

HOSPITALITY

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Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ's love.
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

November 1992

When The Master Returns

by Jeff Dietrich

Editor's note: Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris, long-time members of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker Community, joined us last December to celebrate the Open Door's tenth anniversary. The following is an adaptation of the sermon Jeff preached.

Jesus said to His disciples: "Be constantly on watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge. . . You do not know when the master of the house is coming. . . Do not let him come suddenly and catch you asleep. What I say to you I say to all: Be on guard!"

Hector is a periodic visitor at our hospitality house, usually coming to stay after a stretch in jail or in the hospital. While our guest, he works regularly, takes his medicine at scheduled times, and, in general, gets healthy. But one morning, just as he seems to be adjusting comfortably, he disappears. In the ensuing weeks, we will see him on skid row: underweight, haggard and drawn in face, nervous and tense from lack of medication. Then we won't see Hector for a while--perhaps a long while--until he again contacts the house from a hospital or from jail.

Cheryl, the mother of three children, is addicted to crack and alcohol. Because she is HIV positive, she can only last three or four weeks on the streets before she arrives, abruptly, at the threshold of death. Last night she left us to return to the streets. When she comes back in three or four weeks, the question will be whether we take her in again. If we don't she will surely die in a matter of days; if we do, we are, God forbid, her co-dependents.

Leroy is perhaps our greatest success: he doesn't do drugs or alcohol; he doesn't have AIDS; he's never even been in jail and he is hard-working. In the four months that he was here, he gained the distinction of being the first person in over a decade to actually save more than \$200 while living with us. Working at a job that he detested, telephone sales, he was able to save almost \$1500. We urged him to keep saving until he had enough for first and last month's rent on an apartment. But, alas, the only thing that he wanted was a car. The last we heard from



Leroy was a call from the discount jewelry store, which wanted to know if he was a good credit risk. Now Leroy has his own transportation, nice clothes, jewelry--and sleeps in his car.

What are we really doing here anyway?

When we are really honest with ourselves, when we wake up in the darkness of the early morning, plagued with doubt and even despair, we must admit that we have not accomplished all that much. We have not changed the world; the poor and the hungry are still with us in even greater numbers than when we started. Though we write and speak unceasingly, though we appear with some frequency in the media, though our foundress,

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910 Ponce de Leon

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

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

Newspaper:

Editorial Staff--John Cole Vodicka, Murphy Davis, Elizabeth Dede, Ed Loring, Dick Rustay, Gladys Rustay, CM Sherman, and Phillip Williams
Layout--John Cole Vodicka
Circulation--Phillip Williams and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests
Subscriptions or change of address--Gladys Rustay



The Hardwick Trip Needs Vans and Drivers

Each month, the Open Door Community and a large group of volunteer drivers take a trip down to Milledgeville, Georgia with 75 people who visit their loved ones in prison there. We leave Atlanta at 10am and return to Atlanta at 6pm, one Saturday every month. The trip depends on drivers, cars, and vans. Do you have a vehicle, or could you drive on this trip? Please give us a call at 874-9652 or 876-6977. Ask for Dee Cole Vodicka.

We also need car seats for infants and small children.



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Dorothy Day, is considered by many to be the single most important Catholic in the history of the American church, we remain virtually a secret movement.

What are we doing here, making beds, preparing soup, and cleaning toilets? What are we doing here breaking up fights, arguing with community members and battling unceasingly with petty bureaucrats? What are we doing here going to endless meetings, talking to high school students who would rather be watching MTV, explaining to our parents for the millionth time why we don't get a salary or have health insurance or pay into Social Security, apologizing to them again for that time their new Buick got graffitied while visiting us?

What are we doing here wasting our time on folks who are probably going to die on the streets anyway? What are we doing here wasting our time on losers and drug addicts, people who are never going to make it?

We feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless; we offer hospitality, community and friendship to the poor; but in 20 years of doing this work, what have we really accomplished?

When we first started, it was easier for me to dismiss our failures because we were "just a bunch of hippies running a free soup kitchen. No wonder we failed; we simply didn't know what we were doing." I used to envy all of the professional agencies filled with certified experts who ran effective programs that claimed to "re-connect the poor" or "mainstream the poor" or "empower the poor."

But I have come to realize that we are not failures because of our lack of knowledge, education, sophistication, or professional staff. We are not even failures because the poor whom we serve fail so consistently.

We are failures because we are in intimate contact with the failure and brokenness of our culture. When Jesus told us to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and visit the imprisoned, he knew that such activities would take us directly to the heart of all the injustice, oppression and brokenness in our society. He assumed that such simple activities would cause us to ask questions about both ourselves and our society. He assumed that such activity would involve us in a continuing process of becoming increasingly human. He assumed that it would cause us to deny both power and status. He assumed that this ministry of prophetic compassion would be the ongoing work of his church.

