

# HOSPITALITY

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## Homelessness is... Hell

Homelessness is absurd. Homelessness is unnecessary. Homelessness is hell. Homelessness is Ralph, Jay, Brenda, 5 year old Jimmy, 65 year old "pop", black Willie, brown Juan, white Jane. Ah, homelessness is you and homelessness is me even as we bite the bullet to pay for home repairs on the beach cottage. Homelessness is dereliction, frostbitten toes, crooked and lost fingers, burning blearily eyes with 20-200 vision and a pair of Eckerd reading glasses to mask the shame and blindness. Homelessness is James become Helen in an effort to squeak out an identity where one has no place and where one has nothing to do. What do you do when you have nothing to do? Something? Then you know

by Ed Loring

little of the spiritual and political plight of the 8,753 boys and girls, women and men who roam downtown Atlanta to the chagrin of Central Atlanta Progress and the horror of the Chamber of Commerce and the dread of the banker who just sold one more risk-free bond for the development of Underground Atlanta, where doctors and lawyers and business people will soon be able "to do anything they want" and never have to see, touch, hear, smell, or taste the slowly dying, hidden lives and bodies of the homeless. What we have learned in Modern America is that to have the poor available and ready is

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a social good for the well-to-do. That is when we want them as a source for blood plasma for medical research or the manufacture of medicines, and as bodies for teaching hospitals, and as an ever-ready large pool of cheap labor. However, to have them present in our lives as anything other than objects for our benefit is bad for business and a blight upon our pleasure. Therefore, we will not feed the hungry in a land that produces so much food that it pays farmers not to farm; nor will we build houses for the homeless in a nation that has more than enough construction supplies to house everyone in our land.

Homelessness is Henry. He grew up in North Carolina and twenty years ago came to Atlanta in search of work and his shot at the American Dream. Black, strong, easy going Henry now finds himself a resident of nowhere while a member of the human community that names itself Atlanta. Henry lost job after job as all unskilled workers in our economy do. Henry drinks alcohol to ease his pain and to grasp once more at his dream in the same way that others do at the Falcons football game or at the Hilton's Sunday Brunch.

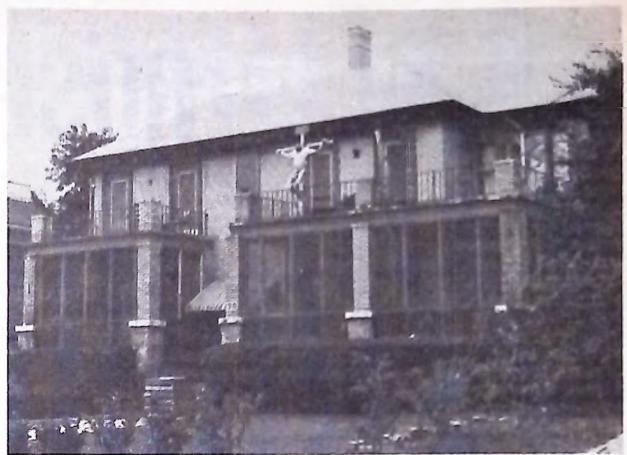
Henry sleeps under a bridge near the Municipal Market just off I 75/85. Sleep comes only in bits and pieces in such a spot, so he is exhausted when he arises at 5:00 am and stumbles toward the local private enterprise labor pool.

"Shall I get work today? Do I want work today?" These questions haunt not only Henry but the 2000 other men (and some 50 women) who sit in the various downtown labor pools each morning. If a job is offered, most folk must make a choice: to eat or not to eat. To go out on a job means the worker will miss the opportunity for the two meals at the soup kitchens. Stomachs, already groaning from digestive juices sloshing against empty stomach walls, say: "go for the soup kitchen." A labor pool job, that last glimmer of hope, has its attraction - "maybe today the break will come." Torn between another day of hunger and a \$25.00 paycheck, Henry, today, chooses food. So he will not work. 6:00 am, sitting in a metal chair not far from the greasy hand-written sign "No Sleeping Allowed", Henry falls to sleep.

At 7:30 am Henry pulls his aching body out of the chair and heads to Butler St. C.M.E. Church for the "grits line." There he meets 200 others who stand in line until the door is opened. By 8:15 he has had a cup of coffee, a bowl of grits, a boiled egg and a 250 mil vitamin C tablet. Just as he is ready to hit the streets his bowels yell out. Where can he go? The church has locked its doors, not wanting the poor and the dirty to use their facilities. He clunks upstairs and quickly hides himself behind the dumpster. Atlanta refuses to provide public toilets. One theory offered by an intelligent leader is that if we provide public toilets, the homeless from all over North America will come to Atlanta! Yet, we spend \$50,000 each year processing the average of four arrests per day for public urination. Henry hopes with his pants below his knees and feces dropping from his bottom that no one will see him. When finished a flicker of desire passes through the broken black man's heart - "oh, if only I had a few sheets of toilet paper, and maybe... just a piece of soap and a little water." But he does not. Now he stinks. Now, as daylight has filled the city streets, Henry is an enemy of the professional, a discarded person, a punk, wino and bum in Lewis Grizzard's terms. He can't even keep himself clean!

Henry wanders toward Grady Hospital. If the guard is nice or sleepy he can wash off. If the guard is absent he can sit in the waiting room until discovered. There he can get some of that wet and cold out of his torn socks. He sits and looks at this filthy feet. "Damn, how I wish my left shoe had a sole," he thinks silently to himself for there is no one with whom to share this most human wish.

When one is poor and carries the terrible burden of poverty - that is having nothing to do but to wait - time moves so slowly. The single most important distinction between the well-to-do and the poor is this: the rich have too little time and too much to do while the homeless poor have too much time and nothing to do. In contemporary culture this distinction leads in many instances to the same spiritual states: despair, alcoholism, stress, violence, sexual abuse, and an ironic dimension of hatred - whereby the rich hate and fear the poor because they have too little to do and the poor hate and envy the rich because they have something to do.



