children on death rows in the country. They pitted their pitiful numbers and limited resources against the state and its money (our money) and larger staff of attorneys to challenge the state's right to commit murder in the name of the people. Death sentence after death sentence was reversed by higher courts who found errors. Hundreds of death sentenced offenders were resentenced to life in prison or term sentences. The opponents of executions were holding their own. Only six people were executed between July, 1976 and December 1982 - four of whom were "volunteers."

In 1983, the courts were anxious to get on with the killings and curtailed the appeal process. And the executions began. One a week; then two in one week. And in 1984 two in one day. And this is just the beginning. There must be a plan by the state to kill a dozen people a day (or 20 or 30) to get rid of the "backlog" that the media always writes about. We, the people against killing, accept this defeat with our heads up and our eyes open. It is time to tighten our

belts and intensify our efforts - no money, few volunteer attorneys, and more and more death sentences not withstanding. We have waged a good and honorable battle and the war is not over. With our heads up and our eyes open, we will continue the battle, accepting our defeats as the natural consequences of an unholy war which we did not start, in which we are not the aggressors, and in which, even in defeat, we have honor on our side.

In death row cells across the country, many prisoners are experiencing the whole range of emotions from fear to elation to resignation. Some rail at attorneys and pour out the fear and frustration on whoever is trying to help keep the executioner at bay. Others deny hope and announce that they are dropping appeals and "getting it over with." Others believe in "the people" (us) and see their executions as the process that will help "the people" find a better way. They die without a whimper, believing that their deaths will keep the next generation safe from executions. It is this faith in "the people" from scattered cells across the United States that help the littlest army to proceed with heads up and eyes open.

Perhaps after we satisfy our blood lust of the nights, will come the dawn of reason; of commitment to explore ways to make the communities safer. of dealing with violence by containment and treatment rather than by more, final, absolute violence.

And until that dawn comes to release us from this nightmare, we will accept our defeats with our heads up and our eyes open, for honor is on our side.

* L.C. Dorsey, a friend of the Open Door, is a free lance writer from Jackson, Mississippi, author of *Cold Steel*. She has written and lectured extensively against the death penalty. Formerly Associate Director of the National Council of Churches of Christ Delta Ministry, and the Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons, she is currently working with Lutheran Social Services' Community Justice Ministries while studying at Howard University's School of Social Work in Washington, D.C. This article is reprinted from the newsletter of D.C. Coalition Against the Death Penalty.



Comes the Dawn

After awhile you learn the subtle difference,
Between holding a hand and chaining a soul,
And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning,
And company doesn't mean security.
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts,
And presents aren't promises,
And you begin to accept your defeats,
With your head up and your eyes open,
With the grace of maturity and not the eyes of a child,
And you learn to build all your roads,
On today, because tomorrow's ground
Is too uncertain for plans, and futures
have a way of falling in midflight.
After awhile you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much.
So you plant your own garden and decorate
Your own soul, instead of waiting
For someone to bring you flowers
And you learn that you really can endure....
That you really are strong
And you really do have worth
And you learn and learn....
With every goodbye you learn.

Donna Talbert 9/23
Parchman, MS

Housing the Homeless

by Joanne Solomon*

Finding affordable housing is hard for most people these days. It is particularly difficult for the poor and underprivileged because of the devastating shortage of low-cost housing. But for most of the homeless poor who suffer the lack of this most basic human need, the search for shelter can be a desperate and discouraging one.

The homeless persons I am referring to are the poorest of the poor, and the reason for their existence goes far beyond lack of affordable housing. They are those who are exiled on the streets - ill-fed, ill-clothed, and unhoused. They are those who are living under bridges, in alleys, empty boxes, tents, old cars, and abandoned buildings. And the bottom line of their existence in these circumstances is that exposure to extreme weather, both the cold and the heat, can be and is a constant threat to their health and their life. Each new winter homeless people lose their toes and limbs; each new winter homeless people die in the cold.

In spite of the fact that over the past several years countless reports have been written, congressional hearings held, task forces formed, and lawsuits filed on behalf of homeless individuals, their number continues to rise. And although there is a slowly growing awareness of the problem of homelessness, the number of shelters being built or opened simply cannot keep pace.