As Walter Brueggemann said in his book Prophetic Imagination: "Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural, but it is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness. . . . Thus, compassion that might be seen simply as generous good will is, in

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fact, criticism of the system, forces, and ideologies that produce the hurt. Jesus enters into the hurt and comes to embody it."

Our task is to do the same. To enter into the hurt is to realize that the system is rigged. It is to realize that the poor can never be conformed to the rigorous, self-serving standards of progress, education and consumption--patterns demanded by our culture for even minimal social acceptance. To enter into the hurt is to realize that these standards are the exact parallel to the pharisaical codes of first-century Palestine that kept the poor of Jesus' time landless, margined, and debt-ridden.

The great temptation of people in our line of work is to abandon the basic human effort of responding compassionately in favor of a so-called "effective strategy." But whether those strategies of salvation are job training programs, political action, substance abuse therapies, or just simple-minded religion, their predisposition toward operational effectiveness and quantifiable results tend to cover over the depth of the woundedness.

We are not here to cure the poor or to fix the poor or to mainstream the poor; we are not here to create programs, make converts, raise money, or build great buildings. We are here to enter into the pain of the poor, to expose the wounds that make the suffering of the poor inevitable. We are here to offer healing and compassion. We are here in response to Jesus' challenge to be human. We are here to submit to that radical surgery which will take away our hearts of stone and exchange them for hearts of flesh. We are here to mourn with the poor and to tell their stories. Anything less than this witness of prophetic compassion covers over the wound without healing it. Anything less than this is pious self-aggrandizement or pompous professionalism.

It is not enough for us to be merely people who have faith and hope in Jesus Christ. We must also be people who have a corresponding lack of faith and hope in the institutions and structures of worldly power. We must not be seduced by professional technique, or therapeutic jargon, or political power, or mindless religion.

To be an instrument of God's grace is to reject the idols of power; it is to reject the instruments of professional religion and professional bureaucracies. To be an instrument of God's grace is to be human and to respond to hurt in a human manner, which is to say personally and communally, rather than collectively and bureaucratically. The personal, communal witness is the only means that opens a path for our God to act in the world. Only by personally emulating, however imperfectly, the values of God's kingdom do we open an avenue for grace, healing, and transformation. Only by being human can we make the world more humane. Only by being Christian can we make the world more Christian. Only by exposing the wound as terminal can we then make room for our God to work.

While it does not seem very effective, this work of cleaning toilets, making soup, healing wounds and offering prophetic hospitality is what our God asks of us in order that we might be human. To be human is to recognize that we are not God, that we are not all-powerful. The greatest evil in all of history was perpetrated by good people who thought that they could fix all human problems in one great "final solution." Whether through war, revolution, or technological progress, these strategies of effectiveness share a common disregard for the relationship between means and ends.

Our collective experience of the last century demonstrates so clearly that the "little way" of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin is not some outdated, pious, pie-in-the-sky



theology, but it is rather the only appropriate means of achieving our noble end--a more human world. The instruments of power, whether political, military, or bureaucratic, can achieve only disaster, even though the world would wish us to believe otherwise.

As Dorothy Day wrote so many years ago in Loaves and Fishes: "One of the greatest evils of the day. . . is a sense of futility. Young people say, 'What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible for only the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes."

Finally, we must ask ourselves what it is that the Master should expect to find us doing when He returns? Running successful programs? Acquiring advanced degrees? Transforming political systems? Should He find us filling stadiums with converts, administering massive building programs, developing sophisticated fundraising strategies? No, the Master has a right to expect that the servants to whom He entrusted His house will be serving still--cleaning toilets, making soup, binding wounds. This is what it means to be human and not to be God. This is what it means to be faithful

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Dancing Along In The Madness

by Murphy Davis

It was one of those days that my eyes were so clouded by the chaos that I almost missed it. It was mid-November, I was on house duty, and I decided that the Thanksgiving-Christmas slide had begun that day. Car-loads of clothes arrived in rapid-fire succession and threatened to bury us in the office living room. Then the caterer came with leftovers from before Thanksgiving parties three times. Where the heck could we put all that food? And where would it be in July? Everybody who came into the soup kitchen had a question or a request. On and on it went.

In the midst of it all, Alice and her two children slipped in. I was too busy at first to deal with her. That was all right, said she. She sat and waited patiently, a 3-month old baby on her shoulder and a shy 9-year old boy at her side. There was a twinkle in his eye.

The chaos continued for a while. Finally I dragged myself over to the sofa and sat down beside her. She was living at the women and children's shelter on Stewart Avenue. What she needed was a stroller for the baby. We dealt with that easily with a call to St. Vincent de Paul. And then there were the shoes her son needed. I looked at the boy's feet and realized with horror that the child was walking the cold city streets in a thin pair of cloth bedroom shoes. I jumped from the sofa and remembered a nearly-new pair of Nikes I had just seen on the top of the pile in the sorting room. Oh God, let them be the right size!