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Circulation - Dietrich Gerstner and a multitude of  
earthly hosts and guests.



Rita Corbin

If we are serious about acting as co-creators with God to fashion a more just world, then we must eliminate the evil of alienated labor. If we are serious about reflecting on work in a theological way, then we have to treat work as part of our being created in the image of God. And if we are earnest about this endeavor, then we have to de-ideologize ourselves from one of the most prevailing ideologies of our time, which is that of paid work.

-Dorothee Soelle

Henry, now, with nothing to do except shuffle his way uptown, heads for St. Luke's Soup Kitchen. Walking hurts; hunger hurts. He now longs to travel the mile so he can stand and wait for the soup and sandwich. Henry joins 700 men and women, boys and girls who climb the fifty stairs to the dining hall. Music plays in the background, crazy people mumble to themselves about love and lost children, young men search in a macho violent-prone society for a way to test and prove their manhood with no tender fathers there to help. Henry eats his soup.

It's 11:00 am. Henry's day that really never began is almost over. He now decides to go for the big \$8.00 job which the Medical Board allows twice a week. With \$8.00 he can get cigarettes, a half pint and a chicken supper. So, Henry, reduced to a man who can only muster the energy and hope for survival, heads off to the blood bank.

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## HOMELESSNESS CONT. FROM PAGE 2

After a two hour wait his name is called. Slowly he arises from the floor where he has watched a Perry Mason rerun interspersed by advertisements which promise a good life if you will only buy their useless product. Henry walks to the hospital bed and lies down. Finally, for the first time in five days he is comfortable. A nurse stands beside him and applies the needle. His blood begins to drip out of his body. Tired and without recognition that he is bleeding to feed forces way beyond his control and perhaps the control of anyone in this society, Henry sleeps. Sleep at the blood bank is unlike sleep anywhere else for the homeless. Here, bleeding, he is safe. The temperature is warm, and the noise of the T.V. and the din of voices of those who wait to sell their blood after Henry are muted by the closed door. Yes, the most comfortable and the safest place for a homeless person in all of Atlanta is on the blood bank bed. It's a pity that one can only be there four hours per week.

Henry's day is over. His life, according to many who understand human existence as rooted in a structure of meaning and purposefulness, has been over for years. Homelessness is death. Homelessness is absurd. Homelessness is unnecessary. Homelessness is Hell. Homelessness is Henry. Ah, homelessness is you and me.

Previously published in *Atlanta Medical*, 1987 and *Sojourners* magazine (under the title "Resident of Nowhere"), 1987.

## The Forces Against Them

February 18, 1987

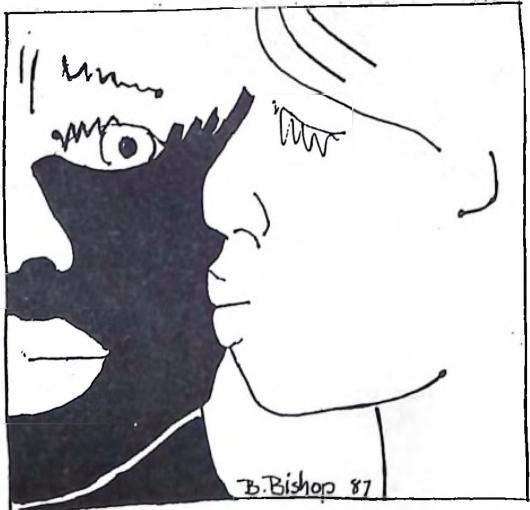
Dear Ed,

I just read your article, "Resident of Nowhere," in the most recent *Sojourners*—it is a great article. Thanks for writing it.

After reading it, I wanted to share with you one fact that relates to something you said in the article. You may already know this. I offer it only in the spirit of our sharing information from our work together with the homeless so we all will know what forces are set against them.

In your article you said: "Yes, the safest and most comfortable place for a homeless person in all of Atlanta is on the blood bank bed."

Last Friday, I finished a three-day jury trial of a homeless, 19-year-old black man on an armed robbery charge. He was found guilty and given a sentence of five years to serve (he will do all of that in jail), and five years thereafter on probation.



"The traitor had given the crowd a signal:  
'The man I kiss is the one you want. Arrest  
him and take him away under guard.' Mk 14:44

What came out in my pretrial investigation of the case was that Kennie (my client) was at the blood bank on Boulevard last October 2. Once he got back to give blood, he was made to wait a good while and finally he was told something about there being something wrong with his blood; they had to run some extra tests, or something. He finally got through, got his money, and walked out of the blood bank. No sooner was he out the door, than a car pulled up, a white guy with shades on jumped out and put the drop (with a gun) on him—told him to "Freeze—Police" and then other cars pulled up—five to eight FBI officers all with guns out descended on him, took him to the ground and then turned him over to two waiting Dekalb County police detectives, who had an armed robbery warrant for him.

What had happened while Kennie was giving blood was this. The blood bank was feeding (i.e. giving) each blood bank donor's name to the FBI, who was looking for a particular individual. The FBI was running the names through their computer, apparently, to see if any warrants were outstanding on each person. On Kennie's name, the computer showed the Dekalb County warrant—the FBI notified Dekalb County—the blood bank kept Kennie waiting until the FBI and Dekalb detectives were ready outside—then they let Kennie walk outside.

The blood banks, thus, may not be so safe after all.

Peace,

John

John Pickens is a friend and former member of the Open Door. As an Atlanta attorney, much of his time is spent doing legal work on behalf of the homeless poor in this city.

## Made in God's Image

by Mark Harper

Some months ago, a notice was posted on the bulletin board of a labor pool in downtown Atlanta with the enticing message that "permanent jobs" at \$8 to \$10 an hour were available for the asking. William B., a 36-year-old homeless man with dark brown skin, construction skills, and the weary countenance of one who has tried to build a better life through the labor pool system, asked. Between 20 and 25 jobs, he was told, were open for folk willing to remove hazardous asbestos insulation from a number of buildings in the Atlanta area. While the health risk was high—exposure to asbestos can cause cancer—the possibility of receiving hourly wages more than double that of normal labor pool pay made the risk seem like one worth taking. And, after a week of not being sent out on any job, William shrugged, "Why not?"