In the preface to the 1982 book, Homelessness in America, the writers share their own perceptions:

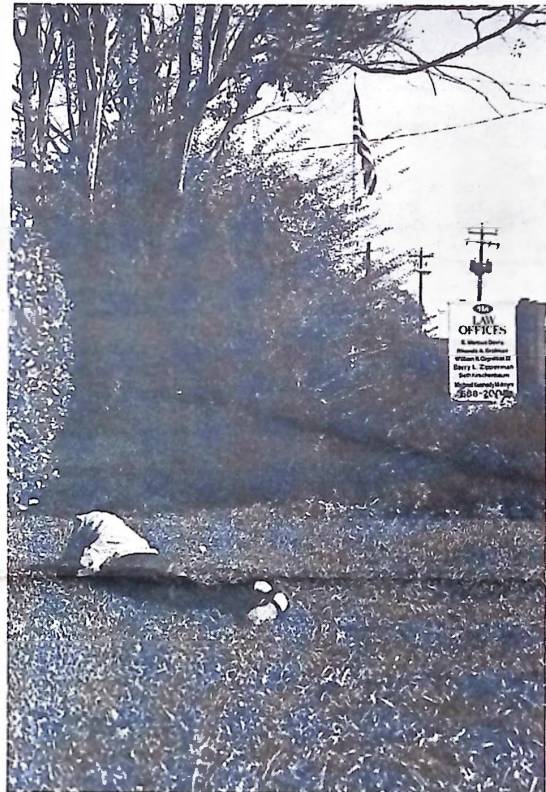
There was a time when we did not see the homeless around us, even though their broken bodies littered our city's streets. There was a time when we did not make an effort to understand what we did see. We coasted, accepting the imprints that others put on what we witnessed. Somehow we have come beyond that, each by our own route. We have moved closer to the people on the street, and we have been able to discern some of what their lives are about. On the journey we have taken, we have learned a basic truth: we cannot change what we do not understand, nor in turn, can we begin to comprehend what we have never seen. It is where and with whom we stand that largely determines what we see and, therefore, what we know.

The sad reality, of course, is that for too many people, the homeless are unseen and their suffering remains in the abstract. Often they are regarded as "untouchables" or throw-aways in a disposable society. The sad reality is that although efforts to alleviate the plight of the homeless may bring a brief respite from the streets for some, many times this is limited to the basic necessities of food and shelter. Many needs beyond mere survival are not being met.

It is a certain fact that the issue of homelessness is not a simple one; the problems of the homeless are many, and they are complex. Likewise, they are associated with numerous, long-term, systemic problems in our society for which there are no quick and easy solutions.

Dorothy Wichendon, in a recent article in The New Republic entitled "Abandoned Americans," states that while there is still considerable confusion about how many homeless people there are in America, who they are, why they are on the streets, and how they should be provided for, the causes of homelessness are not a total mystery. For one, the massive release of mental patients over the last twenty years (a movement known as "deinstitutionalization") has contributed heavily to the number of people on the street. Gentrification and the decline of low-income housing (particularly single-room occupancy hotels), literally is pushing people onto the streets. Continuing high unemployment and unmarketable skills leave many without income to purchase housing. And reduced welfare benefits accompanied by tightened eligibility requirements add to the growing numbers of homeless.

Estimates of the number of homeless in America range from 250,000 to three million people. These statistics include single men and women, teenagers, children, the elderly poor and disabled, battered women, and most significantly unemployed people with their entire families. Whatever the causes or the numbers many be, the homeless are those who have found themselves in circumstances that are overwhelming and debilitating.

