

HOSPITALITY

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October 1994

Loving the Poor: Embracing the Radical Gospel: Matthew 25 as a Liberation Spirituality

by Murphy Davis



FRITZ EICHENBERG

There are many different ways to serve and work with homeless people, prisoners, victims of violence, and other marginalized people; and there are a great variety of motivations that bring various ones of us to the work. Issues in the city have pushed us once again to have to think through the question of the basics: what Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker movement called Aims and Purposes. What is at the root of our call and vocation that simply cannot, must not be compromised?

Matthew 25:31-46 is at the foundation of all we hope to do and be in the Open Door Community. In 1977, when we started Southern Prison Ministry in Georgia, we looked to the Committee of Southern Churchfolk who, in the persons of Will Campbell and Tony Dunbar, had started the ministry a few years earlier as a simple, unpretentious effort to respond to the Gospel mandate to visit the prisoner. It was promised, after all, that in doing that, we would meet Jesus Christ. Everything else would flow from that.

A few years later, when it was time for the Open Door to be born, we looked to the Catholic Worker tradition. There again, the founders insisted that it was in the sharing of bread with the poor that our own eyes would be opened to see God in our midst. Christ comes in the stranger's guise. This is the tradition we were called to follow.

The passage from Matthew's gospel is Jesus' story to his followers shortly before his execution. He tells of final judgement: a time when all the people and nations of the world will stand before him and be divided into two groups. To one group he will speak words of welcome and blessing: "For I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me." When the blessed ones were surprised he said, "Inasmuch as you have done it for one of the least important of these sisters or brothers of mine, you have done it for me." The other group, who had neither fed, welcomed, clothed nor visited the marginalized, had already chosen the sentence of isolation and apartness that the judge now pronounced on them.

In other words, Jesus said to his followers. "The time is coming when I won't be physically with you any more. You need to know how to follow me, know my suffering, comfort me, and be with me. I live with you and among

you in the presence of the poor and the outsider. Serve them and you are serving me. Befriend them and you will be friends of God. Shut them out, harass them, deny them what they need to sustain their lives, and you deny God." Simply put, Jesus was teaching the disciples that God is present among us in the poor and suffering ones: the sickest, hungriest, smelliest, most neglected, most condemned. How we treat them is a direct indication of our love of God.

It is a simple teaching, really. When I was in seminary, I heard the story told of Shirley Guthrie, our Reformed Theology professor who was speaking in a church somewhere. A church member asked him what this passage really meant. Shirley said (no doubt tapping his pipe and shrugging his shoulders), "Seems to me it says 'if you don't feed the hungry you'll go to hell.'" Simple enough, indeed.

Generally we read Matthew 25 as a mandate for action. But it is really about more than action. It is a description of a spirituality: a liberation spirituality that teaches us of the complete transformation, conversion, change of orientation that scripture calls for. As the Latin American liberation theologians teach us, a spirituality that is not concrete is not real. Our spirituality is a manner of life that gives unity to our thought (analysis), prayer, and action. It has to do with a way of seeing, being, understanding and interpreting. It has everything in the world to do with the language we use to describe life and reality, the choices we make, and what and whom we value.

Our spirituality is how we hammer out the meaning of our encounter with God in the particularity of our present context: here, now, in this place, with these people, in the midst of this struggle.

Whatever our circumstances, God comes to us in the poor and oppressed and invites us to open up our lives. When we do share, welcome, and invite, we find ourselves in the glad company of a loving God. We are no longer alone. We are not abandoned.

When we reject the invitation, we choose the path of isolation for ourselves. We cut ourselves off. We might still have the food or whatever we didn't share clutched in our hand, but when we look up, there is no one to share the meal with us. We are alone.

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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, please contact any of the following:

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(continued from page 1)

This is essential to the nature of a liberation spirituality: always we are invited IN: invited into community. How we respond to the presence of God among us in the most unsightly, the uncomely, the least, defines for us a quality of life. This is about an invitation to a complete change of orientation.

Sometime around 1980, Ed and I went over to Emory to hear Professor Jurgen Moltmann lecture. It was before we got to know him as a friend, but the event deeply shaped us. He was articulating, I think, a Matthew 25 spirituality. The poor, said Moltmann, are subjects of the Kingdom of God. Subjects!

It took some time to appropriate it. Almost always, the poor in the ministry of the church are objects of our ministry. We the church members and leaders, define the need, we plan, we get the resources, we serve, we decide when we're burned out, when to quit, when to move on to another project or set up another program. They are, after all, OUR programs, so naturally, we are the subjects.

Not so, said Moltmann. The poor are the subjects of the Kingdom of God. In the poor, the oppressed, the stranger, we encounter the crucified Christ. Jesus Christ is the subject of our worship and our discipleship. And if we understand that we meet Jesus Christ in the poor, then the poor are transformed in our eyes and we see that they are the subjects of our love, not the objects of our mercy or action.

Objects can be moved around, manipulated, acted upon, withdrawn from, seen as an optional activity, and related to at will--at our will, on our time.

Subjects, on the other hand, have priority. The needs and agenda of a subject in our lives set agenda for us. In a subject-subject relationship (or an I-Thou relationship, as Martin Buber wrote), the pain that the other suffers, or the rejection they experience today, probably will give definition to how I spend my day tomorrow. In a subject-object relationship, I have the option of responding, but no one is likely to think it strange if I choose not to. Our friend Don Wester calls this "drawbridge ministry": you let the bridge down, go out and "do" ministry; then you come back in and pull the bridge up tight so nobody can get to you except on your turf and your terms.

There are three implications of such a liberation spirituality which we must explore further: first, the need to listen; then, the need to be very careful with our language; and finally, liberation spirituality as resistance.

People of faith who come from privileged backgrounds need to be very quiet and listen to scripture and to the poor. If God really is present to us in the presence of the poor, then we need to be quiet and hear what she has to say. This is not to say that everything that poor people say is the word of God. The task is, rather, as Gustavo Gutierrez says, to listen to the poor with an ear well-trained by the scriptures. What we can hear is God's lively Spirit which transforms us, changes us, and leads us into deeper solidarity with the wretched of the earth.

Second, a liberation spirituality demands that we speak differently: we need to speak the language of love; we need to speak with a tongue well-trained by the scriptures. Modern technocratic culture has its own language that demands precision and conformity. It is the language of management and its function is, at least in part, to distance people. It makes people objects. Those who come to us for help are called "clients" and we are "service providers" or "case managers". We should interview them for a "needs assessment" so that we can better plan and manage their "rehabilitation". (Once Randy Loney heard me describing these language patterns and he said, "You know, it sounds like a sort of urban renewal of the soul.") If we decide to cut back on the services provided we will call it "downsizing." If somebody gets fired, they are "terminated", and on and on (*ad nauseum*.) One of the worst examples of this I ever saw was in a *Creative Loafing* article on Grady Hospital in about 1986. It quoted from a report from Emory Medical School:

"The patients at Grady Memorial Hospital constitute a wealth of clinical material not available elsewhere to Emory..."

