

# HOSPITALITY

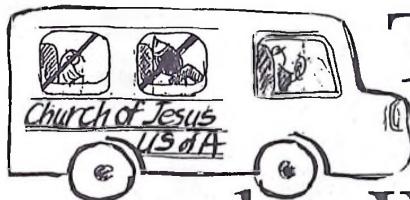
Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Atlanta, Georgia  
Permit No. 1264

Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ's love.  
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212 \* 404/874-9652

vol. 9, no. 11

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

November 1990



## The Gospel Truth and a Worldly Lie

by Ed Loring

One afternoon this summer a big Greyhound bus loped along the interstate highway between D.C. and Silver Springs, Maryland. The bus was filled with modern nomads--those who shower, shave, eat, watch T.V. and sleep in one town and are employed in another--in a hurry. Somewhere along the way a passenger got up and clambered to the back of the bus where he entered the restroom. A few minutes passed before the passenger returned to his seat midway up the aisle. He whispered a word to the unknown resident alien beside him with a smile and shook his head. The fellow passenger passed the word along and in a few minutes those who had hardly shared a sound were whispering to each other--sharing news and telling a story. Finally the person sitting directly behind the bus driver jumped up, leaned onto the driver's shoulder and proclaimed in an urgent whisper: "There is a bomb on the bus!!!"

The bus driver swerved immediately to the highway's shoulder and slammed on the brakes. "Everybody out! Everybody out!" he cried as the bus slid to a halt. Quickly the Highway Patrol was summoned who, after a cursory examination of the bus, sent for dogs who can smell what humans cannot see.

In the meantime the passengers were frantic. Most of us have grown up in the shadow of the bomb and it is easy to imagine the fear of being blown to bits. "Oh, God, No! Help me! Help me! Please help me! I'll never get home."

How foolish they all felt when they learned that there was no bomb on the bus! The explanation, perhaps not scientific in its methodology, goes like this: when the rider went to the restroom, he discovered a homeless stowaway crouched in the corner. As he encountered this poor person, he beheld an unemployed wilderness-wanderer, a sojourner amid the urban deserts and jungles of modern America. Returning to his seat, he winked at

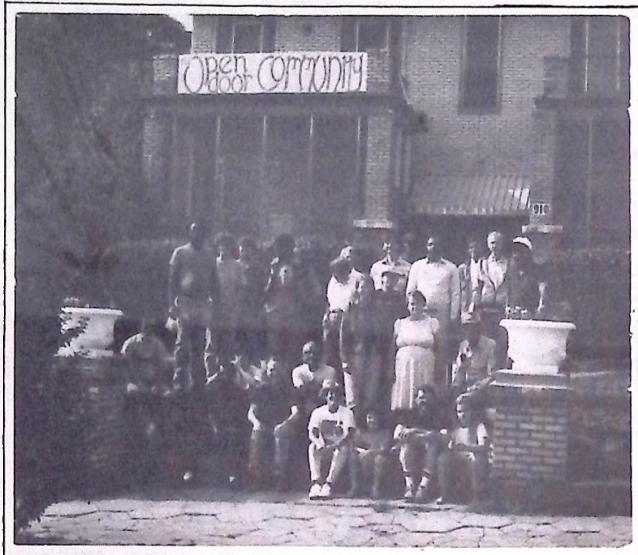
the woman next to him and incorrectly said, "There is a bum on the back of the bus." She laughed, stretched her necklaced neck, across the aisle and repeated, "There is a bum on the back of the bus," to the nameless traveler beside her. Bad news travels faster than a Greyhound bus on an interstate highway, and without ideology or conspiracy, the first false fact was transmogrified into devastating fear: "There is a bomb on the bus." (I remember the African American man named Willie Horton whose name was transformed to signify every white racist fear that flows through the valleys and streams of our land).

The story made national news! Having picked up the initial police reports, the media flocked to the bus in hopes of excitement. Perhaps a little carnage would benefit the evening T.V. ratings. Everyone laughed later when the dogs assured the police, passengers, driver and media that there was no bomb on the bus. "Only a bum, only a bum, not a bomb, on the bus," I was told by National Public Radio as I hacked at the kudzu which was strangling our trees at Dayspring.

Here is the news! What the riders, the driver, the media and the vast majority of the American people have not learned is there wasn't a bum on the back of the bus either!!! It is a worldly lie of devastating proportions, violence, dehumanization--yes, a crucifying of our God--a sacrilege as terrible as goddamn--to name a human being, created in the likeness of God, redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, a bum. Yet, that is what we believe and how we feel toward the homeless poor in our nation today. There was no bum on the back of the bus, 'cause Yahweh don't make no bums! Rather it is in the flesh and obduracy of the poor that we meet, hear, touch, love, and serve our Lord Jesus. The poor are our means to life and wholeness.

(continued on page 2)

# HOSPITALITY

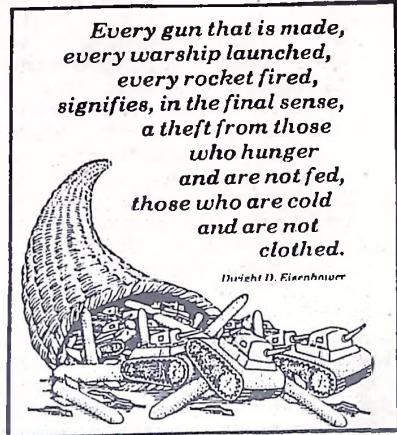


*The Open Door Community at 910*

**HOSPITALITY** is published 10 times a year by The Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of The Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the following:

*Murphy Davis--Southern Prison Ministry Director  
Ed Loring--Correspondence  
Pat Fons--Resident Volunteer Co-ordinator  
Carol Schlicksup--Hardwick Prison Trip  
Dick Rustay--Volunteer Co-ordinator*

\* \* \* \* \*  
Newspaper:  
Editorial Staff--Murphy Davis, Elizabeth Dede,  
Ed Loring, and Gladys Rustay  
Layout--Karen Petersohn and Gladys Rustay  
Circulation--Chris Rustay and a multitude of  
earthly hosts and guests  
Subscriptions or change of address--Willie London



*(continued from page 11)*

Now another, even stranger, dimension to this little news clip must be added. The truth is that there was a bomb on the bus! We, who are ready to toss bombs at Iraq in the Middle East for oil, experience bums as bombs in our own land. We are sore afraid. We fear the poor, and most especially, but not exclusively, the African American poor, as bombs about to explode upon us. The poor are, to quote Mr. Joe Beasley of Antioch Baptist Church, North, the new niggers in our cities and states. The bums are bombs and thus the rumors were truth on the Greyhound bus. Oh, how odd!

The Bible declares: "The poor shall always be with you; therefore I command you: You shall open wide your hand to sisters and brothers, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). But, what have we done by making Jesus' representatives into bums and bums into bombs?