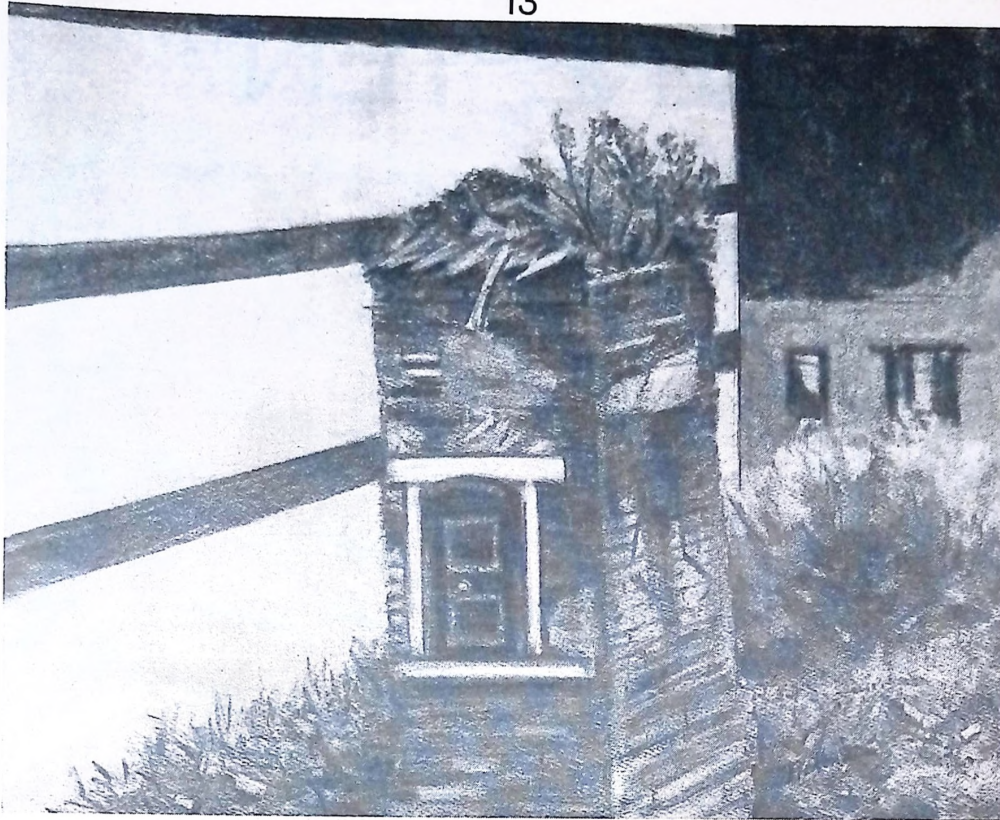


As we look at the immediate needs of the homeless we are confronted with the following: the need for feeding programs, night shelters, day shelters, health care (physical and mental), jobs, job counselling & training, referral, and legal assistance. Showers, clothing, a mailing address, phones, rest and safety are unavailable to most of the homeless. A drastic need that is evident here in Atlanta is for public toilets. Every month over a hundred people are arrested in our city because they could not find a convenient restroom. Subsequently, the city pays an estimated \$50,000 annually just for the arrest and court processing of these people. Here again we see how those on the streets are not afforded a sense of dignity that any human being certainly deserves.

The front-page article in this issue of Hospitality summarizes all the sleeping space currently available for Atlanta's homeless. For the estimated three to five thousand in need, there is at best only room for 1400. In April, when many of the 32 churches/agencies are closed only 160 free beds were offered at night.

During the day shelter remains scarce too. According to a recent report by Beth Schapiro and Associates for the Alliance for Human Services Planning, there were only six day shelters operating this year in the metropolitan area. Five of them are within a mile of downtown. With competition for that limited day-time

Housing (cont. on page 13)



Housing (cont. from page 12)

space, the homeless are forced to find shelter in libraries, hospitals and other public places. Not only is more space needed for people, but also for shower and laundry facilities, for medical screening and care; and for provision of social services.

When we genuinely identify with the homeless and understand the injustices they face daily, we may become overwhelmed. But rather than be discouraged, we must prioritize our commitments to them. Certainly, all would agree that shelters are only a temporary solution to the problems mentioned. Shelters are not homes. Yet the crying need among the homeless is for decent housing. As a start, we can and should mobilize resources within our city to provide the basic and fundamental human right to shelter. A much broader response is needed from all: individuals, churches, civic groups, businesses, foundations, and local governments - involved not only in raising a humanizing voice, but by participating in direct service to the homeless population. Coordination of efforts and cooperation by these segments of the community would maximize their potential.

In the words of Robert Hayes, counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless in New York:

The work we face may never finally be done; however, each step forward, however small, is a significant one; for each step eases human pain and each step preserves human life. The homeless are human beings hurting, crying, bleeding, sweating, freezing human beings. To rage against such visible human suffering is the right course; it is the moral course; it is the true course. So we must rage, and we must reason, and we must work and we must build. And we must and we shall - shelter the homeless.