Human beings: sick, needy, hurting human beings, described as "clinical material!" It's one reason that we often sing the spiritual: "If anybody asks you who I am, just tell 'em I'm a child of God." ("Ain't no clinical material!")

It is a far different reality to welcome guests in as sisters and brothers in community together. While the language of modern technological culture distances, the language of love binds us together and helps us to open our eyes to see each other as kinfolks.

Finally, a liberation spirituality is necessarily a spirituality of resistance: a life well-trained by the scriptures. If the poor are subjects in our life, if we really do believe that God is present to us in the presence of the poor, then it is a given that we are over-against the system that hates, punishes and crushes the poor.

To serve the poor and not confront the injustice of the system that causes poverty and oppression is ultimately to insult the poor and denigrate the presence of God among us. It is to say--your poverty and victimization is an individual problem (i.e., your fault), so obviously what the agenda must be is to rehabilitate you, not reform or transform a sick society. If Jesus comes to us in the poor and we are working to rehabilitate the poor, what indeed are we doing: trying to rehabilitate Jesus Christ?

Loving the poor, the Christ in the stranger's guise, means having to confront the injustice because we cannot stand to see Jesus being hounded, put out, humiliated, hurt, starved, caged, cuffed, laughed at, poked with a billy stick, or neglected. We cannot live quietly or comfortably in a world that tolerates, much less condones injustice.

But let's face it. To love the poor and embrace the radical gospel is very clearly to choose sides. It is to side with the poor and oppressed, yes, over-against the systems of the rich and powerful. It is neither a comfortable nor an easy place to be. It means struggling mightily not to give in to hatred, cynicism, bitterness, and despair; and it means living in hope always for the grief and love to express itself in joyful, hopeful action.

It is in such a place that the Gospel can become food and drink to us. In such a place we know day by day our need for the gifts of grace, mercy and forgiveness in our own lives and the gifts of justice and righteousness to cover the broken earth.

When God comes to us in the distressing guise of the stranger, it is never the same for us again.

Murphy Davis is a partner at the Open Door Community.



MICHAEL SCHWARZ

Fall Appeal

Dear Friends of the Open Door Community,

The letter to the Hebrews admonishes us to welcome the stranger (some did and entertained angels without knowing it), to remember those in prison as though we were in prison with them, to remember those who are being tortured as though we ourselves were being tortured.

These admonitions to the works of mercy are so straightforward and simple that it sometimes confuses us that daily life here seems complex and chaotic. But clearly to love the poor and oppressed in these days brings a level of complexity to life that must be accounted for.

We live in a society where many deeply hate the poor and continually blame the oppressed for their plight. Political rhetoric is almost entirely based on mean-spirited punitive assumptions. And our public policy sinks more and more deeply into a futile pattern of protecting the privilege of the few while we blame and punish increasing numbers of marginalized people. Those who want to help and reach out in love are often seen as stupid, naive or stubborn.

In this context, it is our hope to keep ourselves rooted in the uncompromising Gospel mandates: love the poor; welcome and serve them as you would welcome and serve God. It is our prayer that every shower and change of clothes offered, that every bowl of soup and piece of bread given, that every prison visit made and letter written may be an act of love and striving for the Beloved Community.

Thank you for your support of our life and work on Ponce de Leon. Everything we have to give away and to support our life here comes as a gift. No one who lives in the community earns a salary or brings home an income. We depend on you, our friends.

Please continue to help us. We have asked many times in the past and we will ask again. And may God bring you rich blessings and great love and hope.

With love from all of us in the Open Door Community,

Joe Hall

Greg

Joe

Philly Williams

Gladye

Hannah

Ronald Reece

Theresa Davis

CM Gibson

Tim

Robert Davis

Ed Loring

Tony Sealing

L Wilson

Mr. London

Michael

TOMMY DAVIS

Dick

Cathy Schryver

Charles Williams

IRA

Robert

Lee

Clay

History As Teacher:

Reconstruction Today,

Part 2

by Nibs Stroupe

Editor's note: We continue here with the second of a 10-part series on Reconstruction. Nibs Stroupe, pastor at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, GA, is active in the Civil Rights Movement and author of While We Run This Race: Encountering The Power Of Racism. It will be available from Orbis Press in March, 1995.

The end of the Civil War was a rare moment in North American history, because it provided an opportunity to develop a democratic solution to the devastating problem of "race." The white South was defeated and in disarray. There seemed to be a determination by some Northern white people to offer the freed people of the South the opportunity to be seen as equal partners in democracy. The method was to give black people in the South enough power to force white people to see them as human beings.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed and ratified. It ended slavery as a legal institution in the United States (except in prison). The former states of the Confederacy were to be ruled by military governors until their readmission into the Union. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 divided the Southern states into five military districts. It also sent federal officers into the South to register people to vote. When the registration process was complete, more black people were registered to vote than white people. Constitutional conventions were called in the Southern states to draft new state constitutions, giving rights, including voting rights, to black men. On the eve of these conventions in the fall of 1867, black voters were in the majority in five states -- Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

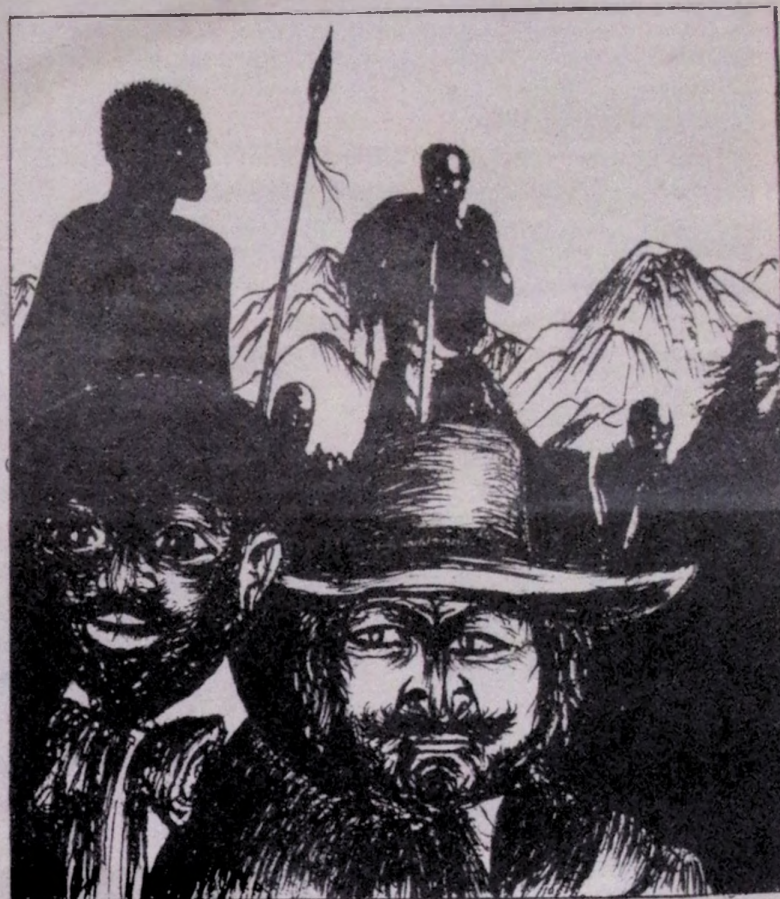
It was in these state conventions that the real struggle for democracy was joined. There was great hope that these conventions would produce a democracy based on equal dignity for all. Despite these hopes, however, the seeds of destruction were sown for this fledgling experiment in democracy. Lerone Bennett puts it this way:

National party leaders, Sumner and Stevens excepted, were prepared to see in the South, middle-class, white-dominated governments on the order, say, of Ohio and Massachusetts; they were not prepared to give their blessings to black-dominated governments with genuine labor interests. Since ultimate power lay in the hands of national party leaders, who could throw the black politicians to planters any time they wanted to, black leaders had to operate within circumscribed limits. They could enact any law they wanted to, as long as the law didn't disturb the business climate. They could elect any officer they pleased, as long as the officer didn't try to do certain things congressional leaders were agreed he shouldn't do. Thus, the black politician as the constitutional conventions opened: He couldn't be revolutionary and remain in power but he couldn't remain in power if he weren't revolutionary. [Lerone Bennett, Black Power USA, 1967, p. 115.]

As we know, these changes were never made. The promise of genuine land reform--of 40 acres and a mule--to those who were dispossessed was never carried through. It was never executed because the whites in the North were not prepared to go that far. The people who had been treated as slaves, who had produced the wealth of the land, were now turned loose in "freedom" without any economic base in a hostile land. The lack of land reform, as well as the continuing racism of whites in the South and in the North, doomed the experiment in democracy to fail.

The state constitutional conventions produced some significant changes. Looking back through history, however, it is clear that the moment was lost. The reforms were not strong enough to stem the tide of racism.

And yet, because Reconstruction has such a negative image now, it is worthwhile to pause and briefly review some of the positive changes that were



LEO MCGUIRE

made. Despite the attempts by whites to prevent it, black people who were formerly treated as slaves did work and save and buy land. Thanks to the Freedman's Bureau and private church efforts, many black people were given an education. Public schools were mandated for the first time in the South, for both blacks and poor whites. Voting was opened up for all men, including black men and poor white men. There were reforms in the debt laws, giving some measure of relief to the poor of all races who were crushed by the plantation owners and merchants. There was also prison reform. The most important change, however, was that black people began to assert their rights as human beings. They were not slaves--they were people. They began to think and act as human beings in public, to demand access to opportunity and power. They no longer had to hide their humanity and display it only in the slave quarters, away from white eyes. They could now be human beings in public. Because whites had come to think of African-Americans as property, as slaves, they were stunned to see black people acting as human beings.

It was this assertion of human dignity by black people that was most threatening to white people. It was threatening not because African-Americans turned the tables on whites and treated them harshly. Indeed, during Reconstruction, the economy and plight of most white people, especially poor whites, improved. The growing sense of humanity among black people was threatening because white people had been trained from birth to see African-Americans as inferior, as animals, as unable to share their human dignity. It was also threatening because the source of cheap labor, the African-Americans, could be lost forever. If the idea of the humanity of African-American people took root in society, then African-Americans would never allow themselves to become slaves again.

Most of all, however, the idea of the humanity of black people was threatening to white people because it challenged the whole concept of "race." The whole system of "race" was created by Europeans to justify the taking of land, materials, and people from societies of darker peoples. The system of race was designed so that Europeans could construe themselves as "white" and thus could be guaranteed to win the "race." The system of race is designed to support the idea that Europeans are suited to rule and to be on top, and thus humanity is divided into the arbitrary and exploitative categories of "race." Racism, the system where one "race" has power and which provides a justification for refusing to share that power, is built on this concept of "race." The most threatening part of Reconstruction, then was that it demonstrated that "black" people had equal dignity and equal humanity. This demonstration of equality and humanity threatened the whole concept of "race." If people of lighter color and darker color had equal status as human beings, if indeed it was true that all people are created equal, then who would win the "race?"

In this sense, the worst fears of whites in power in the South and in the North seemed to be coming true in Reconstruction. The South was defeated in the war, and now those people previously seen as slaves by white people were asserting their humanity and equality. They ran governments. They registered to vote, and they voted. The national hero of the Civil War, Ulysses S. Grant, was elected president in 1868 on the strength of the black vote. Grant won by a majority of 309,000 votes, but with a minority of the white vote. The black vote of almost 500,000 gave Grant his victory. At all levels of government, black officials were elected.

White people were threatened by all this. The possibility for real and positive change was there nonetheless, even in the midst of the anxiety. What would have happened if white people had repudiated "race" rather than repudiating "equality?" What would have happened if white people had begun to see life as a tapestry to be woven together rather than a race to be won? We will never know, for the white people answered their anxiety with repression and oppression. Almost immediately after the end of the Civil War, the whites in power in the South responded to preserve the concept of "race." Most Southern states enacted the "Black Codes" in 1866. The purpose of these black codes was to reinstitute slavery without using the word. Black people who were unemployed could be arrested and sold back into servitude (slavery). Once a black person signed a contract of employment with a white person, they were bound to fulfill it under penalty of imprisonment. This then subjected them to the possibility of being sold back into slavery. The right of black people to own land was severely curtailed. The list goes on and on. [See John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, (University of Chicago Press, 1961) for more details on the Black Codes.]

Whites also used violence. White riots against black people broke out in 1866 in Norfolk, Memphis, and New Orleans. While these white responses enabled the so-called "radical" Republicans in Congress to seize the day by initiating Reconstruction, they also set a pattern of violence and repression that white people would use to reinstitute slavery over the next few decades. In the end, white people answered the possibility and the threat of dismantling the system of "race" as they had answered it before the Civil War. They sought to reestablish "race" and the idea of the inferiority of people of darker color.

This response was national, not just Southern. Reconstruction had sought to change minds and hearts so that power could be shared, but the prevailing patterns of 300 years were difficult to overcome in ten years. W. E. B. DuBois captures this dilemma well in *Black Reconstruction in America*:

Here was a land of poignant beauty, streaked with hate and blood and shame, where God was worshipped wildly, where human beings were bought and sold, and where even in the twentieth century men are burned alive. The situation here in 1865 was fatal, and fatal because of the attitude of men's minds rather than because of material loss and disorganization. The human mind, its will and emotions, congealed to one set pattern, until here were people who knew they knew one thing above all others, just as certainly as they knew that the sun rose and set; and that was, that a Negro would not work without compulsion, and that slavery was his natural condition. If by force and law the Negro was free, his only chance to remain free was transportation immediately to Africa or some outlying district of the world, where he would soon die of starvation or disease. Such colonization was impracticable, and Southern slavery, as it existed before the war, was the best possible system for the Negro. [Atheneum Press, 1935, p. 718]

In this manner, the promise of the experiment in democracy in Reconstruction was crushed out swiftly. White people in the South and in the North were simply not willing to take the steps to insure that the concept of equality triumphed over the concept of race. In the next part, we will look at the process by which "race" came to triumph over "equality" again.