We have turned our neighborhoods into war zones. We purchase ever bigger breeds of dogs and security systems that blurt bell-like screams when shadows dance in our yards. We construct higher fences topped with barbed wire and we beg the mayor to raise property taxes for meaner police to enforce meaner laws. What have we done? We have built more prisons and doubled the prison population in the U.S. in one short decade. We join associations to stop the bum-bombs from entering our neighborhoods; and we turn against those who feed, shelter, and help the dying Christ. "Get them out of my sight! Off my porch! From my sidewalk!" How little different is the cry today from the old hostile chant of the crowd making a choice between Jesus and the thief: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

And so they said:

"Hey, Mr. Bus Driver,  
There is a bomb on the bus!"

"Yes, Mr. Bus Driver."

And this bus is the U.S. of A.  
This bus is the Church of Jesus  
Christ  
The Synagogue of Yahweh  
The Mosque of Allah

This bus is Atlanta, Georgia  
Peachtree, Ponce de Leon and Pryor  
Streets.

If we don't defuse  
The bus with justice

If we don't turn the bus around  
put the wheels on the King's Highway

If we don't stop telling lies  
and calling Jesus' best friends:  
bums  
whores  
lazy bastards  
punks  
niggers  
animals  
crazies  
winos  
rats

*(continued on page 14)*



PETE STINNER

Open Door burial at Jubilee



DON MOSLEY

Four Communities gathered for picnic

by Robbie Buller

**Editor's note:** Robbie Buller is a member of Jubilee Partners. In September at a gathering of Koinonia, Jubilee, New Hope House, and the Open Door, Robbie shared the following with us in response to the question, "What evidence do you see of God's work in the world?"

As I think about the question of what evidence there is of God at work in the world today, it's clear that we don't need to look too far before we see abundant evidence of God's work--right here in the four Christian communities gathered together. It's great to come together as we have this weekend to hear and share with each other what has been happening in our communities.

All of us, in each of our communities, believe that we are called together by God to achieve some of God's purposes in history. That is our holy calling. If we didn't believe that, we wouldn't be here--we'd be doing something else. But who could have ever foreseen the results of together committing our lives to discipleship? I'm sure that the founding members of each of these communities never imagined most of what has actually transpired in our respective community histories--they simply stepped forward in faith.

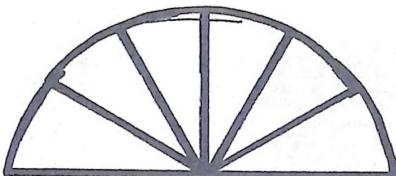
Each of our communities is far more than the collection of individuals that compose them, and the works achieved are far greater than the combined efforts of individuals. As a math teacher, I always taught my students that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts, but somehow in all of our communities, the whole has been greater than the sum of its parts. This mystery can only be explained by accepting the presence of the Spirit of God working with and through the individuals who have committed themselves to bringing about God's kingdom on this earth.

# Evidence of God at Work In the World

As I said before, we don't have to look far to see God at work in each of our communities. We spent several hours yesterday sharing the highlights and struggles of the past year. Does God work among us? Consider a mortgage burning ceremony by a homeowner (a dream 20 years in the making); the arrival of a volunteer who through the gift of dance has brought African-American folks and white folks together in a way not achieved before; clemency for Billy Neal Moore and the incredible forgiveness and strength of members of the family of the victim; unexpected results from an intended simple occupation of the Imperial Hotel; a man donating a full-sized road bus for the transportation of Central American refugees on their way to Canada; another Central American refugee crossing the border safely to Canada; money being obtained by gift and loan to make possible the construction of a hospitality house for family members of people on death row; and another family stepping forward to become part of that death row ministry.

Indeed we don't have to look far to see God at work. But let us remember also that we have much to learn from those with whom we work about seeing examples of God at work. Each of our communities works with marginalized people in one way or another. And for many of them the examples of God at work are not so dramatic or even visible to us. For many folks, just to wake up to be alive for another day is a sign of God at work. Another day of life, another tortilla, whatever. . . is a gift from God that shows that God is present and at work. That kind of total dependence on God is rarely acknowledged by us--we who tend to rely on our own achievements.

For indeed, left to our own devices, we would and do fail. Each of us can remember times in our own communities when we have been so encompassed by struggle and crisis that we thought everything would fall apart. Our weaknesses and failures have sometimes seemed greater than our strengths and successes. At times everything has seemed futile and hopeless. But again, God has been active and present with us and sustained us. Fortunately, God is a God of mercy--a God who works with us in spite of our imperfections. God does not depend on our perfection to work for good with us and through us. In the book Torches Rekindled, a book about the Bruderhof's struggle to live in community together, Merrill Mow reminds us that we are called to be something greater than what we are. None of us can ever really live up to the life that we're called to. It is the calling that is holy, not our enfleshing of that calling. This is perhaps the greatest source of strength to me, as well as being evidence of God at work in the world today. □



# nine-ten

## *Another Open Door Love Story*

by Murphy Davis



*the newly-weds and families*

Rebecca Green and Mike Stoltzfus were married here in Atlanta on October 13--a romance that began in the soup kitchen when both of them were Open Door Resident Volunteers in 1986-87.

It set me to thinking about some of the pleasures of continuity that only come to you in middle age and later, I presume.

Trudy Green, Rebecca's mother, was along with Jean Jones, one of my first friends in Atlanta when I moved here 20 years ago. On my first Sunday in the city I went to Central Presbyterian Church. Before I knew it I was "volunteered" to work in the Monday night free clinic. Jean Jones gave me a ride and Trudy put me to work. No sooner had we finished the night's clinic work but Trudy and Jean had me committed to Sunday morning visits to the girls' section of the Fulton County Juvenile Detention Center.

For a year or more I went along with them to visit with the girls and to sing and pray. Trudy introduced me to many a song that I've kept in my repertoire, not the least of which is "Jesus on the Mainline." On our way to the detention center I would often see Trudy drop off tiny little Rebecca and Eve for Sunday school. They would prance into Central in their patent leather shoes and frilly dresses.

Trudy became a regular Wednesday soup kitchen volunteer when we moved to Nine-Ten and Rebecca who, in the meantime, had done a lot of growing up, left her studies at Oglethorpe to help fix supper once a week.

One day after soup kitchen Trudy told me that Rebecca had decided to take a year out of college and wasn't sure what she would do.

"Tell her to come live with us," I was quick to reply. Then I laughed and said, "You don't want to tell her that, do you?" But Trudy said, "Well, I think I just will." And she did.

Along came Rebecca in September 1986, little knowing that, not only would she work her fingers to the bone and have the most fun of her life, but also that Michael, the man of her dreams, was busily chopping onions in the soup kitchen. The romance bloomed and on October 13, the Open Door family joined in the celebration.