During the next two days, William B. and 18 other men gathered in the labor pool waiting room, watched films about asbestos removal, and learned of the potentially serious health problems asbestos poses to those who work with it. A representative from something referred to as "the asbestos commission" promised that a certified asbestos worker card would be issued to each person who completed the training program and passed a physical exam paid for by "the commission." The card holder would then be qualified to find asbestos removal work outside the labor pool system. Starting pay for the jobs immediately available through the labor pool would be a little better than \$4/hour for the first 60 days, the representative continued, but \$8 to \$10/hour was a real possibility for those who "worked hard." Work was already underway at Northlake Mall, and word on the street was that contractors involved with the Underground Atlanta development project would be hiring soon.

But while the possibility of steady work at a living wage no doubt lightened the atmosphere of a typically dark labor pool, certain gaps in the representative's presentation bothered William. There was, for instance, no mention of a health insurance plan, despite the clearly hazardous nature of the work. As William plainly put it, "I don't want to be finding out 10 or 15 years down the road that I got lung cancer or something and have nothing to live on. I mean, I don't have nothing to live on now."

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As well, there was little in the language of the man from the asbestos commission to confirm the poster's alluring promise of "permanent jobs." Increasingly, William grew suspicious that this job, like so many others, would be a dead end street, ending quickly. "There was no guarantee for anything. This guy who was showing the films held out this big money chance in front of us and encouraged us to go for it. But there was no guarantee that after 60 days of work at around \$4/hour that we would be getting that big money, that \$10/hour. And in the meantime we'd be getting exposed to the asbestos.

"I started to get the feeling that we wouldn't be making any more than we would on a regular \$3.35/hour job, at least for the first two months or so. And the main thing is that he didn't say nothing about any of us getting hired permanently, or even for more than a few months. So I'm thinking that this could be a thing where they'd want to knock out one or two jobs here in Atlanta and when the jobs are finished, move somewhere else, leaving us behind. And none of us on the street has got any way to get up to North Carolina or wherever."

That an ad for the asbestos removal jobs never appeared in the regular newspaper classifieds contributed to William's speculation that the work being offered through the labor pool was not entirely on the level. Why, he wondered, would work that offered \$10/hour not be advertised? And why would a labor pool manager--a person whose livelihood depends on keeping a reliable group of workers available for temporary work--be willing to "lose" 20 regular workers to "permanent jobs"? "I couldn't understand," said William, "why Scotty--who runs this labor pool--would want to lose 20 good workers--guys who have made him money in the past. He generally makes around \$10 to \$15/hour on a job, but seems like to me that he was standing to make a lot more on this one."

As the training program continued, it became clear that labor pool workers had been singled out to perform jobs requiring the removal of asbestos. During several days of cleaning out a warehouse where old asbestos had already been bagged, warehouse employees told William that only labor pool workers had been hired to do the removal. "Contractors know this stuff is dangerous, and I've worked for enough contractors to know that a lot of 'em will find ways to get around safety standards," reflected William. "But I can't help but feel there's something really flaky about this job. They know that none of us on the streets are likely to hire an attorney if we get sick--and they know we need the money. So here we go again. We do the dirty work and probably won't make a nickle more than we would on any other job. Besides, I still haven't seen that card they promised us; I've been askin' Scotty about it for two weeks and I done gave up."

It's been a while since I've seen William. In the winter months, he ate many of his meals in our house and often slept at the church night shelter up the street. I don't know where he's eating or sleeping now, but I hope he's safe and well. I also don't know if he ever landed a job removing asbestos; when we were last together it had been over three weeks since he had seen the representative from the "asbestos commission" who had dangled the promise of a living wage for those who "worked hard."

Maybe William found a fire escape; maybe he got out of a dark alley that shamefully and increasingly is crowded with the marginalized people of our country; maybe he has been able to reclaim his dignity.

But I doubt it. When familiar faces vanish for a few months from our soup kitchen and neighborhood, it's probably not because they've ridden off into a sunset of life, liberty and financial security. I can imagine more readily that William B. is tired, sick, and frustrated; housed in a jail cell or recovering at Grady Hospital from the kind of beating that costs so many street people their teeth as well as whatever is left of a small labor pool paycheck. More often than not, these seem to be the circumstances that draw our homeless friends deeper into the shadows and out of our sight. The streets, like a mad tangle of death rows, don't release their captives easily. And the labor pool system, with its tickets of meaningless work and slave wages, can never be an avenue of liberation.

Instead, William B. and thousands in our city with similar stories have been imprisoned in an economic system which rejects the idea that all human beings have a right to meaningful work. Time and again, the least among us are targeted to do the jobs that cost the most: jobs that cost people their safety, their health, and, finally, their dignity. For when a woman or man is so hungry that she or he will clean trash from a construction site--or remove deadly asbestos from a school building--for scarcely \$3 or \$4 an hour, then hasn't that person been alienated from the process of creation? It would seem that someone like William has been robbed of any sense he once may have had that God created people in God's image--to be creators, joyful workers who find life in keeping and tilling the Garden (Genesis 2).

Maybe that's what makes me so sad when I think about William. He has the skills to build something useful and wonderful: a house, for example, for a family that is now split up and staying in night shelters because they couldn't pay the recently raised rent. And yet, because he's poor, he could only find dirty work that would pay little and might cost him everything. In a systemic way that reveals the fallenness of our culture, William was denied the affirmation that he, too, is a creator made in God's image. By contrast, he was given the flat message that he was expendable, not worth a health plan. And that is wrong.