His fingers moved like lightning as he scrambled the laces and pulled the shoes on his feet. Perfect.

And then he danced. All around the living room. Oblivious to everyone and everything except the joy of a good pair of shoes on his feet.

They left and the hecticness of the day continued. But how many times I have looked back and breathed a grateful prayer for the joy of that moment: the spontaneous glee of a

child who could run now--even on the concrete; the satisfied smile of a mother who saw her children receive what they needed; and a song in my heart because the cast off



Don Mack

shoes of a child in a church somewhere found their way to this child's feet.

Victories in these days are few and far between. The numbers of homeless grow. The executions of our friends continue. The war and torture rages on.

But life wins out over death. Love is stronger than death, homelessness, greed or war. And by God's grace the power of the Resurrection breaks through even our clouded eyes. □



The Cole Vodicka children, along with Dee, join friends from Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in building a "Sukkah" for the celebration of "Sukkoth" (Festival of Shelters).

Murphy Davis and Ed Loring will be at Warren Wilson College (Swannanoa, NC), November 3-5. They will lead a forum on the life and work of the Open Door Community and meet with students who will be at the community during January, 1993.

How Can We Sing The Lord's Song In A Strange Land?

by Joe Heckel

Editor's note: Joe Heckel is a friend of the Open Door Community. A retired Presbyterian pastor, Joe is a leader among homeless advocates in Pittsburgh, PA, where he works regularly with the men's shelter of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church. A frequent traveller to Nicaragua, El Salvador, and now Cuba and Haiti, Joe brings together the passion for the poor of the Third World in cities of the U.S. and abroad.

I found an African nation in the tiny end of the Island of Hispanola called Haiti. They were rooted up, torn out of, dragged in chains from their homes, their families, their culture, their religion, their Mother Earth on the continent of Africa and brought to the "new" world to do the heavy work for the white men who had already exterminated the native "Indians" because they could not find enough gold, lift heavy enough burdens, and resist the white man's disease. The Europeans needed a more rugged slave. Those Africans who survived capture in their native land, who were stacked in layers of shit and disease in the dark, putrid holds of slave ships, who survived the wrenching of their bodies from their beloved communities, and their humanity from the frames of their bodies, who were spewed out on a new shore to be bought by whites to do the labor of rape on the green fertile earth--those who survived all that were rugged slaves indeed.

They were so rugged in fact, that in 1804 they threw off the yoke of the white government. In a great revolt they became the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. Sixty years before the white government of the United States "abolished" slavery, the slaves of Haiti abolished the white government. But they were not and never have been "free." The place of an "owner" was taken by an economic, political, and social structure. A system in which a few humans dominate most humans. A system fed by outside political, economic, social and religious forces took control of the land and the people of Haiti.

The land was raped to furnish North American breakfast tables. The politics were manipulated to ensure subservience to imperialist powers. The religion was cultivated to enhance Christian missionary statistics. Human spirits still longed for freedom.

A prophet and priest appeared. A prophet who thought, spoke, and saw visions in Creole, not French or English. A priest infected with the new vision of the Church, not polluted with the old.

In 1990 Jean-Bertrand Aristide wrote to "all my Sisters and Brothers" who have worked for so long in the parishes of the poor, who

have struggled for the liberation of our people in the name of Jesus Christ against the heaviest of odds, who have labored and spoken out against the abuses of cruel systems. His message, now a book, is called In The Parish of the Poor (Orbis Books).

He knows how hard it is to build Utopia on a garbage heap. Indeed, it is hard to build even a decent poor person's home there. But that is all he asks--a decent poor person's home. He also imagines a Haiti where at three or four in the afternoon, every afternoon, every person would sit down and have a great big, steaming hot plate of rice and beans. That would be a peaceful country. But today the country is not peaceful. Many hardly manage one hot meal a week. Many work all day with only plantains for dinner. While the peasant eats cornmeal mash with their fingers, the elite in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince eat steak and veal flown in from abroad. "The rich of my country," he writes, "a tiny percentage of our population, sit at a vast table covered in white damask and overflowing with good food, while the rest of my countrymen and countrywomen are crowded under that table, hunched over in the dirt and starving. It is



a violent situation, and one day the people under that table will rise up in righteousness, and knock the table of privilege over, and take what rightfully belongs to them. Brothers and Sisters, it is our mission to help them stand up and live as human beings. That is what we have all been

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Reflections On The Festival Of Shelters, 1992

by Dick Rustay

Remember how the Lord your God led you on this long journey through the desert these past forty years, sending hardships to test you.

When you have all you want to eat and have built good houses to live in and when your cattle and sheep, your silver and gold, and all your other possessions have increased, be sure that you do not become proud and forget the Lord your God who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves.