Please see the November issue of *Hospitality* for part 3 in this series on Reconstruction.

The Wonder Among Us Called Charles

by Gladys Rustay

Charles came to the Open Door in February, 1994, towards the end of an extremely cold spell. He freely admitted that the only reason he came was because it was SO cold and he wanted to get warm.

We wondered if Charles would last a week at the Open Door!

Amazingly enough, he's still here. He has shared much of his experience and insights of injustice he encountered on the streets and in work places with us.

Charles is a gift to us. Recently towards the end of a Bible Study on Mark 9:14-29 about Jesus healing a boy with an evil spirit, Charles said, "Jesus really made a mistake with those jokers. He needed to get rid of those twelve and get himself some better ones!"

We're glad Jesus didn't get rid of the "jokers" because we find ourselves making as many mistakes, if not more, than his early disciples. We give thanks for a God who forgives and offers another chance, and who gives us Charles.

Gladys Rustay is a partner at the Open Door Community.



GLADYS RUSTAY

Charles Williams looking at a picture of himself at our Benefit Concert.

I Hear Hope Banging On My Back Door, Part VII

The American Nightmare: Fear and Hate

by Ed Loring

When Homelessness is hell
When Homelessness and poverty are public policy
When Housing does not precede life
When liberty is a cracked bell
And equality is propaganda
then
Fear is planted
Hate is harvested
The American Dream becomes
The American Nightmare.

So let us listen to the classic question sung from the haunts of Harlem:

Harlem

by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
or fester like a sore--
and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
or crust and sugar over--
like syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

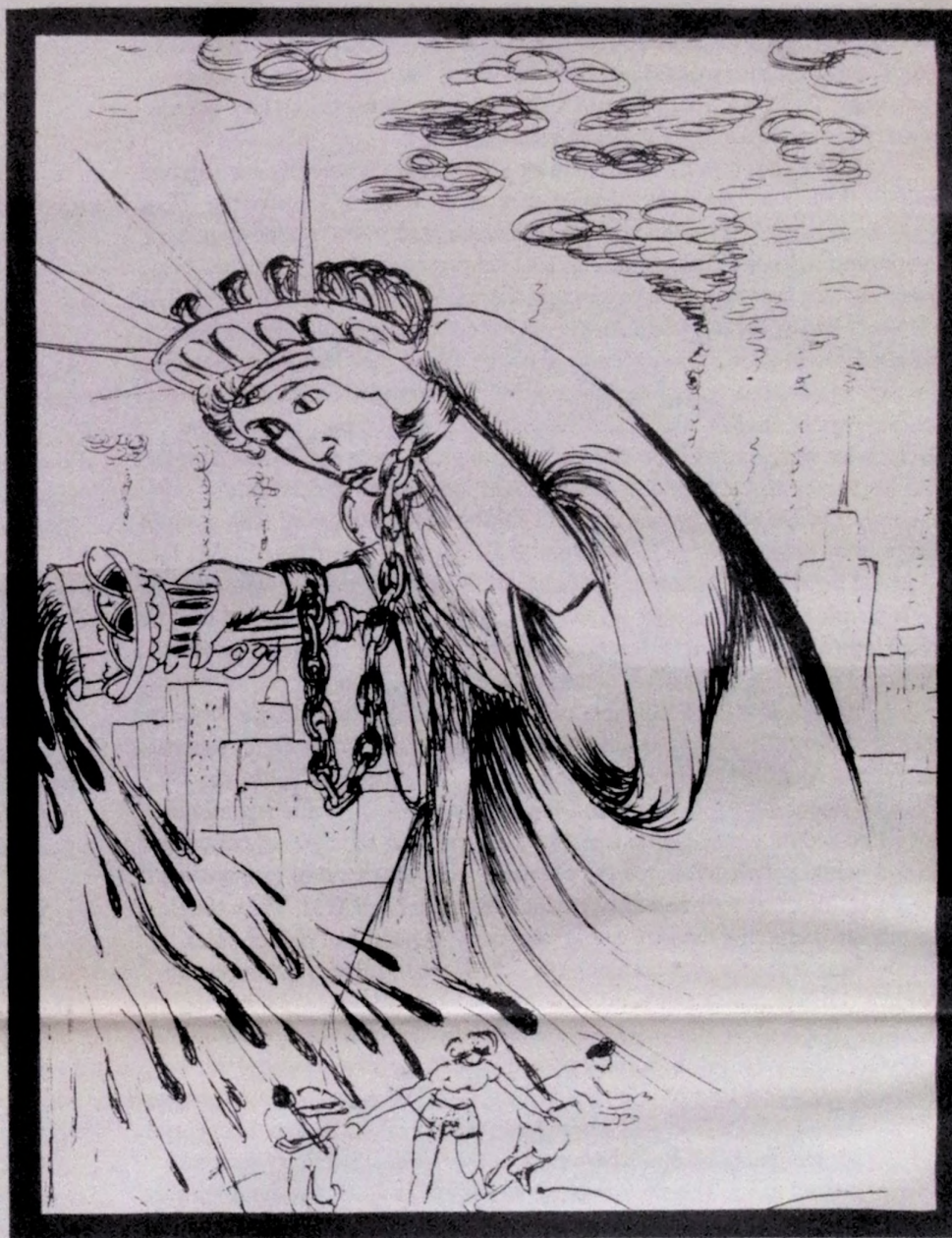
or does it explode?

And from the rancor of racism and the pain of prison Malcolm X can teach us from the point of view of the labor pool and shelter floor:

"What is looked upon as an American dream for white people has long been an American Nightmare for black people." (1962)

A year later speaking to his sisters and brothers Malcom X said:

Unemployment and poverty have forced many of our people into this life of crime; but... the real criminal is in City Hall downtown. The real criminal is in the State House in Albany. The real criminal is in the White House in Washington, D.C. The real criminal is the white man who poses as a liberal--the political hypocrite. And it is these legal crooks, posing as our friends, [who are] forcing us into a life of crime and then using us to spread the white man's evil vices among our own people. Our people are scientifically maneuvered by the white man into a life of poverty. You are not poor accidentally. He maneuvers you into poverty. You are not a drug addict accidentally. Why, the white man maneuvers you into drug addiction. You are not a prostitute accidentally. You have been maneuvered into prostitution by the American white man. There is nothing about your condition here in America that is an accident.