"Treadmill," by Walter Habdank

As people of faith we need to say no to a culture that would deny William and others the joy of being human and created to do worthwhile work in God's world. We can begin by choosing between discipleship to a culture that promises us everything from "big money" to unlimited power, and discipleship to Jesus who promises us a cross.

But while discipleship to the worker-servant Christ can, and will, cost us our lives, we also hear the good news that though "he was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death. . . God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name." (Phil.2:8,9). We, that is William, you, I, and anyone else who chooses to struggle and engage in the work of God's kingdom, are promised everlasting life. And that, it would seem, is a risk worth taking in a land where discipleship to culture would cost us our lives--period.

# Night is Coming

by Elizabeth Dede

"You got to get me outta the chain gang!" has always been James' plea. A 64-year-old Black man, who has been in prison for the past 21 years, James literally has experienced the slave labor of the prison chain gang. When he was first imprisoned, James was forced to work. He had to wear a striped suit, was brought out to dig ditches, to cut the grass on the median strips, and to work on roads. It was hard, physical labor that he was forced to do from sunrise to sunset. Attack dogs and guards armed with shotguns kept James from escaping and made sure that he kept on working. There was no joy in this work; it was work designed to break a person's body and spirit. The only thing James looked forward to was the time off for a meal.

Once when the guards and the dogs were distracted, James ran away, but he did not keep his freedom. The prisoner's stripes made him too obvious, and he was brought back in by the dogs and the guards with shotguns. Back in prison, the warden asked James why he had escaped, "I got to get outta the chain gang! You got to help me get outta the chain gang!" was James' reply. The warden made an empty promise: if James would not run away again, the warden would send help. That was fifteen years ago, and James virtually was forgotten. While he was freed finally from the punishment of hard labor, James kept his promise and sat behind bars, never attempting to escape again. But no one ever visited him; no one ever wrote to him; no one ever helped him.

Six months ago, The Open Door received a letter from James. He had no place else to turn. The parole board will not release a person from prison unless they have a residence upon release. James has no family, and 21 years in prison have severed ties with friends. Five months ago I went to visit James. His first words to me were, "You got to help me get outta the chain gang!" And that is his constant refrain at each visit. "I don't wanna die in the chain gang." Although James has not been forced to do that hard labor for many, many years now, prison is still symbolized for him by the slavery, the humiliating stripes, the attack dogs, the guards with shotguns of the chain gang, where work breaks bodies and spirits and leads to death. James' plea, "You got to get me outta the chain gang!" can be rephrased: "Give me life!"

How terrible that work should be related to death! For so many of us, our work gives meaning to our lives and gives us joy. In our society, those 21 years that James spent in prison would be considered the best years of a person's life. At age 40, one who has found fulfillment and meaningful work in our system usually is settled and content and works until retirement at age 65. Those contented, settled, satisfied years have been lost to James. Now he is at retirement age, but he has nothing to retire from, and so he begs for freedom: "Get me outta the chain gang! Give me life!"



James works in the prison yard, keeping the grass cut, and the lawn around his unit is well-manicured. He works so hard that the guards have to tell him to take a break in this heat and sit in the shade for a while.

It seems strange that James would work so hard now, after the years of forced labor in the chain gang, but I believe that James works hard because his labor staves off the dark fear of death in the chain gang. James is 64, but as long as he is healthy enough to be outside working with the living, growing grass, then he knows that he is alive, and he has hope for life as a free person.

I have hope for James. I hope that the parole board will release him and that James will come to live at the Open Door and share in our work, which is the work of God that Jesus calls us to: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of God who sent me; night is coming when no one can work (John 9:4)." Before the darkness comes, I hope that James can help to feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, open his home to a stranger, and give clothes to someone who has none. This is meaningful work, work that gives life, and work that James can do, even as a 64-year-old Black man who knows years of death in prison and feels the coming darkness of death in the chain gang. May he also know the joy of life and work in the light of Jesus.



Dietrich Gerstner

## "I Want to Help"

by Suzy Grine

I'd like to introduce you to a friend of mine. His name is Ronnie Rude. Ronnie volunteers at the Open Door. Every morning at 9 am (12:45 on Sundays), our front door opens to requests, donations, and Ronnie. He comes in more often than not with a smile on his face, loping into the kitchen with the easy energy of a boy, offering "good mornings" and high-pitched laughter to any and all around. One morning Ronnie came in with an ugly open gash on his forehead; he had been attacked and robbed the night before. That was the only time in my eight months of living here that Ronnie's good-natured cheerfulness has been understandably absent.

Ronnie and I are friends because we work together. When I am responsible for the soup kitchen, Ronnie is my most faithful helper: he stirs the soup, counts the eggs, empties the garbage, makes the tea, ladies the soup. I can depend on him to take on any job that needs doing with the same eagerness-to-please that characterizes his presence in the house. It is a paradoxical presence, though, because Ronnie has a

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“... a stranger and you welc

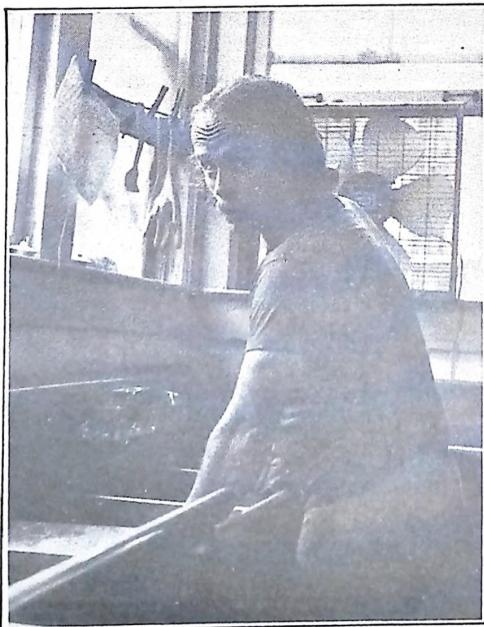
Each day, our community opens its door to the tired, the dirty, and the hungry of this city. Among the many committed people who enable us to respond to our call to hospitality are our house guests: women and men who have known the misery and dehumanizing power of the streets. Pictured on the following two pages are some of the people whose love and hard work help to create a space of welcome and dignity for so many who are residents of nowhere. We are grateful that God has brought us together, gives us meaningful work to do, and- from time to time- creates sisters and brothers out of strangers.