NEEDS

Men's underwear

500 Knit caps

Cotton work gloves

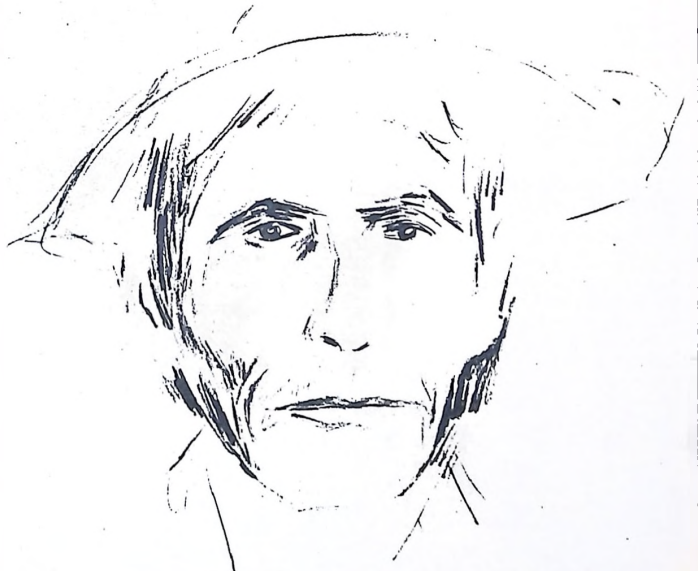
Coffee

Shaving Creme

Sofas

Table lamps

Easy Chairs



*Joanne Solomon is the Administrative Assistant at the Open Door. This article is based on a speech given at a recent housing conference in Atlanta.

14 NINE-TEN

by Murphy Davis

Life at 910 Ponce de Leon is a humbling experience. This morning in one final effort to write the house column for *Hospitality* I tried to seek out a quiet spot and squirrelled up in a far corner of our upstairs apartment. Downstairs somebody is "fixing" something--beating on the walls--and it sounds like the whole place is about to come down. Somebody else has a radio on full-blast and my dreams of quiet gurgle (not-so-quietly) down the drain.

Every day there seems to be a struggle to look at the agenda I had for the day (I always have one!) and oftentimes to be willing to let it slip on through my fingers. Life among the poor brings its own set of demands, and they're not always the ones we had in mind. If anything is predictable, it's probably the unpredictable nature of everyday. That's okay unless you carry around a pocket full of "achievable goals."

We are so accustomed to thinking of life with dreams of success. Even working with and among the poor doesn't necessarily take that away. I will tell you about some of our accomplishments here at the Open Door. In the past year we have served some 130,000 meals to hungry people; we have provided some 11,000 nights of lodging for the homeless; we have provided some 44,000 showers and clean changes of clothing; 400 or more people have been fitted with eyeglasses by Dr. Gerry Hobson; hundreds of sore and damaged feet have been bathed and cared for by Ann Connor; there have been hundreds of legal consultations and defenses provided in court by John Pickens and through our legal clinic; our transportation has provided 500 or more family visits for prisoners, and about the same number of pastoral visits have taken place; we have vigiled and gone to jail in an effort to witness for life and human dignity.

But...the fact is that instead of growing larger, our community has grown smaller. Right now we have fewer workers, shelter fewer people, provide fewer showers. In this city, though the numbers of the homeless have grown, there will be fewer beds this winter. Our energy to be advocates sometimes lags. And alas, it looks like the roaches will never really go away. So, as long as life goes on, we will arm ourselves with perseverance and a big jar of boric acid.

We are not indulged in the luxurious illusion of "progress." Our friends from the streets are more likely to get older, sicker, and even to die than to "get themselves together," get jobs, have their own homes, to--if you will--be "rehabilitated." Of our friends in prison, a few make it out of the cycle of despair and death. Many do not.

How difficult to hear the word that the Gospel calls us to be failures! After all, what are we to expect when we are invited to follow a homeless wanderer whose best friends were un-educated fisherfolk,

prostitutes, and other misfits? The lectionary reading, for the 21st Sunday after Pentecost reminds us of James' and John's request to be seated at the right and left of Jesus. We too would love to have such assurance of position and success, and we often miss the irony of Jesus' answer that indicates his eagerness to share with us his position in the world--a position of utter failure and rejection.