LEO MCGUIRE

Reaching backwards 100 years we can hear the cry and call of our sisters and brothers who are American Indians. Like Yahweh and Noah their dreams of freedom and a spacious land of welcome and community was spoiled by greed and lust. Not long before the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 the Paiute Messiah, Wovoka spoke:

All Indians must dance, everywhere, keep on dancing. Pretty soon in next spring Great Spirit come. He bring back all game of every kind. The game be thick everywhere. All dead Indians come back and live again. They all be strong just like young men, be young again. Old blind Indian see again and get young and have fine time. When Great Spirit comes this way, then all the Indians go to mountains, high up away from whites. Whites can't hurt Indians then. Then while Indians way up high, big flood comes like water and all white people die, get drowned. After that, water go way and then nobody but Indians everywhere and game all kinds thick. Then medicine man tell Indians to send word to all Indians to keep up dancing and the good time will come. Indians who don't dance, who don't believe in this word, will grow little, just about a foot high, and stay that way. Some of them will be turned into wood and be burned in fire.

II

The particularity of the American Nightmare for most of us is fear and hate, rooted in the single superiority of white people -- technological superiority. This white superiority, and its concomitant fear and hate is most easily symbolized by dropping the H-bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki August 6th and 9th, 1945 but just as profoundly reckoned by the four Hotchkiss guns used against disarmed American Indian children, women and men 55 years earlier. Until now, Europeans and European Americans have had the guns on their side, although we must admit that all the fire power in the world did not win in Vietnam.

So those dreamers in power whose nightmare remains denied have created ugly terms and nasty visions of God's best friends. Often when we "work the door" for our soup kitchen we hear these epithets screamed through car windows at us by people angry because the last traffic light was red.

Let us listen to ourselves as we name those for whom Jesus came and died:

Bum
Hobo
Drifter
Indigent
Vagrant
Lazy
Son of a bitch
Ni--er
Wino
Migrant
Jail bird
Loiterer
Street person
Homeless
People of the air
Derelict
Drunk
Loafer
Unfortunate

Pig
Dog
Vagabond
Tramp
Whore
Welfare cheat
Shiftless
Trash
Beggar
Panhandler
Criminal
Poor
Convict
Underclass
Losers
Mentally ill
Deinstitutionalized
Handicapped
No goods
Those people

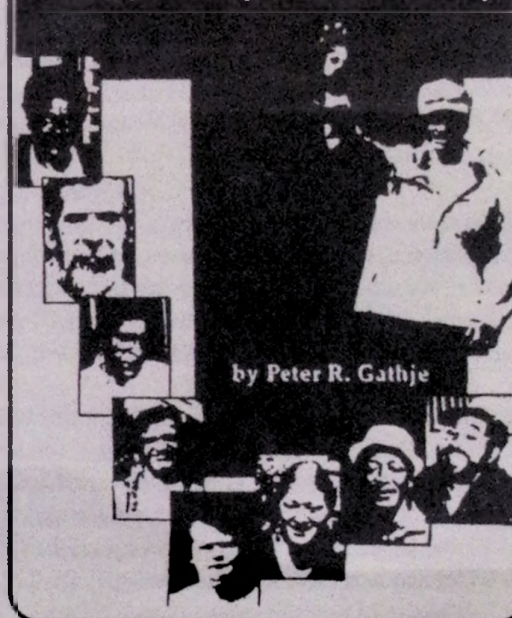
III

A few weeks ago I, with my son Neely, stood on the hill at Wounded Knee where the four Hotchkiss guns blew to bits the almost frozen Sioux. I cried. Suddenly a terrible hailstorm hit us like pellets from a shotgun. We dashed to our car in amazement. We don't have hail like that in the South!! About twenty minutes later a bright beautiful and fully arched rainbow suddenly appeared. I remembered the mass grave at the hill top and I thought of Butler Street Breakfast and all the people who sleep in our back yard. And then I remembered Noah and God and how with all the hate and misery and suffering we put on each other, even in the midst of the nightmare, there are promises and hope for justice and peace, for freedom and reconciliation, for housing and good work. But why? Why is there such violence and Hate among so many white and well-to-do people? Among people of faith? Inside you and me?

Ed Loring is a partner at the Open Door Community.

Christ Comes in The Stranger's Guise

A History of the Open Door Community



Copies of the Open Door Community's history, Christ Comes in the Stranger's Guise, by Peter Gathje, are still available. A donation will help us to feed the hungry and visit the prisoner. To request a copy, please contact Phillip Williams at the Open Door Community, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.

Welcome Jeannie Lukkar!



GLADYS RUSTAY

Jeannie Lukkar joins us as volunteer co-ordinator and administrative assistant. You may be hearing from her when she calls you to recruit volunteers for our ministries.

A Day on the Street

by Tom Gildemeister

Editor's note: We welcome our good friend, Tom Gildemeister, to our pages. Tom is a recent honor graduate of the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. A supporter of our Hardwick Prison Trip, we are joyful to share life and ministry with Tom.

Harsh, fluorescent light pours out of the labor pool door and into the back-alley, predawn darkness. The ammonia smell of days-old sweat hangs in the air. Handwritten placards mounted on the walls announce a price increase for check cashing and warn that no i.d. means no job. Twenty people, mostly African-American men, sit and wait. But the place is as quiet as an empty church.

An old man's name is called out and he strains to stand. I can feel his exhaustion across the room. When he shuffles by, I can see that he is not old--no older than me, maybe 40 or 45. Filthy clothes and a shopping bag bundle of tattered possessions tell one part of his story. He mumbles an obscenity when he learns the obscenity of his day's labor, and then drags himself into the darkness to be loaded into the back of a small pickup. The labor pool is one room in the hell-house of homelessness.

On the surface, the labor pools seem innocuous, even a positive good. They serve as a resource for businesses with short-term, labor intensive projects, and they provide jobs for unskilled or unemployed folk in need of a day's wages.

But these clearing houses have a dark side, an evil that consumes the good. Many companies utilize the labor pools each day and dodge the cost of insurance for regular employees. The work itself is the kind of prison-gang misery that most free people would refuse. The time that lapses between a worker's arrival at the labor pool and receipt of an eight hour, low wage paycheck can be 15 hours. And if they don't wait into the night, they don't get paid at all. Payment for transportation to and from the job-site, along with the labor pool's fee, is deducted--often leaving a worker with less than two-thirds of the wage paid by the employer.

Why do human beings submit to these conditions? They have no choice. Most are homeless. All are destitute: commodities to be used up and cast off in the world's richest nation.

MARTA deposits us onto Techwood. The smell of the honeysuckle that adorns chain-link fences mingles with the stench of urine and human excrement. With no public toilets, alleyways and dumpsters must serve as latrines for Atlanta's homeless.

Discarded butane lighters and empty bottles of cheap wine litter the vacant lots and serve as a grim testimony to the crack cocaine and alcohol that numb the pain of poverty. Cadillacs and Lincoln Continentals circle the block. The drivers stop and ask us if we are looking for work. I later learn that they are trying to circumvent the few laws that regulate the slave-block auction atmosphere of the labor pools.

Three men sleep next to me on the concrete floor of a second labor pool. The security guard gently nudges their feet and whispers that sleeping is not permitted. He seems to know. Maybe he has lived on the street too. A glimmer of love fills his eyes and he walks away, as the three men groan and return to their moment of peace.