—Deuteronomy, chapter 8

It's over! We have just completed six days keeping a 24-hour presence at Woodruff Park in the heart of Atlanta. Each night at 5:00 we began with a worship service and charged those staying in the park overnight to be alert and have eyes to see and ears to hear what occurred in and around the park.

In preparation for the Festival of Shelters, we studied the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, where the Israelites are constantly reminded to remember: to remember that God sustained them in the desert; God brought them out of slavery; God is still the Provider and Sustainer even when there is now plenty and people live in good houses.

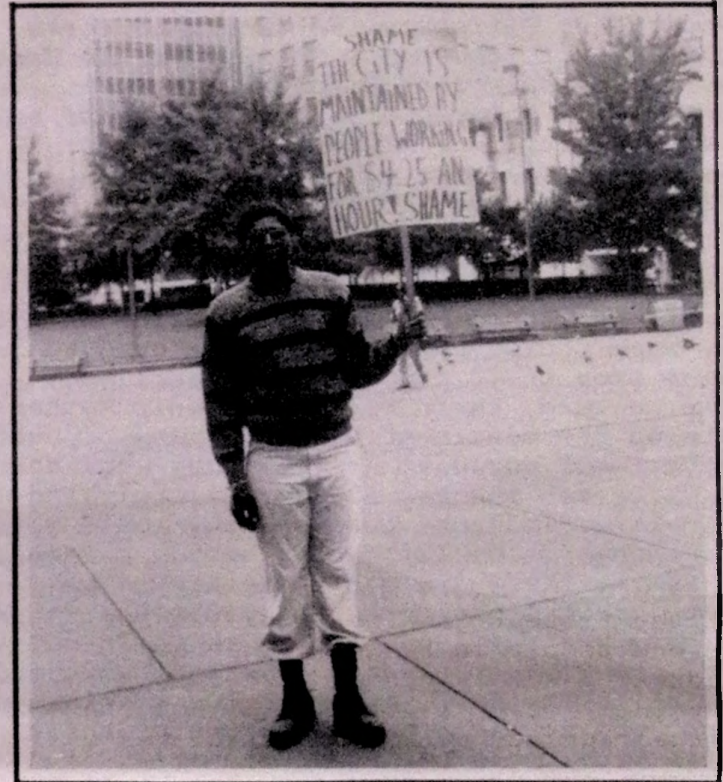
For some of us, who had never been homeless and had always had plenty, the question was, "How can we remember when we have never been in the desert? We've always come from the land of milk and honey." Community members who had lived on the streets shared their thoughts with us and gave insight on what to see, hear and feel. "Day after day you get your feelings hurt, knowing that no matter what you do you will only get minimum wage." "You got to go by the rules that you had no part in making." "See the big buildings around the park and remember that other folks are living in kudzu patches." "Experience the pain of separateness and see the consequences of being poor and homeless."

So we went into Woodruff Park and listened and looked. This is what we saw, heard and felt:

Horace, a street person who talked with us: "I work out of labor pools. They take money out of my check for a meal and for transportation even when I don't need them. When I get my check, it comes to \$20.00 for 8 hours of work and 4 hours of waiting. How can I live on that and have a place?" Juxtapose this statement with a huge billboard one block away that had a beautiful picture of a golf course surrounded by water and palm trees, obviously a retirement center. Underneath is the caption, THE REASON YOU WORK SO HARD! Not for our friends on the streets. Couple these two stories with a headline appearing in the newspaper that morning stating the middle class is disappearing while the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Another street person named Andre said: "There's a lot more to homelessness than

being on the streets. It's washing up in laundromats, losing all motivation for finding work. When you do find work, you're in the same position at the end of the day as when you began the day, with nothing."



Gino Williams, witnessing in Woodruff Park.

Melvin, when the discussion centered on the random killings in Atlanta stated a profound truth that we all forget. "If God doesn't protect you, no one can."

And then there was John, a street person we've known for years who frequents our Butler Street Breakfast line. He sat on a park bench and calmly raised his shoe revealing all of his five toes exposed, sticking out from his shoe. He said that he needed to go to Grady Hospital to have his foot checked. On closer inspection you could see a bloody big toe that had been stubbed and lacerated. John seemed to accept it as the way life is. The next time we came back to the park to take him to get shoes, he was gone.

During one of our worship services, John Cole Vodicka, a member of the Open Door shared a reading from Habakkuk calling us to remember. "What's the use of an idol? It is only something that a person makes, and it tells you nothing but lies." (3:18) John then pointed to the huge buildings surrounding Woodruff Park and said these buildings and prisons have become our idols. Love, trust and belief in what these buildings stand for has replaced love for our brothers and sisters.

At our final worship service at the park, Ed Loring explained that the main sin street people have is the sin of believing that they deserve what they have become.