It is hard to learn that salvation comes not because our work builds steady progress toward the coming of God's kingdom, but because God is full of love and grace for us and the whole creation. Perhaps one reason that God calls us to love the poor is because the reality of the poor mocks our assumptions about progress and success. When we struggle to grow in love for the poor we become more of a family and less of an institution. This is certainly to be celebrated, but it means

that we have to drop the expectations of progress or measurable growth.

The notion of failure still offends my white middle class over-educated sensibilities. So it is very helpful to remember those who have gone before us. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, called us again and again to acceptance of apparent failure. Jeff Dietrich writes of her:

Dorothy had created a place (the Catholic Worker House of Hospitality) that was a virtual nightmare. It was a failure, a flop. She often quoted St. Teresa of Avila in saying that her life was like a night spent in an uncomfortable inn. It was a place that no one would stay unless they were very poor, or very insane, or very committed to the value of poverty and service.

I wonder sometimes if a combination of poverty, insanity, and commitment wouldn't help. We would so like to be faithful disciples and hold on to our own agendas: aspirations for power, prestige, accomplishments, full utilization of our talents, a badge for our suffering and oppression, etc.

But the invitation is to join the joyful, demented band of disciples dancing toward the cross of Golgotha and an empty grave.

We are invited to be failures. When we can ourselves become vulnerable, precarious, insecure, we have hope for really being with and serving the poor. But we must continually struggle with our hungers.

We are hungry for success; God offers us love. We are hungry for good reputations; God offers us the seeds of faithfulness. We are hungry for an easy road and smooth relationships; God offers us forgiveness. We are hungry for so many things that feel so good or taste so good but in the end bring only death; God offers us the gift of life.

Dorothy Day's words of encouragement stay with us:

What we do is very little, but it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest. What we do is so little we may seem to be constantly failing. But so did He fail. He met with apparent failure on the cross. But unless the seed fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest. And why must we see results? Our work is to sow. Another generation will be reaping the harvest.

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

Name _____

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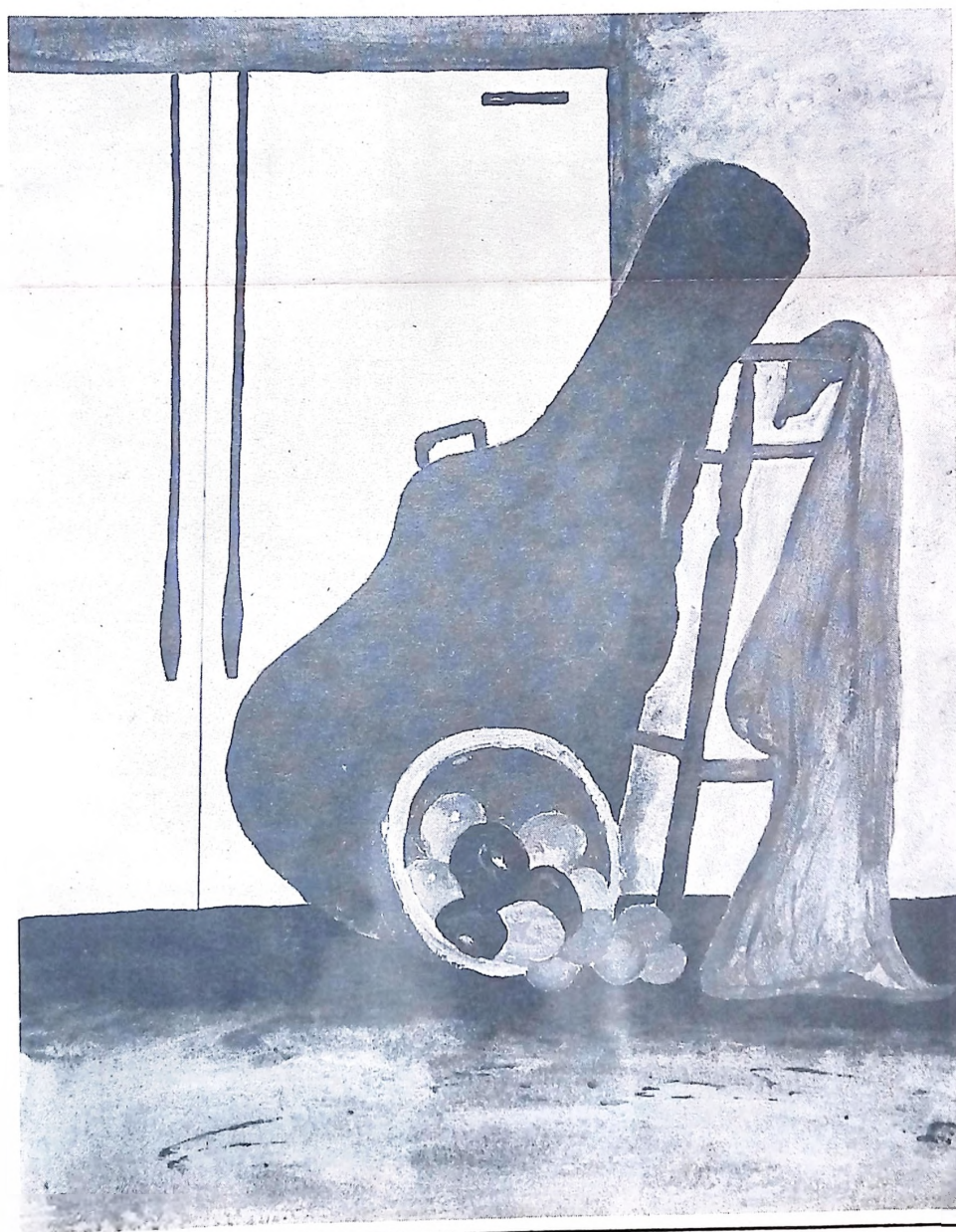
Saint Luke's Soup Kitchen