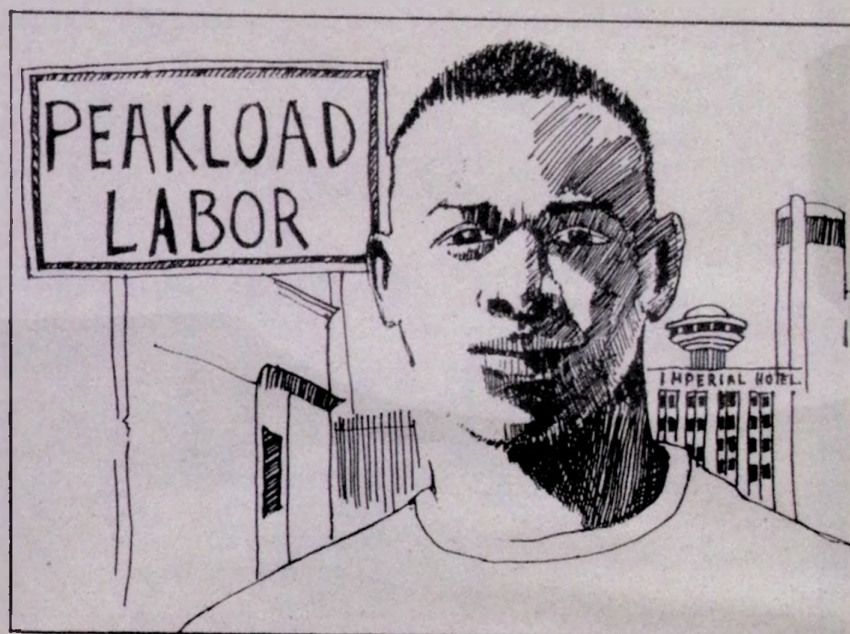
Our journey pushes into downtown. The rising sun rests on the horizon, huge and orange through the early morning smog, and dances on the mirrored windows of the skyline. Like all the side streets, Peachtree is curiously devoid of early-morning pedestrian traffic. Business men and women hustle into the gleaming mausoleums. And these buildings, with their towers straining into the heavens, are mausoleums--tombs for the people who are dead to the everyday agony on the streets. Their ears listen, but do not hear. Their eyes are open, but do not see. Their hearts know, but do not feel. And the Holy Spirit hovers above, grieving the incomprehensible babble.

We are last in line for breakfast at the Butler Street CME Church. Most of the 200 homeless people eat in silence. They have made the choice this day to eat and not offer their bodies to the labor pools. One of the servers lectures me on the benefits of nutrition when I decline the offer of a vitamin C

tablet. Another asks for a cigarette and thanks me three times. Both folks remind me of me--struggling to be helpful and polite, but sounding more like a parent than a friend.

The faces in the line that forms at Saint Luke's two hours later are familiar. Like us, many have wandered north from Butler Street to their next meal. People on the street kill time, and time on the street kills people. I speak or nod to those I recognize. Most respond with smiles and greetings, others with distant gazes, still others with angry scowls.

I had six hours of comfort the night before, belly full of good food, lulled to sleep by the soft breathing of my wife. I did not huddle under a cardboard and rag shelter. My rest was not troubled by nightmares, as the violent rousting or robbery of yesterday or last week plays over and over again in my mind. I was not awakened by a demanding, growling stomach. But I am exhausted. It's ten o'clock in the morning.



BRUCE BISHOP

We walk back into downtown after the late morning lunch and settle into Woodruff Park. A radio station offers free soft drinks. The music from their van accompanies the trees and shrubs that sway and whine in the cool gusts.

The participants in the noonday gathering are an odd lot. Successful, well-groomed men and women have come to eat yogurt and lavish in the beauty of the day. The homeless come to rest and kill time. They share this downtown oasis, but they do not mingle. The poor stakeout the south end of the park. The rich keep their distance. Only the poor will look into my eyes. The others turn away in disgust or look right through me. I am one of "them." I am invisible.

One of our group lies back in the grass to rest. A few moments pass and a clean-cut young man rushes up on roller blades. In his spandex shorts and knit shirt, he reminds me of a model for a health club commercial. I have watched him pick up trash and smile at the people. But now, his smile grows taut, and he kicks the shoe of my friend. I think of the love in the eyes of the labor pool security guard. This health club attendant has none. He tries to sound polite, but an insistent voice tells us that walking on the grass is not allowed--and resting on Woodruff Park's lawn is a dire offense.

Ali is greeted with an embrace by one of our group. He cannot contain his excitement, but he is anxious at the same time. The melody of his voice reveals that his birthplace is somewhere in West Africa, the continent to which almost all homeless people can trace their roots. He has lived for months on the streets, but he has finally found a job--a busboy at a hotel in Marietta. With his first paycheck two weeks away, he is worried that without a home, this precious opportunity will be lost because of the lack of rest and a daily shower. The hell-house of homelessness has many rooms.

We walk south on Peachtree. Crossing Alabama Avenue, we enter a culture that is utterly foreign to the antiseptic money machine of the downtown financial district. Rap music spills onto the sidewalk. Friends shout greetings over the cacophony of the traffic. Vendors hawk scented body oil, sneakers, and other goods from jerry-rigged kiosks. People look deeply into a stranger's eyes and smile.

A small crowd gathers with amused tolerance to hear a street preacher spew out a message of judgement and hate. He labels gay men "sissies," damns women and men whose hair is too short or too long, and declares all

white people to be the beast of Armageddon. One of the few white men growls menacingly, and the crowd whoops and laughs.

I am jolted out of a mesmerized gaze by a firm squeeze on the arm. An African-American woman continues to hold me tightly and points to the preacher with her free hand. Her words undergird the tenderness of her smile: "Don't listen to that crazy fool ... no way he's from Jesus." She embraces me with her eyes for another moment, and without another word, disappears into the crowd. A person better be careful on the street. The Christ might just grab your arm and touch your soul.

We continue south to the jail and municipal courts, two places that every homeless man and woman will visit. The court is a well-oiled, efficient machine. A case is announced, the bailiff fetches the defendant from the holding cell, the plea is made, and explanation is offered, a witness or arresting officer is called, and the judgment and sentencing follow--all in five minutes.

Subtleties abound amid the workaday atmosphere of dispatched "justice." Comic relief, usually provoked by the judge or court clerk, is always at the expense of the accused. The judge pronounces the criminal charge of every dark-skinned defendant for all in the court to hear. Drunk and disorderly, urinating in public, prostitution, possession of illegal substances, loitering in a parking lot--we hear it all. White-skinned defendants? Not once do we hear a charge.

My body feels heavy and limp as we walk toward the MARTA station. I was not aware of the emotion that had been growing in my gut. Tears fill my eyes and I cannot utter a word as we sit cross-legged on the concrete and reflect on the day.

The source of my weariness is not twelve hours and countless miles of walking. No, I'm beaten down by the horror of the sights and sounds, the smells and textures. And I shudder, knowing that we have visited only a few of the rooms in the hell-house of homelessness.