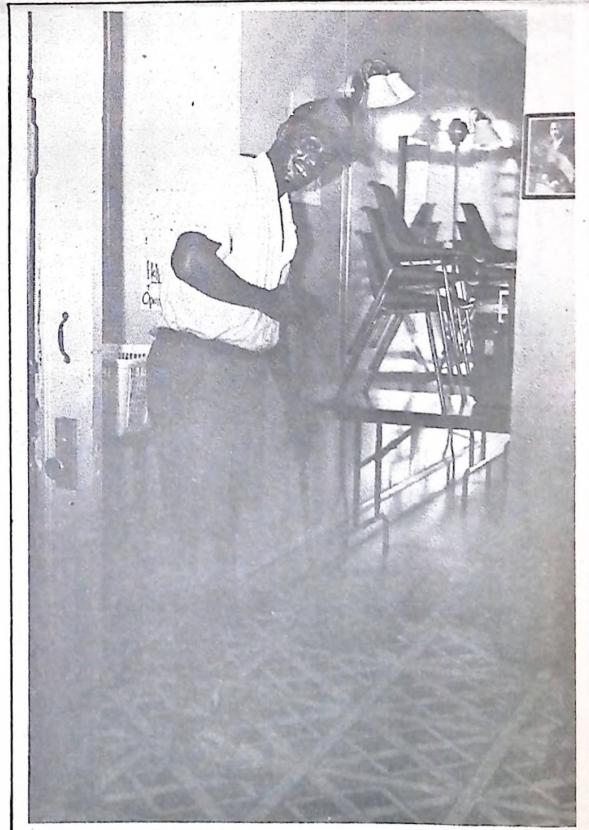
Eulene Kennedy



Carl Barker



Chuck Hinton

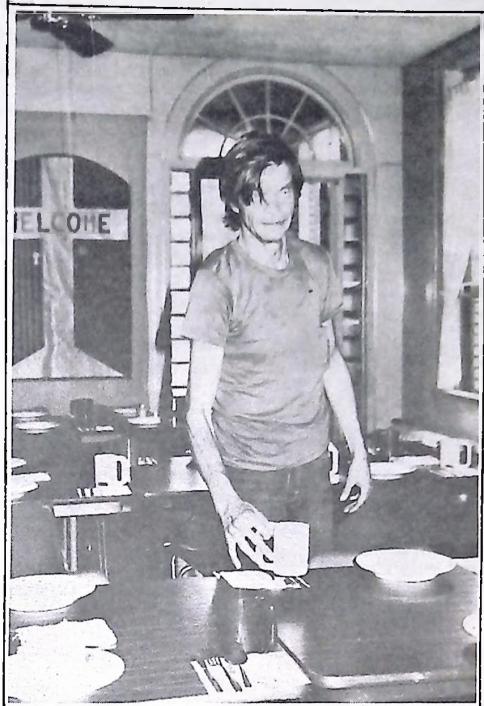


Carlton Carmichael

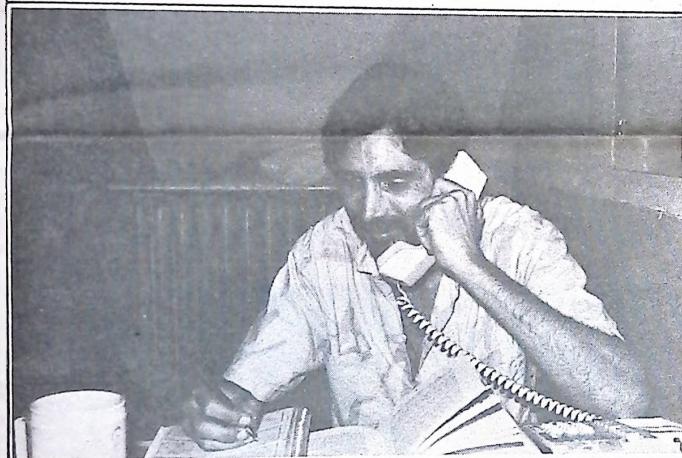
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Robert Barrett



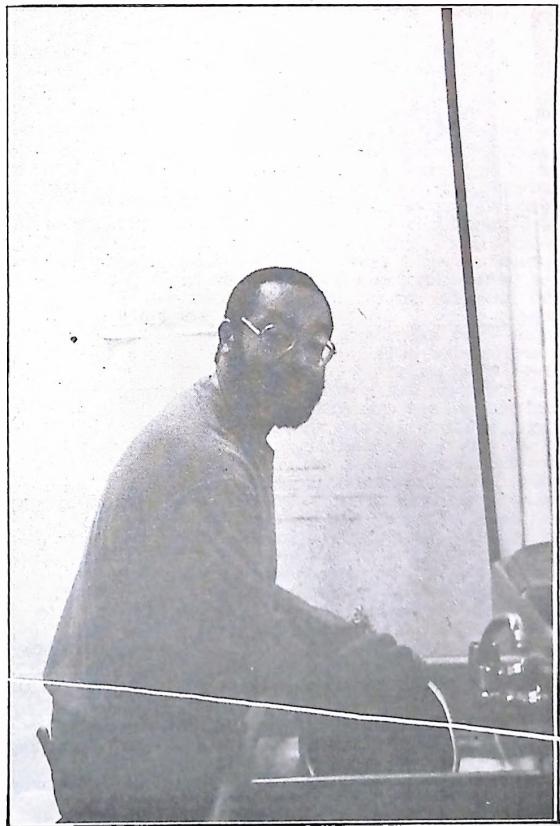
Ralph Dukes



George Kraft



Willie Lincoln



Willie London

photos by Dietrich Gerstner

HELP CONT. FROM PAGE 5

mental disability that creates a neediness more common to our friends on the streets than to our typical volunteers. It's the neediness of a child who demands attention as well as that of a person marginalized by our society and standing—as Ronnie once did—in our soup line.