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White America has declared that if you only work hard enough, you will succeed (a declaration that is suddenly being looked at again when so many middle class and upper class folk are finding this statement to be a lie). The love of God is for all, not just for the "good people." Slowly and inexorably we are confronted with the reality that our society has lost its soul. Prisons become the answer to housing for the homeless. Buildings have become more important than people. The Olympics mean the destruction of low cost housing for stadiums and dormitories for athletes and students, not for the poor and homeless. Am I my brother's and sister's keeper is hurled from the pinnacles of the buildings, implying that the question is stupid. Yet deep within us comes the haunting answer that indeed, we are our brother's and sister's keeper and to deny this is to accept death: death of people and death of a society.

Every day during the festival from 12:00-1:00pm we walk with banners pleading with people to have eyes to see. We hand out leaflets to those who rush by trying to ignore us. We feel the contempt they have for us, the utter scorn that is in their eyes, and it hurts us. We dread being rejected. Sometimes we get a smile from people passing by. They stop and read our literature and exclaim, "Is it really true that the fastest growing population of homeless people is that of women and children?" We say yes and enter in a conversation with them. Out of nowhere a policeman drives up and congratulates us.



Tommy Davis, Ira Terrell and Marcus Gill listening to a friend's sharing during the Festival of Shelters.

"Keep it up. We have to make the public aware that the homeless are increasing and we're not doing anything about it." So we keep on keeping on.

On the last night of the festival, we had a feast when we returned to the Open Door. We invited those from the streets who worshipped with us and we reflected on the week's festival. As we shared our insights and joys, Ronnie stood and shared his thoughts. "A year ago I was on the streets. I started to worship with you at Woodruff Park during the festival and you invited me to live with you. Now I can say I have a home. You are my home." It became clear why Ronnie spent the last night of the festival

out in Woodruff Park even though he had a painful leg and had trouble walking. Ronnie



Murphy Davis and Tim McDonald (Pastor, First Iconium Baptist Church) leading worship in the park.

understood that God loved him, and Ronnie responded to that love.

And so the festival has ended for one more year. But one last thought remains. During an evening while we were spending our night in the park, eight vans suddenly drove up and street people swarmed around them. Soon ropes were set up and two lines were formed. People cooked hot dogs on grills. Clothes were distributed and there was a festive atmosphere in the air. Everyone was fed (around 300 people). After the feeding, singing began, Spirituals and Gospel songs. It was led by one of the street people and was a marvelous thing to behold. There was sharing and love shown. . . . But then, after the singing, and after all the equipment was put away, the people who came in vans got back into them and drove away back to the suburbs. And it was very quiet. The park again was left to the homeless until a police officer cleared it at 11:00pm. We were there that night, but today I'm back at 910 and the park will be left for the homeless tonight. What does this say to me and to you?

When you have all you want to eat and have built good houses to live in and when your cattle and sheep, your silver and gold, and all your other possessions have increased. Be sure that you do not forget the Lord your God who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves.



Kay Gale: Struggling To Serve God

by Kay Gale

I was born in Tampa, Florida 57 years ago and spent my life there, or in its suburbs, until I moved to Hamilton, Ontario in July, 1990. I served in Hamilton, along with other Volunteer Services Workers in a community and Mennonite Church. When my two year term there was completed, I returned to the South (about which I feel passionately) to the Open Door Community. I arrived here July 18, 1992.

That sounds pretty straightforward but my journey for most of my life has been a jagged one. Raised Southern Baptist, committing to the Lord in my teens and then rejecting the church in my early twenties; the journey between then and the mid-1980's was primarily directed to the goals of being successful as a wife, parent (I have one daughter, Leslie), worker, home owner, etc., etc., with social activism thrown in.

My father was a Southerner, strong in his faith in the labor unions and conservative in his views of race and civil rights. My mother was a Northerner and very liberal in her views of equality--not just in equal opportunities for all, but that all people are equal, period! Ah, there were lots and lots of interesting debates in our household. I grew up hearing both sides of issues debated in passionate and sometimes heated voices. I was enchanted by it all. And I fell in love with ideas, issues, causes, the psychology and philosophy of humankind. So the goals in my life were pretty common to my generation, but the days spent working toward them were spiced up with the politics and issues of the day. And then along the way, I divorced and adjusted to raising my daughter virtually alone.

1970 (2 years after my divorce) is a year of demarcation for me: from that time until 1976, I worked for a labor union. I was in the thick of things: learning about agreement negotiations, writing propaganda and then in my last year there, on the union organizing team. And during this period (even though I had already read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*), I became a "consciousness-raised" feminist and a member of N.O.W. The 1970's and 80's was a period of high energy social activism for me: I worked for political campaigns (canvassing, leafleting, mailings, get-out-the-vote drives; voter registration--the small but useful components of a campaign) for local and state representatives and presidential candidates. I demonstrated against the unjust policies of our government and picketed for liberal causes; supported, with my hard-earned dollars, various liberal organizations and was generally consumed by the "American Way." I didn't like it and wanted to change it! I wanted the politicians to make good on the ideals "sold" to me as a schoolchild: that America is great; it cares about the poor of this country and in the rest of the world; that it

loves peace.