Katrina Guettler (who also met her husband, Robert McGlasson, at the Open Door) said at the reception that we should put an ad in the paper saying, "Volunteer at the Open Door: Meet the Woman/Man of your dreams."

## *We Like Ike*



*thanks Ike and Willa Mima*

For seven years Ike Carmack has gotten up long before dawn every Thursday morning to drive over to the Open Door to help serve the Butler St. Breakfast.

We enjoyed a recent celebration with Ike and Willa Mima (they've been married 55 years!) to say thank you and to celebrate the seven years of shared work and the hope for more to come.

## Good-bye, Good Friends



We miss Roosevelt!

We've said good-bye to several folks in recent months. Ruth Allison, a partner in the community, left to spend at least a year in a monastery in New Mexico.

Amy Yackel a Resident Volunteer went off to marry Rod Adams (both had been volunteers at the Open Door and Jubilee).

Bettina Paul returned to her family and friends in Germany after her two years with us.

Roosevelt Dunbar, who had been with us for a year, moved away to live with his sister in Brooklyn, NY.

Joan and Ali DeWitt left when Joan's Resident Volunteer term of a year was up. Joan is beginning nursing school, and Ali and Hannah are still schoolmates. Joan returns at least twice a week to volunteer at Butler Street and to give hair cuts one morning a week.

Our lives are so rich because of the many folks who come to share their lives and energy with us.

## I Cannot Tell a Lie: D.O.T. Cut Down an Oak Tree

When we heard several years ago that a plan for the beautification of Ponce de Leon included planting trees along the street we were happy to participate by planting a beautiful willow oak and two crepe myrtles along the curb.

This summer the Department of Transportation decided that, once again, automobiles are more important than the earth and growing things. They cut our beautiful trees to little stubs. The same fate befell a lovely large cypress (a rarity in the city) next door.

Thanks a lot, D.O.T. ☐

## ANOTHER SIDE

by Mike Hall

*Editor's note: The following piece is reprinted from the Druid Hills Presbyterian Church newsletter, October 1990. We are grateful for our many years of shared ministry with the church through the night shelter there.*

Until recently Druid Hills Presbyterian Church was widely acclaimed for its work with the homeless, hungry and outcast. Times have changed. Many are challenging the validity of our witness and are claiming that our efforts actually attract crime and violence to the area. Let me say that after having been here for nine years, I have never had an act of violence perpetrated against me, nor am I aware of but one such unfortunate incident in all of our many programs. Street people are not valid scapegoats for all the crime in the area around the church. They cannot afford weapons; they are tired and weak and defeated; they have no mobility. Break-ins involving various forms of robbery are generally done by people with some previous resources. If you eliminate street people, you will not eliminate crime in an urban area.



GLADYS RUSTAY

*Joe Coppage, a familiar street person who walks Ponce, stays at Clifton Night Shelter and eats at 910.*

Nor are street people to be included within such groupings as prostitutes, who base their questionable business around some attractiveness, which street people don't have. And that's the rub. They are not attractive. They are generally smelly, ill-kept, and rude. But they are people who need love, and if the church doesn't offer it, who will?

When someone challenges our programs, invite them to come and see for themselves. Invite them to Community Fellowship on Sunday afternoon at 4:30. Invite them to the Night Shelter, to the Art Therapy, to the Community Center. Encourage them to actually risk knowing a street person--maybe even risk becoming involved on their behalf.

No community wants crime. We must do all we can to fight it. We join with our neighbors in that fight. But stereotypes that would identify all street people with crime, and attempt to eliminate them (and their meager supports) on that basis, is a cruel abridgement of civil rights and a new and evil form of prejudice. Together let's fight it. Let's continue, as the people of God, to be faithful to the one who in all things sought the truth--a truth involving justice--a truth involving love--a truth that sought the equal rights of both the wealthy and the poor. ☐

# Festival of Shelters 1990:

## Laying Down Our Lives



GLADYS RUSTAY



GLADYS RUSTAY

by Carol Schlickup

*Editor's note: The Festival of Shelters, sometimes called the Festival of Booths, is a biblical event (Nehemiah 8:13-18) during which the children of Israel celebrated the Exodus and their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They lived in tents and shelters for seven days to remember their origins, their time of wandering, and to put themselves in touch with the power and the gifts of God.*

*Shelters are for remembering, and the Festival of Shelters was instituted as a time for the Israelites to remember their dependence on God, to remember that they could not claim the credit for their deliverance.*

*Last year the Open Door Community appropriated this Jewish festival as part of our liturgical year. Members of the community and friends spent 24 hours outside at Woodruff Park for six nights and five days. Downtown, among the people of Atlanta, we reminded ourselves, and everyone who came through the park, that in our history we are all homeless wanderers. We also remembered that God has delivered us all from the desert, so we called on the people of Atlanta to stop hindering God and to house the homeless.*

*This year we once again observed the Festival of Shelters. From September 30 to October 5, members of the Open Door Community, People for Urban Justice and friends and supporters spent 24 hour periods in Woodruff Park. We said to ourselves and to the city that houses are for forgetting, but shelters are for remembering. What we have is given to us by God to share with God's people so that all might live as God's children (Deuteronomy 8:11-20).*

*The following piece is the meditation that Carol Schlickup shared with us at the concluding worship of this year's Festival of Shelters.*

This past week, in the company of homeless people, we've made festival. In the center of the city of Atlanta we've set up our tents and our boxes, raised our placards and our voices with people who are poor and oppressed, housed in prison, enslaved in labor pools, innocently executed; people of color, people without the material goods that our society requires for validation--women, men, even children! People who have no neighbor! We put our bodies in Woodruff Park, so surrounded by the power of Pharaoh, to call the powerful people of the city of Atlanta to their knees, to remind ourselves and them that we are all created and loved by the same God and that one day we will all be held accountable for the stewardship of our gifts. We're reminded that all we have is ultimately gift from our God and, like Pharaoh we must be convinced to share, to let God's people go!

What have we felt and learned? What have we seen and heard during this festival week? Police presence comes to my mind--a presence intense and overwhelming. They came through the park on their scooters, walked the grassy hillsides waking people who'd flattened the grass with their tired bodies, drove up in squad cars shining spotlights and headlights into our eyes at 11:00-12:00-2:00 and finally 3:00am. THE PARK IS CLOSED! I can't forget the fear and disbelief in the eyes of homeless people when they heard that we would stay in the park after the 11:00 curfew. Police protecting the park, the grass, the fence. Police protecting the lunch-time middle class munchers, the Underground Atlanta entertainment crowd, the bankers and investors--from whom! The only fear I felt was of the police. Hasn't anyone told them that the crime is that this city has allowed 15,000 people to be without homes while buildings like the Imperial Hotel stand empty? Homeless people need protection. Another important question is whose presence do the police represent? Who is sending this message?