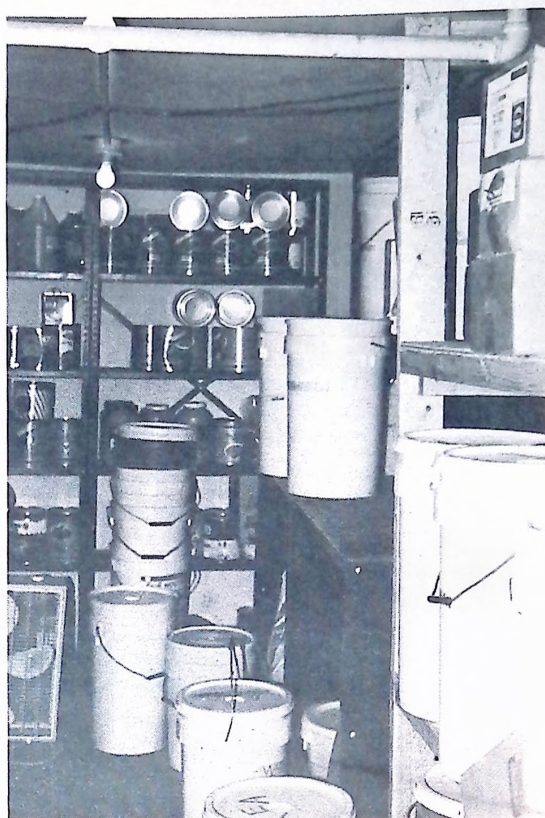
"If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it."

"What do you do when you don't have anything to do? Wait for the soup line to open. Oh, I know it doesn't begin until 10:00 AM but what can I do/ Pick up aluminum cans? Man, we get arrested now for climbing into dumpsters. America loves its garbage!! I wish America (or should I say God?) loved me. Is it true the angels also serve those who only stand and wait? Ever been to the Grady Pharmacy line? No, I'm waiting for St. Luke's to open. They got coffee and all the soup I can eat. Hey, could I have that butt?"

I, too, am hungry as I, too, wait for the soup line to wind its way up those long hard stairs. I eat among friends--brothers mostly--Black brothers--and I watch them eat and I am watching them die. The streets are the valley of the shadow of death where I often find fear. Soup can ultimately nourish neither the body nor the spirit.

Suddenly I am alone. I stop on the stairs and look out a narrow window and listen to a soup kitchen fed baby cry and cry and cry. I pray, "God, oh God, save the child; save the children; save my Susan, Neely and Hannah. Oh God, oh God." The child stops crying and slowly regains her breath. I walk back out to Peachtree Street. I am full of soup. *





Rob Johnson