Then in 1987 I "lost" my daughter (she went out on her own) and in early 1988 my mother died. And I was burned out from the Reagan years.



Kay Gale

In the summer of 1987 I was led gently and persuasively back to the church. Three wonderful women, whom I had met in the Tampa peace movement, were friends and members of the First United Church of Christ (Congregational). Elizabeth Johnson, Gertrude Chesler and Arlene Tanner were, and still are, an inspiration to me in the church and in the struggle for peace and justice. I shall always feel blessed by our friendships.

It wasn't long after returning to the church that it became clear to me that it wasn't totally up to me (and others like me) to change the world. And that we couldn't change much anyway. I began to rest, wearily, in the knowledge that God is in control; that what we need to do is what we're able to do. And with that knowledge came a peace of mind and spirit that I never had before. And in December, 1989 came the decision to leave the lifestyle I had lived, more or less, all my life and spend the rest of my life trying my best to live the commandments of our Lord.

And that's where I "rest" this day: at the Open Door with friends living the same struggle to serve God and the children of God in whatever way possible. My cup runneth over! □

When The Master Returns

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and not to be effective. This is what it means to be an instrument of grace and not an instrument of power--to be servants of the poor and not administrators of poverty programs.

We may not be able to cure Cheryl, Hector, or Leroy, but we can serve them and welcome them as best we can. We can embody their hurt and tell their stories. And we can let our God do the rest. □

Everyday People

by Phillip Williams

I want to tell a story--a story about four men. Their names are Charles Lyons, Ralph Dennis, Joe Miller and James Walker. Some people see them daily as they come out of their huts and go off down the streets of Atlanta. These people might say to themselves as they pass the four, "There go four more of them headed to the Open Door to stand in line for something to eat. Look at them." Yes, they are coming to the Open Door, but not to stand in line; they are coming to help prepare the meal and serve it to those who, like themselves, are homeless.

We at the Open Door are fortunate and privileged to have Charles, Ralph, Joe, and James come in and help us. If it weren't for them sometimes we would have been hard pressed to serve. There have been days when volunteers could not come, but we were blessed with these four. Our regular volunteers find that Charles, Ralph, Joe, and James are teachers, too, as they work together. Through conversations, the volunteers learn about homelessness and the flip side of the coin--of being poor, living in huts and sticking together.

We are always happy to have Charles, Ralph, Joe, and James at the Open Door. They play cards with community members, pass the time away from the harshness of the streets, and worship with us. Talk about



L to R: Charles, Andrew, Joe, James and Ralph

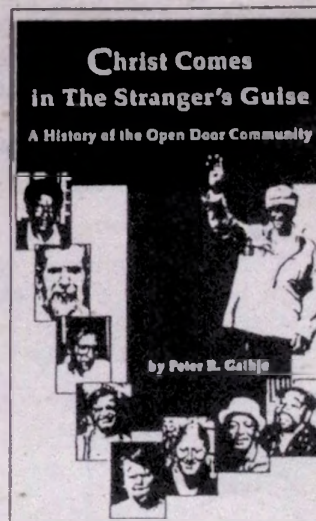
dependable--these four are tops! When it comes time for the distribution of Hospitality, they are here to do the stuffing and labeling. That's a big help to us.

The sad news in all this is that their little community of huts by the Carter Center will be forced to move because of the new road. Where will they go? Will they still be able to come to the Open Door to help serve? We sure hope so because Charles, James, Joe and Ralph are a real blessing to us.



Inez Fleming is a dear friend of the Open Door family and a member of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church. She recently celebrated her birthday with us!

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



Please send a \$10 donation to:

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

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

Name _____
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City _____, State _____
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How Can We Sing The Lord's Song?

(continued from page 5)

working for for all these years in the parishes of the poor."

As the crisis and the rarity of a relatively free election drew near, the groundswell of support for Aristide was gigantic. The people--not the military, not the political parties, not the elite--but the masses of illiterate, oppressed peasants who had caught the vision of their prophet and priest, literally lifted him up.

We might call it a window of opportunity. Perhaps it was a ray of sunshine penetrating the rancid deck into the putrid hold of a slave ship. At the very last political moment, and with all the political maneuvering required, the selected candidate of the FNCD (National Front for Change and Democracy) "stepped aside" and the name of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Prophet and Priest (I should say former Priest), was placed on the ballot as a candidate for the Presidency of Haiti. The people, the masses, the peasants, the oppressed responded. He received 70% of the vote, with more than 75% of the registered voters casting ballots.