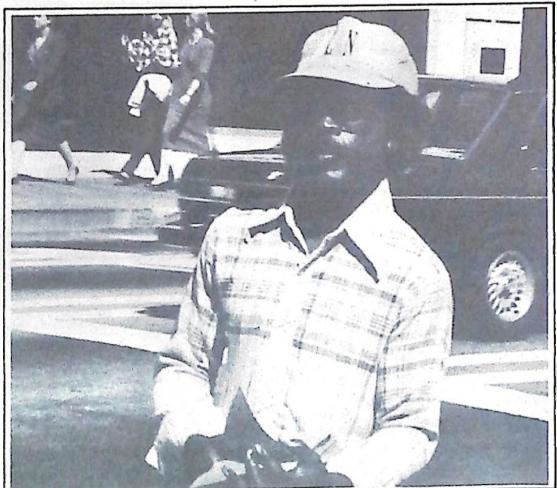
There's been the warmth of reunion with our friends from the occupation of the Imperial Hotel and their confusion over the outcome of that occupation. Why is the Welcome House shelter charging homeless people to stay there? Did we know that two of the four members of the executive committee from the Imperial Hotel had left Welcome House shelter or been put out? When would the new SRO be built? So we're reminded and we learn again that housing precedes political empowerment and the ability to organize and manage!

The evil of addiction to alcohol and drugs has been a lived reality each day as we touched the hopelessness and aimlessness of being poor and without a home. As I reflect, I know in my own heart that I, too, would look for ways to relieve the pain. Housing precedes sobriety and being clean of drugs.

Leafletting has had its own hard lessons to teach! Try to leaflet a crowd of middle class business people on such issues as: abolition of the death penalty, the crisis of the African American male, prisons as housing for the poor, the modern day slavery of labor pools, or women's rights and the feminization of poverty. If one practices this most important discipline, then one will know the invisibility of the poor and the alienation of the middle class and the rich.

What must we do?! To what are we called? We're called to remember our ancestors. We're called to remember our own beginnings and our eventual endings. We're called to community, to care, to be neighbor to one another--not in the sense of living next door or down the hall, but in the biblical sense of laying down our lives! We're called to experience and to articulate the pain of the poor and through this articulation to become new. There is nothing more threatening to the power of Pharaoh, than hearts that are emboldened, spirits that are made new and alternative life styles that are being lived! Pharaoh thrives on the status quo, control and order. We are called to be faithful to a God of surprises, to a God of covenant and commitment! We are called to joy, hope and, most lasting of all, LOVE!

Let the Festival Continue! ☐



GLADYS RUSTAY

## Festival of Pain

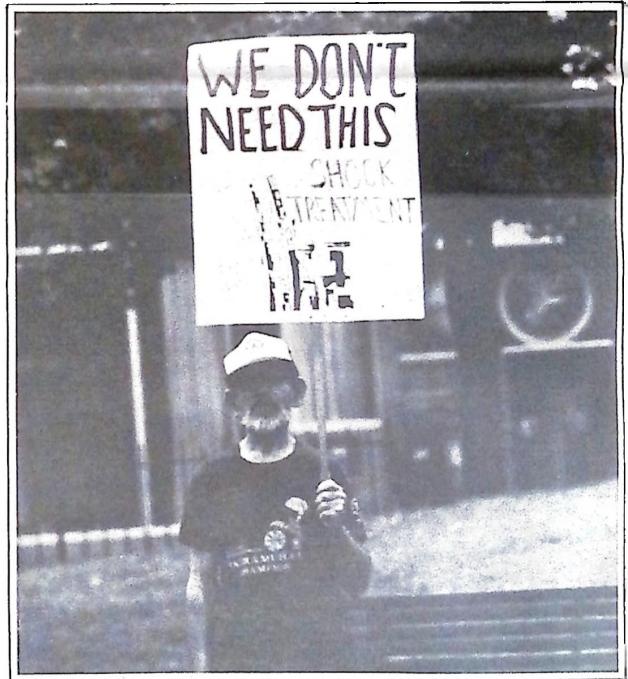
Bodies stoop,  
Faces grimace,  
Voices scream in agony!  
Where are the midnight revelers?  
Where the Mardi Gras madness?

Our vigil kept by grim-faced groaners,  
Surrounded by madness we huddle  
and dance careening through the  
park--Closed to caring,  
Kept for some.

Our cry echoes in central city canyons:  
"Remember the forgotten  
You who've forgotten  
That you may be remembered!"

Ragged boxes the decor,  
Hunger a special guest,  
Admittance if you'll share the pain.

by Carol Schlicksup



GLADYS RUSTAY

Hasn't anyone told them that the crime is that this city has allowed 15,000 people to be without homes while buildings like the Imperial Hotel stand empty?

# Journaling

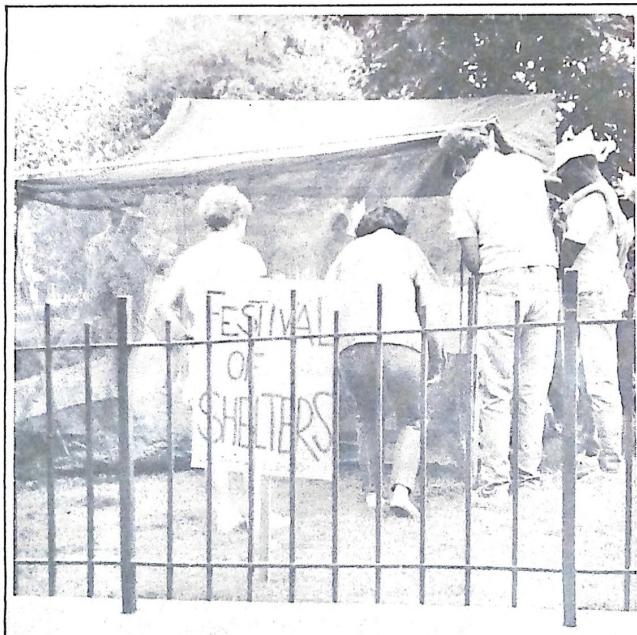
by Chris Rustay

## A Festival of Shelters Journal

*Editor's note: The following is a selection of entries from Chris Rustay's daily journal which he kept during the week we spent in Woodruff Park for the Festival of Shelters.*

### Sunday, September 30

When we arrive at the park there is a general milling around for about fifteen minutes. Some folks are getting tents ready to be set up during the worship service. I notice that a good number of street folks have joined our worship service. One of them is Roger Osborn, who joined us last year for this same festival. Roger sings a song about being homeless. His voice rings out powerfully about his pain, rejection, and the hate that is poured upon him. It is echoed back by the tall, silent and impassive buildings of downtown Atlanta ringing the park. As he sings, I listen to the city noises that provide a counter melody: pigeons, sirens, some of the homeless folk talking loudly on nearby benches, the clip-clop of the horses that some of the downtown police ride. Because it is Sunday there are very few other folk here. . . to listen to Roger's pain.