Ronnie is the paradox of childhood and manhood. While it is the 43-year-old man who deals with life on the margins of society, it is the six-year-old who shapes his everyday responses. The transition is baffling to observe: at one moment Ronnie will giggle and playfully duck his head, treating your remark to him as a sign of attention and acceptance; another moment he will assume an adult frown and tell with bitter anger, and a touch of cynicism, the tale of being put on the streets without a return of rent deposit or time to move his things because his landlady decided to sell and go to Florida.

Society has no place for the paradox of Ronnie. While we all must be personally responsible with our own fallenness in a fallen world, Ronnie retains the gift of innocence at 43. To what degree is he then responsible for dealing with harsh realities, such as landladies who abuse tenant rights, and employers who pay him less than minimum wage? Our society recognizes the body and numerical age of a mature adult, and disregards the childish mind and personality. Thus Ronnie applies for a job in the working world, trying to "make it" as any adult is expected to do, and employers turn him down or cheat him. In any case he ends up on the margins.

He came to Atlanta to work and received a job through his vocational rehabilitation program, but it didn't last. As I have spent these past months working alongside Ronnie, I have come to an understanding of why it can be difficult to work with Ronnie. An extra-large measure of patience is absolutely necessary, as well as a saintly dose of good humor and tolerance (or long-suffering, as the case may be). Of course these are valued qualities in any parent, and since Ronnie is essentially a 43-year-old child, this makes good sense. The problem arises because our society, and especially the employers of our working world, do not cultivate these qualities itself, and so refuses to bend to the needs of Ronnie.

Being products of the above society and fallen creatures in our own right, the workers of this household have struggled to accept Ronnie. Although our philosophy of work stands in resistance to the selfish ambition of the competitive job market and the worship of money that can result, we are subject to the same desire for efficiency and may sacrifice the needs of the individual so that the soup gets on the table in time. Sadly, we defeat the whole notion of joyful work when this happens, and Peter Maurin's goal of humanizing productivity falls to the wayside.

When our philosophy of work, together with our faith in God as the Creator of meaningful work, does not meet with our practical reality, Ronnie personalizes the results. Because he openly demands the affirmation and care-filled attention we all desire as children of God, he is the first to receive the fallout from short tempers and high expectations. Most of us can mask our needs for approval and love behind the cold front of business-like efficiency, but Ronnie's whole face falls. His shoulders slump and he shuffles his feet and mumbles so you can hear, "I was just trying to help."

Faced with this living reminder that our highest goal is not efficiency in work but rather to be gentle with one another and offer our work as worship to God, we have come to appreciate Ronnie. Indeed, Ronnie is a gift to our community. For now we have the opportunity to grow, and perhaps fit into God's vision of things a little better.

## An Easy Essay

by Peter Maurin



E. Zutav

Carlyle says:

"The person who has found his or her work need look for no other blessedness."

But workers

cannot find happiness  
in mechanized work.

As Charles Devas says:

"The great majority having to perform some mechanized operation which requires little thought and allows no originality and which concerns an object in the transformation of which, whether previous or subsequent, they have no part, cannot take pleasure in their work."

Eric Gill says:

"The notion of work has been separated from the notion of art."

The notion of useful has been separated from the notion of beautiful.

The artist, that is to say,

the responsible worker,

has been separated from all other workers.

The factory hand

has no responsibility for what she produces.

The hand has been reduced to a sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility.

Industrialism has released the artist

from the necessity of making anything useful.

Industrialism has also released the worker

from making anything amusing."

## Joe Bottoms is Tops

by Elizabeth Dede



Dietrich Gerstner

When I asked Joe if we could have lunch together so he could tell me his story for Hospitality, Joe said that he didn't like to talk about himself and that he wouldn't have breakfast or lunch with me because he didn't want to answer questions about himself.

Now I am faced with writing this piece about Joe, and I find that I know very little about him. But I do know that Joe is stubborn enough that having said he will not talk about himself, Joe will be true to his word, and I will not get any answers from Joe to questions about him.

I am saddened when I think about how little I know about Joe. For the past year and eight months I have lived in the same house with Joe, and I have worked with him and eaten meals with him, but I don't know Joe's

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middle name, or how old he is, or what he did before he came to The Open Door. And Joe doesn't talk about these things. Joe is a person with a story, but he won't share it. And that makes me wonder sadly if society has caused Joe to believe that his story isn't worth knowing.

I wish I knew more about Joe because he is my friend, and one of the ways that friendships become closer and stronger is through sharing about ourselves. Since I can't know that I am Joe's friend based on those sharings, I base my knowledge of Joe's friendship on the smile he always has for me, on his cheerful, "Good morning, Elizabeth," and on his wondering in the middle of the afternoon how my day has been going.

In my own feeble way, I show my friendship for Joe by teasing him, rather than by sharing about myself or by asking to know more about him. One of my favorite teases is about holding Joe's hand in the supper circle. While I try the different sides and ends of the dining room throughout the week, Joe most often keeps to one regular place in the supper circle. Thus, about twice a week, I get to stand next to Joe and hold his hand, and we always make a big deal about "what a pleasure it is to hold your hand."

Shortly after I arrived at The Open Door, Joe was diagnosed as having a contagious case of active TB. He was hospitalized and during an exam, cancer was discovered in Joe's mouth. He underwent major surgery and spent weeks in the hospital, recovering. At The Open Door, one of Joe's jobs had been to dry the silverware each night after dinner. I remember that Joe would wait patiently as the dishwashers washed the cups, bowls, plates, pitchers, and finally, the silverware. While Joe was in the hospital, we told him that he had to come home quickly because the pile of silverware waiting to be dried had grown so large that it threatened to take over every inch of space in our house. Actually, we had made an improvement on our silverware-drying technique and got drying cups designed for air-drying silverware. To this day, some of us who have been around long enough to remember Joe's stay in the hospital, refer to those drying cups as Joe Bottoms' replacements.