And so a new government was formed. Aristide dismissed everyone in all the Ministries of government. He eliminated the "Section Chiefs" who were virtual dictators of the 65 political sections of Haiti. He invited the poor to breakfast in the Presidential Palace. But he didn't last long.

As one Haitian put it, "The 30% vote was more important than the 70% vote." The power that ruled Haiti from its infancy resumed its position as Archie Bunker might reclaim his chair after a brief interruption to go to the "terlet."

And so it is today. Aristide is in seclusion, his life in danger, waiting for the powers and principalities to do their will. The military is back in control. The Ministers have returned to their Ministries.



The Section Chiefs have been restored and each one has been given 100 deputies to carry out his will in the countryside. And anyone, which in the countryside means everyone, who supported Aristide is in fear for their lives. People have been beaten and arrested

for having a picture of Aristide in their homes.

I have been sharing with you my experience of Haiti. At this point I am very weary. The words "drooping hands" and "weak knees" flash through my mind. And so I search these words out, and find them in the tremendous account of the great witnesses of faith and the call to persevere in our own race, and to look to Jesus, the beginning and completion of our faith, who himself endured shame as he was mocked in the military barracks, maneuvered through judicial trials, and tortured to death as a public spectacle (Hebrews 11,12).

Here is the great list of people of faith--men and women, rough and gentle, scoundrels and harlots--thousands of people--too many to call by name--who suffered mocking and imprisonment, some were killed, they were destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering over deserts and mountains and living in the catholes and caves of the earth.

Am I talking about the Old Testament? about Haiti? about Atlanta, Georgia? about Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania? I think I am talking about the Kingdom of God.

It is not a very attractive calling. It is not a story of success and power. In fact, to attractive, successful power it is foolishness. Woe to the attractive, successful, powerful! You have received your reward. But Blessed are you Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.

The record of our faith tells us quite clearly that the Kingdom of God is here. It is not in the Soviet Empire or the American Dream. It is not in the shopping mall or the Olympic Stadium. It is not in the Church or behind your locked door at home. It is where it has always been.

"I have heard the cries of my people."

Our Mother and Father God love us so much they have conceived a Life for us! Therefore, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees! See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God! □

Special Needs for the Holidays

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

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Open Door:

I want to thank you for the inspiration your past several newsletters have given me. I live in Asheville, NC, go to school in California and have never been to the Open Door, and yet I feel a part of it in a real sense.

I worked this summer in San Francisco for a student group called Empty the Shelters (there also was an Empty the Shelters group in Atlanta). This group is committed to battling against homelessness and for social justice by more direct and sometimes political ways than just ladling soup. In addition to working in shelters, agencies, and City Hall, we try to work on community organizing, public education, and direct action (like your action at Druid Hills Presbyterian).

Your collection of people has done incredible work with homeless people and people in prison in order to gain more dignity and support from the community. You have also shown me that Empty the Shelters is not the only group who knows the importance of fighting all forms of oppression (racism, for example) in order to fight against any form of oppression, like many of those who come to the Open Door often face.

Regarding the letter by the Reverend Brant Sanger, I would just like to praise the Open Door for showing the courage it takes to be right, even when those who doubt you label you as "self-righteous." How can we kick people out of our church's boundaries without asking, "Would Jesus have expelled these brothers and sisters?" Will we, as in the instance Rev. Sanger mentioned, allow potential members to blackmail us into forcing homeless people off our grounds, just so that they will be members? Most importantly, will we let society dictate our church's behavior, or will our church's conduct be determined by Christ's teachings? I hope the Open Door continues to ask these questions of itself and the community at large.

I have seen the same attitude toward homeless people displayed in San Francisco as the one that I understand exists in Atlanta. Just as at Druid Hills, many San Franciscans want homeless people out of their sight: either by making it illegal to obstruct the sidewalk in any way, by sweeping them off the street by van or police force, or even by putting them in jail if they ask for money in a way that a pedestrian doesn't like. Would Christ have put our homeless brothers and sisters out of sight, off our property, out of our thoughts? Judging from the behavior of many people in society, there are some who think ignoring part of our community is fine in Christ's eyes.

While Christianity is nominally not a facet of Empty the Shelters, I think E.T.S. and the Open Door share a commitment to working hard to support, empower, and love those of us who have been largely forgotten by the community when we are rightful members of it. In addition, we will not be intimidated by controversy. We know that if many Christians had not been controversial in the past, some of us would still be enslaved in chains, with "upstanding" white Christians as their masters.

A homeless veteran I met this summer named Freddy Parks told me that living as a Samaritan is a very rewarding, yet difficult, way to live. I salute the Samaritans of the Open Door, who will not pass by those who are lying on the side of the road, robbed and stripped, while everyone else passes them by, or perhaps bans them from their property. Together let's make a community where no one is left stranded and alone, and to everyone all doors are open.