Folks put up tents to start the Festival.

GLADYS RUSTAY

### Monday, October 1

Nibs Stroupe, pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church and a member of People for Urban Justice, gives the meditation at this evening's worship. He talks about prisons--the fact that prisons are housing for the poor. As the gap between the rich and the poor increases, and as more people fall between the cracks of our social support system, our prison system becomes larger. (Is it any wonder in this fearful society that two of the most thriving "industries" in America today, the military and the prison systems, are based on peoples' fears of each other?) Nibs talks about cities believing that they can "absorb" any reductions in low-income housing. (They are absorbed in alleys, in dumpsters, on sidewalks and beneath highways.) Nibs builds a consistent and logical argument for the signs that point to the fact that folks would rather feed their fear and greed than their hungry.

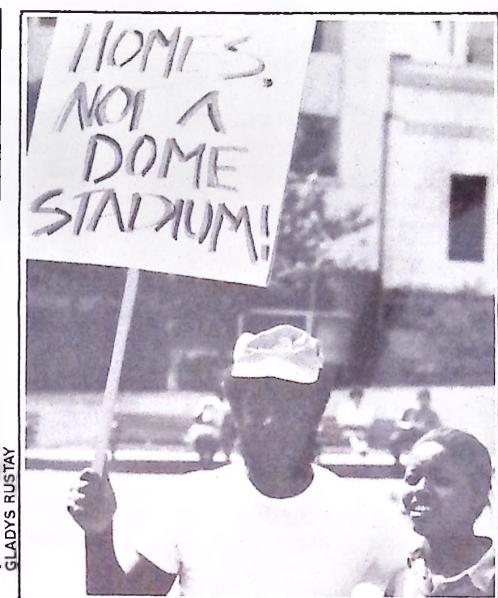
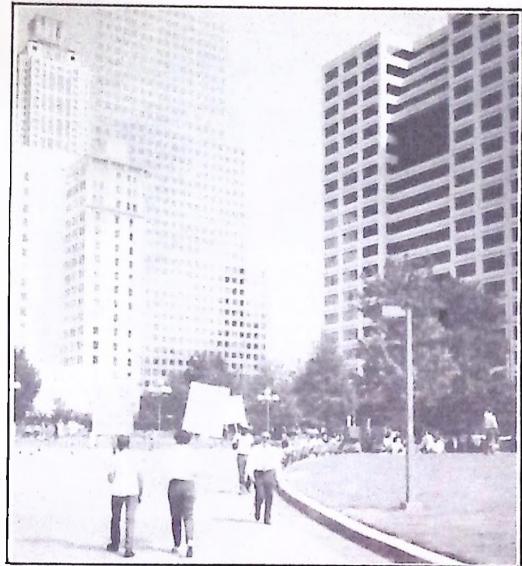


Nibs shares with us that the major housing we provide for the poor is prisons.



GLADYS RUSTAY

Each day we celebrated the Eucharist with our friends on the street.



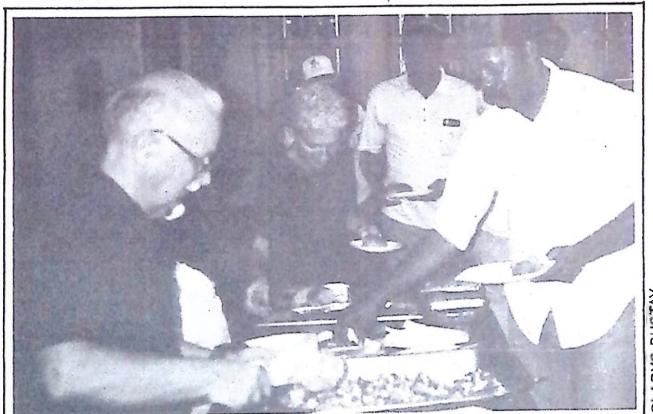
Tuesday, October 2

At noon we again pile in the vans to go downtown to leaflet. This time it is on the issue of prisons as housing for the poor. I walk the perimeter of the park. As I'm passing out leaflets, I look up at the buildings--so high above the streets--so removed from the struggle for life that happens on the little patch of grass below.

Someone hands back a leaflet and leaves me hurriedly, screaming "Screw the homeless!" I'm shaken. This is the first overt hatred I've encountered. I wonder what pain he must have in his life that he can hate others so much.

Wednesday, October 3

At noon today we leaflet for changes in the labor pool system and for employment for everyone. I am surprised by the supportive comments I receive. One middle-aged African-American woman stops me and talks about how Andy Young has forgotten the poor. All he cares about is money and the Olympics. "And where are all the folks going to go when they bulldoze their houses for the Olympic buildings?" she asks.



The Festival observation ended with a special meal sent in and served by friends of the community.

Each noon we carried signs and leafleted.

Refrigerator boxes doubled for displays in the daytime and on their sides as shelter for sleeping at night.



Thursday, October 4

I prepare to spend my night out. I stuff an extra pair of socks, a light jacket, a heavy sweater, a poncho, and a pen and paper into a backpack. As we go downtown, I wonder whether it will rain tonight. It will be cold if it does. I do not look forward to that.

Riley meets up with us a little later that night. He is just passing through, he says. He owns a fruit vending stand now, and is no longer homeless, but he used to be. He explains how he is being harassed by the police and being fined out of existence. First his stand is too wide. Then his stand is too long. What next? I ask him why he isn't home now. He answers, "You know, I used to live out here. Yea, I come back here, so I won't forget."

I crawl into my refrigerator box and fall asleep.

Friday, October 5

Now, I know why I am out here, sleeping uncomfortably, if at all. I am called, like Riley, to remember my past. To remember that I am dependent on God.

At night, the only life in the city is in the park, until the police have run everyone out for the evening. Now, in the early morning, the only life is in those folks returning to the buildings--those folks who didn't hear Roger sing. □

# Equal Access to Cardboard Boxes

by Ed Weir

*Editor's note: Ed Weir is an old friend of the Open Door Community, who has spent many nights on the streets with us, reminding us that "we're not on a girl scout camping trip" whenever we begin to complain about being cold. He is now a partner at New Hope House--a community which ministers to folk on death row and their families. The following is a brief reflection on his experience of the Festival of Shelters.*

Wonders never cease!!! I slept in a cardboard box while on the streets of Atlanta. It was wonderful!!