Even though Joe doesn't talk very much and won't tell me about his past, he is not without a sense of humor, which surprisingly shows itself in an open, clownish way. For instance, Joe is one of the few people who will actually enter the annual Boogie Contest at Mardi Gras, and we never have to beg him to get dressed up for Halloween. Joe enjoys that foolishness as much as I do, and readily sheds his inhibitions.

## No Vagrant - Free Zone ?

by Elizabeth Dede

*Editor's Note: During our July House Meeting, one of our House Guests shared with us that he had spent an afternoon in Woodruff Park, where he witnessed the arrest of four of his black brothers because they had been asleep on benches in the park. So, there ain't no vagrant-free zone?*

Are you white?  
Are you rich?  
Is your hair cut short and styled like Ollie North's?  
Do you shop in Macy's?  
Do you read the New York Times?  
Do you wear a three-piece suit and tie?  
Do you take your noon-time break from your office  
in the Georgia-Pacific Building  
and eat your lunch on a park bench in the shade?  
Do you spend the night in the Ritz?  
Do you have a few drinks in the lounge?  
Then, there ain't no vagrant-free zone.

Are you black?  
Are you poor?  
Is your hair unwashed and tangled?  
Do you stand outside of Woolworth's with a cup  
for your blind friend?  
Do you pull the Atlanta Journal from a trash can in the park?

Last year for Christmas, Joe was given a beautiful, long, silky nightgown. Not put off by this apparent error in Christmas gifts, Joe quickly got up and began to dance with his beautiful nightgown/dance partner.



Dietrich Gerstner

Aside from his light-hearted sense of humor, Joe is also an exceedingly dedicated worker. For several months now he has helped with the administrative tasks of this community. Recently, we put together a booklet about The Open Door, and several of us spent several days collating the fifty pages of each of thousands of copies. From our collating tables, the booklets went to Joe's stapling table. In an amazing, single-handed feat of dedication to his work, Joe stapled all 3,000 copies in less than a week.

These few things I know about Joe, and I wish I could share more because you see, Joe is a unique person with his own story, his own past, and his own place at The Open Door, and there is no replacement for Joe. Joe Bottoms is tops with me!

Are your clothes worn and tattered?  
Do you watch the others eat?  
Do you spend the night on the street?  
Do you share a bottle with your friends?  
Then, "we'll arrest you 'cause you look like a vagrant."

Say NO to the Vagrant-Free Zone!

WOODRUFF PARK, ATLANTA, AFTERNOON OF MARCH 2, 1987

I walked to Woodruff Park from the library, planning to take advantage of the sunny, spring day by reading some poetry in the park. As I entered the park I was immediately startled by the sight of a mounted police officer down from his horse, writing tickets to two men seated on a park bench. At The Open Door we talk almost daily about the coming of the "vagrant free zone," as another terrible form of oppression for our homeless brothers and sisters who reside in downtown parks. So, as I saw this police officer with these two men who looked to be poor and homeless, I stopped in amazement and sat down on a nearby bench.

I watched as the police officer called for a van, arrested these men, and led them off to jail. After this incident, another man came and asked the police officer what was going on. I could not help but move closer so I could hear the conversation. It turns out he had arrested these men for "sleeping in a drunken state," in the middle of a sunny afternoon; the men did not seem drunk to me.

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The police officer went on to say that the arrests were a part of the coming "vagrant free corridor" to keep the city "clean" for the coming democratic convention. He talked of "snatching 'em up." The officer then turned to me, as I was standing nearby, and said, "we'll arrest you" because "you look like a vagrant."

The officer's badge number was 1976. I copied it down because I felt the officer violated moral law and God's law. If the law of the state is not consistent with the higher law of the Spirit, we need to work to change the law of the state.

-Andy Smith, former resident volunteer

April 14, 1987

Dear Friends,

Saturday, December 27, 1986, while enjoying a shopping spree in downtown Atlanta with my parents who were visiting me from Roanoke, Virginia, a rather disturbing thing happened.

Upon entering Ferrell's Ladies Shoe Store, my father, who was following my mother and me, was stopped at the door. He was asked to identify himself and state the nature of his business. He replied that he was shopping with his wife and daughter.

My father is 65 years old, rather distinguished looking, I think. We were all dressed casually in jeans and sweaters, but none of us was dressed shabbily. Why was my father stopped and carded? Was it because he is a black man, casually dressed, entering a store in an area that is now commonly referred to as the "vagrant free" or "sanitized zone"?

Concerned,

Cynthia L. Hale,  
Pastor/Developer, Ray of Hope Christian Church

Three scarfed grandmothers, babushkas, tell me to tell my mother hello for them. A jolly man tells me of eating grass to stay alive; he doesn't want it to happen to me. "Mir," he says and stuffs a three ruble note in my pocket. . . "Mir" (Peace). . . "Drushba" (Friendship) is the cry coming to us from the roadside where three to four deep, people crowd to get a view of us, to clasp hands overhead in greeting and blow kisses. I walk into the gauntlet. Both sides of the road. . . people—boys and girls—ask, "address pajousta" and "autograph." They trade pins, give hand-painted spoons. A group of young women bursts into laughter as I raise my camera. Babies—well-capped and bright-eyed. . . graceful children. The pride of parents smiles into my viewfinder. . . The enemy. . .

"Drushba, drushba, drushba, mir, mir, mir," an old woman chants through her tears. As I pass by she grabs my hand; a kiss. . . do I deserve this? . . . Graceful people, not without fault, not without problems, but graceful. Some are now my friends. . .