Love and strength in the struggle,

Thomas Hunter Arnold
Stanford, CA

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Dear Open Door Community,

A friend read to me from your book about how you got started while we were driving down the West coast, and I found it very inspiring! Praise God for the good work God is doing in and through you.

Please send me your book, and any information you have about visiting your community.

Yours in Christ,

Mary Graves
Solano Beach, CA

Dear Open Door Community,

The articles on Racism and Prejudice have been very important in helping me articulate to my congregation the serious work we must undertake to end racism.

Thank you for this and so much more as we seek peace and justice together.

Nancy Wiens
North Bay, CA

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Dear Open Door,

In July I spent 10 days in Detroit, Michigan, my hometown. My mom is there still and many dear friends. My visit coincided with "Detroit Summer '92," a project that was an exciting model of young people working together with grassroots community groups and churches to learn and build community. I don't have the capacity here to describe it, but if you know the devastation of Detroit--the signs of hope there proclaimed the presence of the Spirit. Perhaps it is when the trappings of "success" are stripped away, God comes to fill the cleared space. Is it possible to preach that? Is it possible to alleviate the suffering caused by our idolatrous greed--without also challenging individuals to be less greedy? As long as there are people who need a home and basic stuff can anyone claim they are Christian and comfortable?

In Atlanta, now, you must have the feeling of watching the preparations of the Roman circus and gladiator matches. The Olympic expenditures and plans must be galling. In Minneapolis we have just witnessed the opening of the largest temple of consumption anywhere--the Mega mall. The grossness is obscene. 18 log cabins were built as part of a central amusement park at a cost of \$1.8 million. Full scale houses, I've heard--may not be true. Mega churches are holding services in the rotunda of the Mega mall. I'm surprised the central sculpture, with appropriate fountains and plants, isn't a golden calf.

I'm rambling--sorry. The economic extravaganzas in the midst of suffering and need are sometimes overwhelming and there don't seem to be many prophets around these days--just profits. . . Wonder how those words got to be the same?

In Christ's love,

Pauline Redmond
Minneapolis, MN

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Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your demonstration in downtown. It really takes effort to bring about change!

We have successful low income housing in Ormewood Park. I would welcome more creative human efforts in this needed area.

One problem is racism. One group wants to change the name of Confederate Ave. One wants to hold on to a negative past.

Does the name "Confederate" represent our neighborhood?

I think it is past time to change Confederate Ave. to another name. Confederate has a very negative meaning to a lot of folks. It means repression and loss of rights, pain and lynching!

Let's do the right thing and change Confederate Ave. to Veterans Ave. or some other name!

Can you help us rename Confederate Ave.?

Call City Council at 330-6030.

Call the Mayor's office at 330-6100.

Sincerely yours,

Scott Petersen
Atlanta, GA

Editor's note: We met Scott Petersen while we were downtown leafletting during the Festival of Shelters.



WE ARE OPEN. . .

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

OUR MINISTRY. . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household and volunteers/supporters), November 27-29.

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.

Open Door Community Worship

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

Join us!

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| October 25 | Worship at 910
Nelia and Calvin Kimbrough, preaching |
| November 1 | Worship at 910
Ed Loring, preaching |
| November 8 | Worship at 910
Dick Rustay, preaching |
| November 15 | Worship at 910
Missa Luba
Choir of First Presbyterian Church,
Milledgeville, Georgia |
| November 22 | Music Night
5:00pm, Eucharist
5:30pm, Singing |
| November 27-29 | Advent Retreat
Dayspring Farm |
| December 6 | Advent Worship at 910 |
| December 13 | Advent Worship at 910 |
| December 20 | Advent Worship at 910
Service of Lessons and Carols |
| December 24 | Christmas Eve Worship at 910
7:30pm |

*We will be 11 years old on Christmas Day!
Happy Birthday, Open Door Community!!*



NEEDS

JEANS

Men's Work Shirts

Men's Underwear

Quick Grits

Cheese

Mayonnaise

Multi-Vitamins

MARTA Tokens

Postage Stamps

Men's Large Shoes (12-14)

Coffee

Non-Aerosol Deodorant

Toothbrushes

Toothpaste

Disposable Razors

Shampoo

WINTER COATS

SWEATERS

HATS

GLOVES

Soup Kitchen Volunteers

BABY CAR SEATS

CUB SCOUT UNIFORM

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

A Note On Donations

We appreciate all your donations that keep us going. Please help us by bringing them only to our front door. We suggest you park in our side driveway, lock your car and come ring our doorbell. We will get folks inside to help you bring your gifts in.

Donations left at our back door usually do not get to us. Folks in our front yard may offer to help, but this causes problems for us, so we ask you to ring the bell and let us help instead.

Many thanks!

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

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____