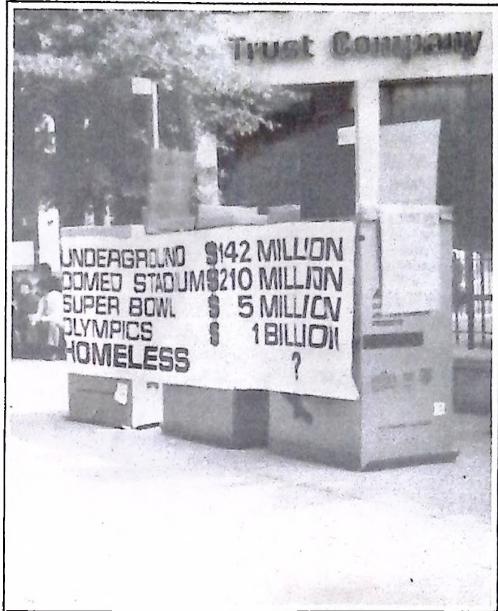
You don't think it's so great? Let me explain.

Over the last eight years people at the Open Door have escorted me onto Atlanta's streets for 24 hours on several different occasions. Never before have I slept inside anything. Most often I have tried to sleep on the very small porch of a government building across from Grady Hospital. Sometimes I have tried to sleep in a park. Always I tried sleeping while exposed to cold, rain, violence, and visitors. I never slept one entire hour and never a total of three hours.

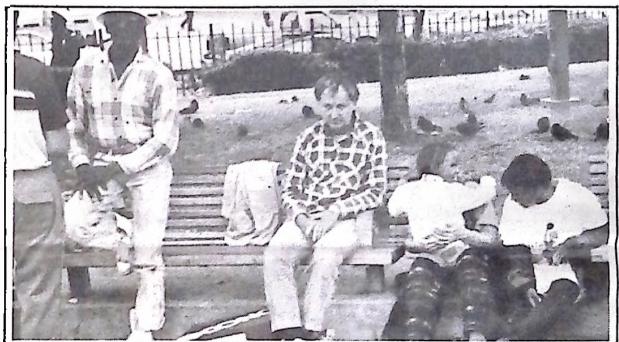
I am very cranky and dangerous when I am tired from lack of sleep. Once after another sleepless, miserable, rainy night, I finally made it to the grits server at the Butler St. breakfast. The server was very cheerful and wanted to know how I was doing. I grunted. What I wanted to do was punch the server in the mouth.

So what about this box? Inside this box I set a record for sleeping. The box was big enough for two people. Two others tried sleeping with me at different times. They had to leave because I snored. What a wonderful sleep--well, sort of. The concrete was still hard.

But I wasn't cold. The box deflected the wind. I didn't feel watched. There was security in this cardboard box.



one of the boxes Ed slept in--when it was horizontal!



Ed after his 24 hours on the street--does he look dangerous?!

I was still tired the next morning, but I had energy to pass out fliers for several hours.

For months now Ed Loring has been preaching the virtues of housing before everything else. From this trip I better understand that a person can work if that person has had a decent night's sleep. A person can get medical care if a person has a permanent place to be since an address is required. A person can relax from the day's tensions if one has a secure room.

My box was only a shelter. It worked for one night; maybe it was good for four or five nights. But people who sleep in shelters are subject to invasion of private space.

Banners have gone up all over downtown saying, "Take a Bite Out of Crime." The people of the city of Atlanta who want to do that need to make a financial commitment to permanent housing for people without housing. The financial costs would be less than what we are spending on jails and prisons. The cost would be much less than the Olympics, the domed stadium, and Underground Atlanta.

The bottom line is that God intends for each person to have equal access to God's cardboard boxes--I mean resources. □



# The Fort Benning Hunger Strike

by Carol Cummings

*Editor's note: Carol Cummings lives in the Little Five Points Neighborhood and is a long-time activist for peace and justice. She has visited Central America several times and has been a leader in the Atlanta Sanctuary Movement. Last month she visited those fasting on behalf of the people of El Salvador at Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia. We are grateful for these reflections she shared with us for Hospitality.*

The chalk line has probably disappeared now along with the brightly colored Salvadoran cross, the chairs, the thermoses of water and the banner reading "Fast for Life in El Salvador." When we visited on September 23 the line marked the edge of the Fort Benning military reservation; the nine hunger strikers were forbidden to cross it under threat of arrest. Likewise the soldiers were forbidden to speak with the protesters while in uniform. Many who did talk with them came at night when they would be less likely to be observed.

For 35 days there were always one or two fasters on the tiny grassy median in the road through a gate onto the 300 square mile base. The constant traffic sometimes made conversation difficult and participants in the daily prayer services had to crowd tightly together to hear.

The fasters included decorated Vietnam veterans, a former member of the Salvadoran military, a Salvadoran whose family members were victims of repression, and clergy who have recently returned from working in El Salvador. They called for an end to training of Salvadoran military personnel at Fort Benning's School of the Americas and the cessation of all military aid to El Salvador.

We spent several hours talking with the fasters, participating in the evening service and watching the interaction between the fasters and the passers by. Sometimes the people in passing cars shouted obscenities; someone threw an activated tear gas canister during the night. By the time of our visit there was relatively little negative reaction because the fasters were no longer a new phenomenon and they didn't respond to provocation.

A steady stream of people stopped to talk. The fasters were careful not to overwhelm such folk--only one or two of them, rather than six or eight, took up the conversation. Mostly they listened. They listened to the woman who worked in a day



CAROL CUMMINGS

care center where there were children with both parents in Saudi Arabia. They listened to the frustration of soldiers who could find no alternative employment, no route to education except the military. They raised the question whether it was appropriate that those who fought to protect the freedoms of US citizens had to give up their own freedom to think for themselves.

When asked, the fasters explained their own views. Congressional investigators claim that several officers indicted for the killings of six Jesuits in El Salvador last November were trained at Fort Benning's School of the Americas; the base denies it. The School claims it teaches the Salvadoran military officers about human rights. When Charles Liteky, a former chaplain at Fort Benning, asked to see the human rights curriculum, he was told they would have to get that information through the Freedom of Information Act. Those who participated in this interview with the second in command at the School were interrogated for two hours by Military Police as they left and charged with criminal trespass.