How many homeless people are there in metro Atlanta?

In 1993, there were 22,245 individuals who requested shelter from the Task Force. This number is an accurate, unduplicated count of every individual who was in need of shelter and who called the Task Force in 1993. However, it does underrepresent the actual number of homeless people in metro Atlanta because not every homeless person calls the Task Force for assistance and the Task Force's ability to receive calls is limited by the capacity of its telephone system.

(Reprinted from "Homelessness in Metropolitan Atlanta," a comprehensive report by the Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless.)

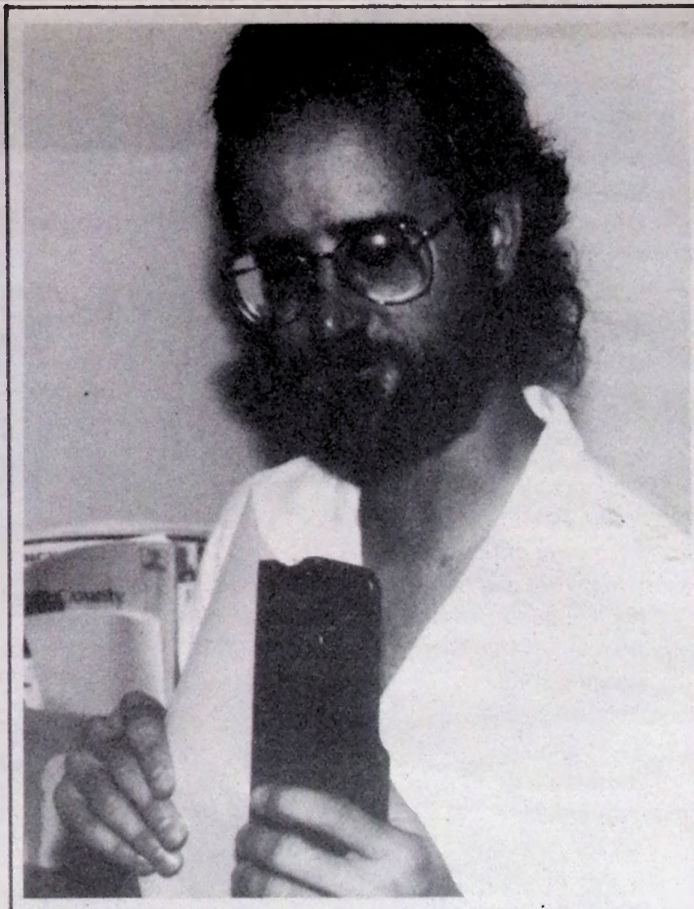


The Open Door Community Needs Resident Volunteers!

Spend 6 to 12 months as a Resident Volunteer

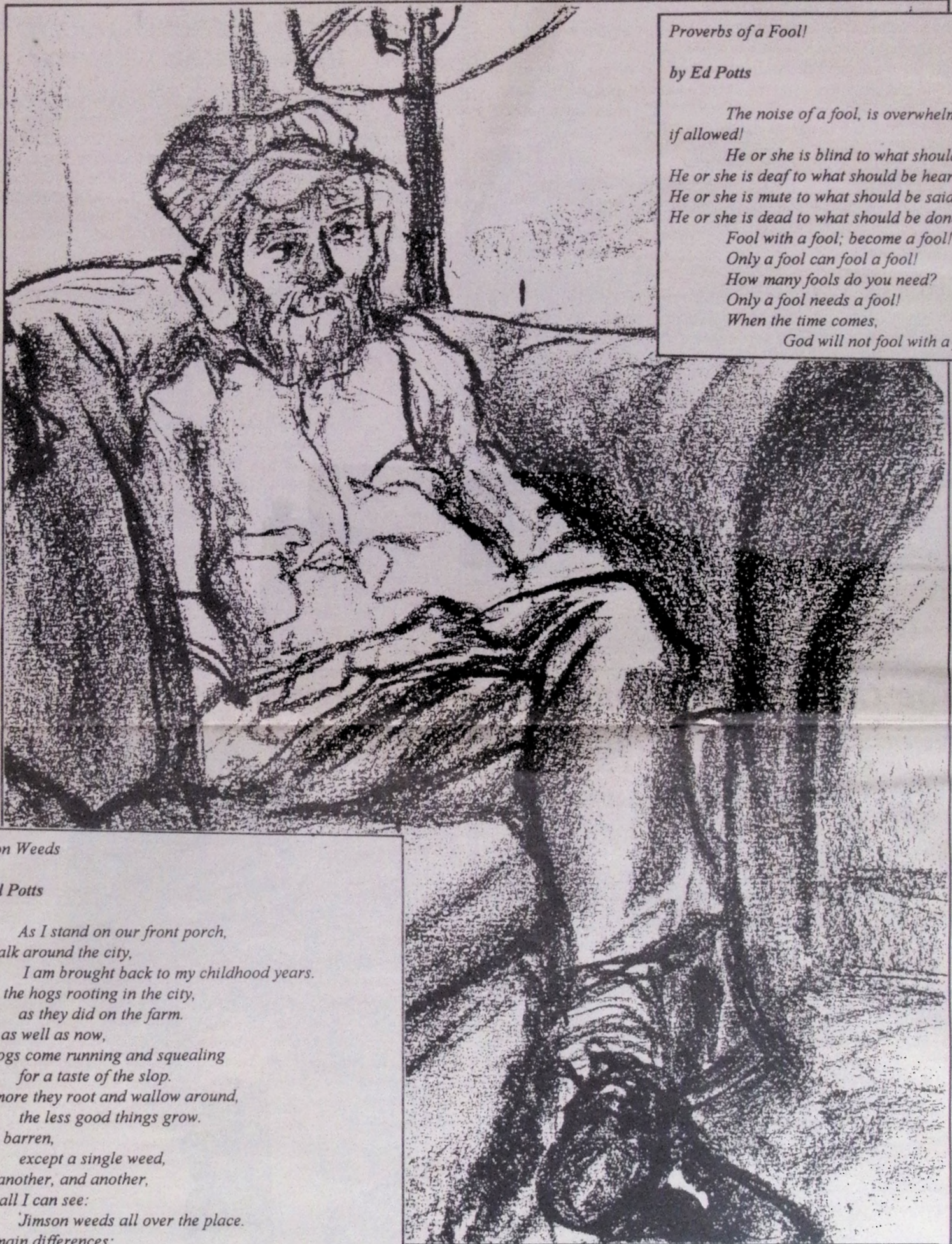
Michael Galovic, pictured at right, has joined us for a year's volunteer term. Come meet him and all the other members of the Open Door Community. Live in a residential Christian community. Serve Jesus Christ and the hungry, the homeless and prisoners. Bible study and theological reflections from the Base. Street actions and peaceful demonstrations. Regular retreats and meditation time at Dayspring Farm.

Contact: Ed Loring
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30306-4212
404/874-9652; 874-7964 (FAX)



Michael Galovic is a helpful addition to the Open Door family.