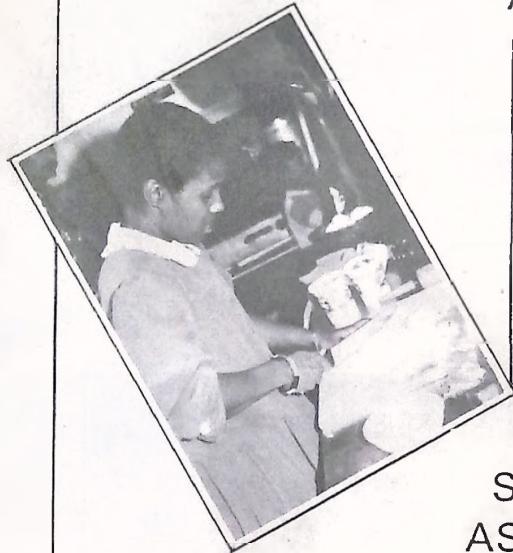
Fasters we met are dedicated people working in poor communities either in the US or in El Salvador. Their solidarity took visible form as they lost weight and became weaker. They joyfully welcomed all who wished to share their community in whatever small way. They were never self-righteous about either their views or their actions.

As they ended their fast, the North Americans pointed out that the poor in El

(continued on page 12)

# JOIN THE OPEN DOOR COMMUNITY

A North American Base Community



SPEND TWELVE MONTHS  
AS A RESIDENT VOLUNTEER

Live in a residential Christian community. Serve Jesus Christ and the hungry, the homeless and prisoners. Bible study and theological reflections from the Base. Street actions and peaceful demonstrations. Regular retreats and meditation time at Dayspring Farm.

Contact: Pat Fons, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212 \* 404/874-9652 or 876-6977.



(FORT BENNING from page 11)

Salvador do not have the option to end their hunger simply by deciding that they will eat. The Salvadorans participating in the fast struggled to maintain hope for their country in the face of persistent, massive US support from the forces of greed and repression. What is politely called "low-intensity conflict" because it does not involve North Americans directly fighting and dying in a war, is high intensity suffering for the people of El Salvador.

Although the fast is ended, the participants have not abandoned their goals. The Senate will vote soon on S.2954 which would cut military aid to El Salvador by 50%. The House of Representatives has already passed this bill. Such a cut would go a long way toward encouraging the Salvadoran government to negotiate seriously toward an end of the war and resolution of the basic issues of social justice which caused it in the first place. The hunger strike was a dramatic and effective expression of solidarity for the Salvadoran people; let us pray that more and more US citizens will find their own ways of strengthening that solidarity. 

Mary Mullins

## *Special Needs for the Holidays*

HAMS  
TURKEYS  
Green Beans  
Black-eyed Peas  
Greens  
Yams  
Stuffing Mix  
Rice  
Pies  
HATS  
GLOVES  
SCARVES  
SWEATERS

# *A Pastoral Appeal to Lee Atwater*

Dear Mr. Atwater,

I am very sorry that you have such serious brain cancer. I know a bit about your struggle; my father died a few years ago from brain cancer.

This appeal is addressed to you because the soul of this nation, like your body, needs healing so desperately. We white folk are dominating and exploiting the African-American members of our national family, and we must stop, seek forgiveness and reconciliation and be about a better America for all.

From your mind sprang forth Willie Horton as the Black male mugger who would rape white women and beat white men. George Bush used your scheme to the fullest and the Republican Party benefits daily from white folk's fear and insecurity focused upon the lives of African-American men. We all suffer from the damage done by your misuse of Mr. Horton.

Would you be so kind as to apologize to the citizens of the U.S.? Would you please ask Mr. Horton to visit you in the hospital?

Forgiveness changes history and our nation is so deeply wounded today. I believe there are tens of thousands of African-Americans across this land who will forgive you if you seek it. I, too, need forgiveness. My ancestors were slaveholders, and I daily benefit from white privilege. Together we can be builders of the Beloved Community. Please help.

I hope you get well. May God's love and shalom fill you this day.

Peace to you,

Ed Loring

## *Messages from Nicaragua*

Who: Peggy and John Law

When: November 13, 7pm to 8pm.

Where: St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
435 Peachtree St.

(St. Luke's parking lot is just north of the church on Peachtree St. Walk across the covered bridge at the back of that parking lot to enter the building where the meeting will be held.)

The Laws have made numerous visits to Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Last year they observed the Nicaraguan elections, worked with Habitat for Humanity, and talked with all sorts of people throughout the country.

Everyone is invited to see their slide show and join in the discussion.

*Sponsored by La Solidaridad of St. Luke's*

For more information, please call 377-9299.

## **REQUIEM MASS**

In Remembrance of Those Homeless People Who Have Died in the Past Year

November 2, 1990

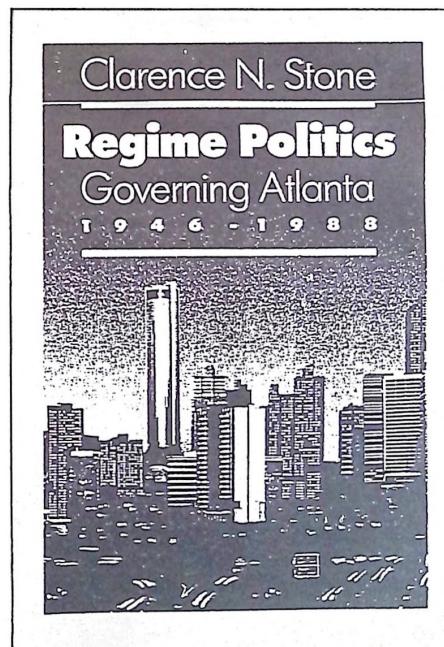
Episcopal Cathedral of St. Phillip

2744 Peachtree Rd., NW  
Atlanta, GA

Free supper at 6:30pm  
Service at 8:00pm  
Rev. Albert Love and Rev. Ed Loring  
(child care provided)

## **Liberty to the Captives**

Recently in a speech in Nashville, Mt. Juliet, TN, Baptist preacher and writer Will D. Campbell made the point that religious fundamentalists tend to be selective in their professed commitment to take everything in the Bible literally. Citing Luke 4:18, where Jesus says that he has come to "set the captives free," Campbell invited the 14.7 million Southern Baptists--many of whom espouse biblical inerrancy and literalism--to meet him at the Tennessee State Prison in Nashville. Saying that he hadn't been able to tear down many prisons by himself, Campbell allowed that "with 15 million of us, we could raze that sucker to the ground."  
(From *For the Defense*, the newsletter of the Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.)



**REGIME POLITICS** is an excellent book that explains some of the root causes of homelessness in Atlanta. We highly recommend that you read it.

If we don't repent  
Change this city into the Beloved  
Community

If we don't find Jesus Christ  
in the back of the bus  
in the soup kitchen lines

Then. . .

The Bomb is going to blow up  
And we  
    in our pitiful rags and riches  
    our college degrees and fabulous  
careers  
    our houses, cars and bank accounts  
Will be dead.

OR

We can rid the land of lovelessness and  
fear  
Where no one is a bum or bomb  
Where everyone has enough  
Where justice is our security  
and we love one another.

"Ain't no bums  
Ain't no bombs  
on this bus," says Jesus.

"Follow me." 



### Special Funding Appeal

Title:  
She is  
screaming  
for help.  
May 1985  
Hannah

Our bank balance continues to be low, and we have several bills to pay. For example, our food costs to feed 6,290 people in an average month are approximately \$3700. Please help us with a financial contribution.

## Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the chronological copies of the events of occupying the Imperial Hotel. I was very glad to get this and have shared it with several people. Even though I, as you, would have liked to see more done by the city than mere promises, you clearly were victorious in raising the question of Atlanta's homeless situation to the public eye. It is hard for me to believe that we as a society can spend the kind of money we do on sports and entertainment facilities and not provide money or ideas for affordable housing for all the different stratas of our populace. Even our daughter Pamela struggles to make ends meet because housing and transportation in Houston is so high. And she has a good job. Affordable housing is not just an issue of the homeless. It is also an issue of the hourly worker who struggles to stay just ahead of being pushed into homelessness.

The article on the Olympics in the August issue of Hospitality was impressive in showing that the games and the athletes are not the consideration. Instead, it is the money that can be made off of them by the promoters. If the ancient Greeks only knew where we have taken the Olympic spirit they would be writing tragedies about America. At least for the Greeks it was a human face that launched a thousand ships, not TV megabucks. Anyway, I am grateful for all your efforts and am with you in thoughts and prayers.

After going out to spend some time with our son Blake in L.A., we have settled into trying to get some things done around here. I have been brush-hogging and trying to fix up some land I own on the outskirts of Paris, Texas in hopes of selling it in the next year. I am feeling more and more that I do not really want to be an owner of land from the investment end. If I am unable to actually use the land, I feel that it should be in the hands of someone who can, even if I realize no profit out of it. To buy land and hold it so that I can make a profit off of the increase in its value has come to seem wrong to me, much as I see the buying of something like the Imperial Hotel and leaving it unoccupied just so you can possess the land and future opportunity to make money when others are in need of using that land or building. Hopefully, I can get the property in better shape than when I acquired it and find someone who can use it in the proper way. My approach toward ownership and investment has truly changed over the years. I think you might say that you have had an effect beyond the day to day struggle with feeding, clothing, and standing up for the rights of the homeless in your area.

Love,

Bill Neely  
Paris, Texas

Dear Friends,

I would like to express my special thanks to you all for such a job well done, and I am very much pleased with the fact that the court case is over in the Imperial Hotel ordeal. I happened to be homeless at that time and needed a place to lay down and find shelter for the night, which may have been impossible if you, myself, and others had not done the take over in order to bring the homeless crisis to the attention of the top city and state officials. Once again, you have made it a brighter day with the Lord's help to see that the homeless and needy are well thought about. Those special efforts have paid off. We all together brought support and unity in our community to show people that there is a crisis out there that needs to be dealt with. It's more than just the Olympics. I am glad to see that there are people like you who stand out on issues such as hunger, housing, and jobs. Thanks again. My prayers are with you.

Sincerely,

Charles Eldridge

Dear Open Door,

Thanks for calling my attention to the Festival of Shelters. This time of "remembering" is truly sacred and holy for our community.

The illustration on the flier is classic--the truth. The two trapped parties are the "poor" and the government. The key to the "toy" is wound by those who insist the police powers be enforced to maintain their interests rather than the interests of the community.

Peace,

Carl

*Editor's note: The preceding note was written to us on the back of a flier (shown below) which we passed out downtown during the Festival of Shelters.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In the local Catholic Worker upcoming newsletter we have an article by Robert McAfee Brown. As you folks well know, this guy is a great writer--in fact he's one of my favorites. Here's a terrific quote from this article which I'm sure you'll fully agree with:

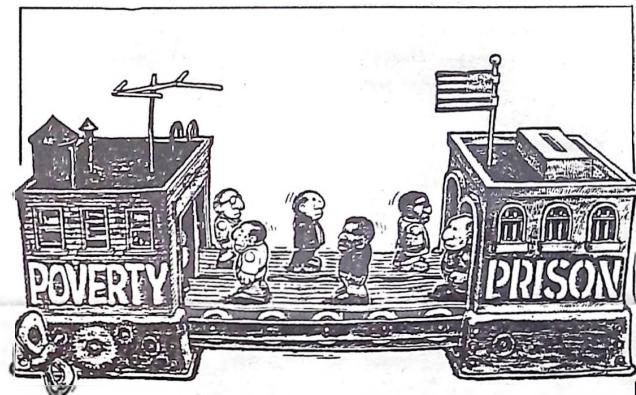
"On matters of life and death, amiable detachment is no virtue. I would rather be guilty of incivility toward people with too much power than guilty of complicity in the murder of peasants destroyed by the power of others. Anger toward the first group of people can be an act of love toward the second. Anger can sometimes be the other face of love."

I wish I could say stuff like that. You people do it quite often in your great paper.

At our monthly Catholic Worker Meeting today we agreed to send a donation to Black Workers for Justice in Raleigh, NC. They appear to be a real good organizing group for the South.

In solidarity, with much love and a big hug,

Jerry Robinett  
Tucson, AZ



#### PRISONS ARE HOUSING FOR THE POOR

Each year at the local, state, and federal level, we claim to have no money for housing while we spend hundreds of millions of dollars to build prisons and millions to execute a select few. Most of the growing number of men, women, and children in prison are not accused of acts of violence; most of them are poor.

The City of Atlanta imprisons the homeless for public urination (when there are no public toilets) and sleeping on park benches (when there is no "legal" place to sleep). Such policy is cruel, costly and dangerous to everyone.

BUILD HOUSES NOT JAILS!



Open Door Community 910 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30306 876-6977 or 874-9652

WE ARE OPEN. . .

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

OUR MINISTRY. . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household & volunteers/supporters), Nov. 30-Dec. 2.

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**

\*\*Men's Work Pants\*\*

Men's Work Shirts

Men's Underwear

Quick Grits

**35mm Camera with telephoto lens**

Cheese

Mayonnaise

**Trailer for hauling**

Multi-Vitamins

MARTA Tokens

Men's Large Shoes (12-14)

Coffee

Non-Aerosol Deodorant

Hams and Turkeys

**JEANS**

Washcloths

Curtains

**MEN'S WINTER COATS**

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

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Open Door Community Worship**

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

*Join us!*

November 4 Worship at 910

November 11 Worship at 910

November 18 Worship at 910  
5:00 Eucharist  
5:30 Music Night

November 25 Worship at 910  
Joe Hendricks, preaching

November 30-December 2 Advent Retreat  
at Dayspring Farm

December 9 Advent Worship at 910

December 16 Advent Worship at 910

December 23 Advent Worship at 910  
Service of Lessons & Carols

December 24 7:30pm Christmas Eve Eucharist

December 30 Worship at 910

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