GLADYS RUSTAY



Proverbs of a Fool!

by Ed Potts

*The noise of a fool, is overwhelming,
if allowed!*

He or she is blind to what should be seen.

He or she is deaf to what should be heard.

He or she is mute to what should be said.

He or she is dead to what should be done.

Fool with a fool; become a fool!

Only a fool can fool a fool!

How many fools do you need?

Only a fool needs a fool!

When the time comes,

God will not fool with a fool!

Jimson Weeds

by Ed Potts

*As I stand on our front porch,
or walk around the city,*

I am brought back to my childhood years.

*I see the hogs rooting in the city,
as they did on the farm.*

*Then as well as now,
the hogs come running and squealing
for a taste of the slop.*

*The more they root and wallow around,
the less good things grow.*

*All is barren,
except a single weed,
then another, and another,
until all I can see:*

Jimson weeds all over the place.

The main differences:

on the farm they bloom under God's sun.

In the city they bloom in darkness.

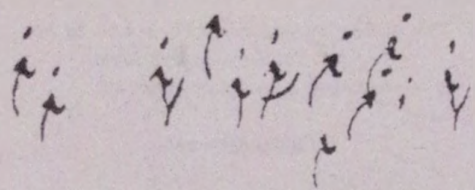
On the farm they can be cut down or pulled up.

In the city God will destroy!

*Jimson weed: a poisonous plant of the nightshade family that
has a white or purple trumpet-shaped flower and a prickly fruit.*

Ed Potts is a partner at the Open Door Community.

Ed Potts drawn by Virginia Tyler.



JOURNEY OF HOPE

*From Violence To Healing
Murder Victims Families For Reconciliation*

Please Join Us For These Events In Atlanta:

Sunday, October 2: Justice Journey Through Atlanta

3:00pm at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Tomb (Auburn Ave.)
Martin Luther King III

3:30pm at Southern Christian Leadership Conference Offices (Auburn Ave.)
Joseph Lowery, President of SCLC

4:15pm at the State Capitol
Members of Murder Victims Families For Reconciliation

4:45pm at Trinity United Methodist Church (265 Washington St., SW)
Tree-Planting by MVFR members

5:30pm at Antioch Baptist Church North (540 Kennedy St., NW)
Dinner with Sister Heien Prejean (Author of *Deadman Walking*) and Representative John Lewis

Tuesday, October 4: Rally at the State Capitol

11:00am Press Conference
Sr. Helen Prejean, Ed Loring, Sam Shepherd and MVFR members

Sunday, October 16: Closing Celebration

3:00pm at Central Presbyterian Church (across from the State Capitol)
Music by Elise Witt, Joyce Brookshire, and

Guy and Candie Caravan

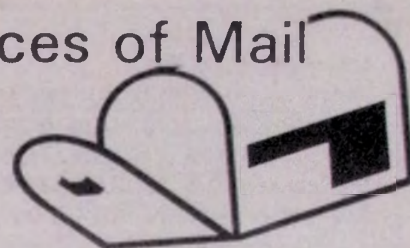
Words of Encouragement from Murphy Davis,

Steve Bright, and MVFR members

5:30pm Potluck Dinner

For more information contact Elizabeth Dede at 404/874-9652 or 876-6977.

Grace and Peaces of Mail



Dear Murphy and Ed,

I want to thank you for your input regarding the appropriateness of Fulton County providing grave markers for indigent persons being buried under our care.

Although I met with much bureaucratic resistance your input made me see the necessity for this. I am excited to let you know that we were able to amend the policy to include a provision to provide headstones for indigent burials. Surprisingly, it was passed by a vote of seven to zero.

Sincerely,

John O'Callaghan,
Commissioner
Board of Commissioners of
Fulton County

Editor's note: John is a Fulton County Commissioner and an elder at Covenant Presbyterian Church. He volunteers with a group from Covenant to cook supper once a month at the Open Door.

"Indigent burials" as provided by the county are a little-noticed institution. We are grateful that John's caring inquiries led to a decision to provide more dignity for the graves of the poor who have died among us.



Dear Brothers and Sisters at the Open Door Community,

This letter is to update you on the developments in the German "Friends of the Catholic Worker" group. For an extended time we have been meeting contemplating the founding of a small CW community in Germany. Now there is going to be a humble beginning.

Three of us are going to move together in October to a small apartment in Hamburg. We are looking for a bigger house (or several apartments in a neighborhood). To start with, we will both walk the streets with our homeless in Hamburg and accompany refugees to the asylum authorities to provide them with some protection from arbitrary bureaucrats. We hope to grow and be some day able to work both with the local poor and the extensively marginalized refugee population in Germany.

Please pray for us in the spirit of brother and sisterhood, for the starting of our community is humble and at its very beginning. people with interest in community life, service to the poor and a prophetic witness to the political powers. Please post or keep this letter to make it available to anyone potentially interested.

Thank you for your support in prayer and communication.

Shalom,

Jens Schild
Hamburg, Germany

Celebrate Christkwanza in Advent

We would be happy to send you a packet containing the November 1993 Hospitality with an article by Dr. Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta and Elizabeth Dede's adaptation of the Christkwanza ritual into the Sundays of Advent, and a sample order of worship. Please send the request with your name and address to: Murphy Davis, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.



WE ARE OPEN. . .

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00am until noon, from 2:00 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 2:00.). 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 9:10, 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, 2:00pm-5pm

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

WEEKEND RETREATS—Four times each year (for our household and volunteers/supporters), November 25-27

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 Needs

JEANS
T-Shirts
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
Vaseline
Disposable Razors
Shampoo
Socks
Washcloths
Sandwiches
Throw Rugs
Twin Mattresses
Shrubs for Backyard Plantings
Infant Car Seats

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 or after 1:30, it would be helpful. THANK YOU!

Open Door Community Worship

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

Please join us!

- | | |
|------------|---|
| October 2 | Journey of Hope
5:30pm, Antioch Baptist Church North
No worship at 910
(see announcement, page 11) |
| October 9 | Worship at 910 |
| October 16 | Journey of Hope
3:00pm, Central Presbyterian Church
No worship at 910 |
| October 23 | Worship at 910
Nelia Kimbrough, preaching |
| October 30 | Elise Witt and Friends
Eucharist 5:00pm
Music Night 5:30pm |



If you have found Hospitality helpful and would like to know more about the Open Door Community, please fill out, clip and send this coupon to **The Open Door Community • 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE • Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.**

☐ Please ADD to the Hospitality mailing list.

☐ Please accept my tax deductible donation to the Open Door Community.

☐ I'm interested in volunteering. Please give me more information.

☐ I would like to explore a six to twelve-month commitment as a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door. Please send more information.

Name

Address

City , State Zip +

Phone

Moving?

Bulk rate mail is not forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service. Send Hospitality, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA, 30306-4212, your new mailing address as soon as you know it. Please enclose the mailing label from your most recent issue. *Thank you!*