The airport—230 Americans leaving; 200 Soviets, staying behind. Eja, a Soviet walker, looks at me and Patty, says nothing, just slowly strokes my arm, then Patty's, like something valued. She looks numb. . . no words.

They felt it too, maybe even more.



Bruce Bishop

## Peace Walk

by Bruce Bishop

Two-hundred Americans, 180 Soviets, one month, hundreds of tents, sleeping bags, mosquitoes, and thousands of well-wishers—these were the components of my US/USSR Peace Walk experience.

The US/USSR Leningrad to Moscow walk was co-organized by the Soviet Peace Committee (SPC) and the International Peace Walk (IPW) of the former Great Peace March. The Walk was the first joint US/USSR peace walk. It was also, among many other firsts, the longest and largest cultural exchange, the first public meeting with dissident groups in an open exchange, the first unplanned overnight stay with Soviets, the longest, if not largest, rock concert held in the Soviet Union, the first demonstration by a foreign group at Red Square; and there were many other firsts. We walked with our Soviet counterparts—our friends—in towns and villages where Americans had not been seen before. In Novgorod, 40,000 people turned out instead of the estimated 5,000. Everywhere we went people were standing, sometimes for hours, sometimes in the rain, to see us and to wave.

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In October, Patty Ankrum and I will start a three-month tour through the Midwest and the East. We are veterans both of the Soviet Walk and the Great Peace March. The program will include Patty's live music, our slides, stories, and reflections on the issue. If you have an interest call or write:

Bruce Bishop  
1706 So. 13th St.  
Goshen, IN 46526

219/533-7225

before October 1:  
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE  
Atlanta, GA 30306

404/874-9652

\*\*\*\*\*  
Novgorod—ancient capitol, gold leaf onion domes, town square, an ocean of people out to see us. A World War II veteran, through his tears, tells me of his American friends, friends he made at the meeting of US and USSR troops at the Elba. "I never thought it would come to this," he says. "We both fought the Fascists."



Rita Corbin

# I Was

by Jack Alderman

Don't you think it an amazement--aren't you awed by the phenomenal abilities of heart and mind; Isn't it impressive: the ease in which we can walk right back into that we left behind; You do remember me, don't you? then why the quizzical expression: the lowered lip, the raised brow; Can it be that you have forgotten or that I am mistaken? to be honest, I don't know how.

Wait! allow me to refresh your memory, let me help you to recall those once-upon-a-long agoes; When life was better and you weren't bitter, when we were friends and not foes; I was the neighbors' child you visited in the hospital, you thought me handsome and strong; My parents commented that I looked red and wrinkled, you said, "Yes, but not for long!"

I was the toddler you presented a caring hand when first I tried to walk; When the garbling started taking shape, you informed the others that I could talk; You taught me magical songs and to pronounce tough stuff like a 'rock-a-baby-bye'; Now you have pronounced me unfit, you have decided that I must die.

I was the Samaritan who volunteered to carry your groceries from the corner candy store; You patted my head and rubbed my cheek and told me I needed to grow a little more; Even though I was fairly large for a lad of three, you found a way to graciously decline; Now I have grown too small, too insignificant--my life is nothing but a waste of time.

Remember when I enrolled in kindergarten, you gave me the pretty crayons and nifty fingerpaint; When you saw a display of my artistic talents, I was worried that you would faint; There were rainbows on the walls and horses in the hall, I had green skin and orange hair; Such a distance, such a difference, another unusual corridor-- this one to the electric chair.

In the second grade I earned a whole bunch of E's and a huge gold star; I overheard you whisper to my mother that one day I would go far; Mom tried to dismiss your prejudiced predictions, she argued that I was the teacher's pet; You defended me faithfully, unwaveringly--it surprises me now that you could actually forget.

You bragged on my manners, noting that I always used 'please' and 'thanks' and 'sir' and 'ma'am'; Now you say that I am uncivilized--an animal!--pardon me, please, but I don't understand; Did I reach a point when my sins could not be forgiven, when my remorse would be ignored; Was it when I became the devil, or was it earlier, when you became the lord. . .

11

I was the one who escorted your daughter to the annual 'Twist And Shout' contest; You shouted the loudest, telling everyone everywhere that we were the best; I recall your concern when we exchanged rings in the fall of our senior year; All was acceptable, including yours truly, when my honorable intentions were made clear.

You placed an arm around my shoulder the morning I boarded the bus for the Army; You spoke of marked cards and loaded dice, it was an attempt to warn me Of the injustices we encounter as we encounter the cruel, harsh, and merciless; I went on to fight for your life, now you fight for my death--what a mess!

I remember the church conference you moderated, the one entitled 'Fairness and Decency'; Did you change your opinion or was that only in regards to a celestial society; Or is it that my situation prohibits me from receiving the love of Christ; I'm really in a dilemma--and a predicament--how about some practical advice.

I have one of those King James' handy, will you kindly supply chapter and verse; Oh, yes! way back there. . . it does mention that life can be a blessing or a curse; And I am responsible for my words and deeds, I had a free will and choice; So now you'll have your eye-for-an-eye, your scales balanced, your reason to rejoice.

The more I contemplate, the more I comprehend; it's obvious why you've elected to forget; If you remember who I was, you'll discover who you are: a pietist and a hypocrite; So hurry and kill me while you have the chance, get me out of your way; And then pray God doesn't use your system of judgement come Judgement Day.

Jack's poetry is born out of his life on Georgia's death row in Jackson.

## Open Door Community Worship

5:00 - 6:30 pm

Sundays

Followed by supper together

We gather each Sunday for worship, prayer and the Lord's Supper. We invite you to join us.

Every 6th Sunday the Community has a full day retreat outside the city. This replaces our evening worship at 910 Ponce de Leon Ave.

## Open Door Schedule

### WE ARE OPEN...

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm and from 7:15 pm to 8:30 pm. The building is open from 9:00 am until 8:30 pm those days. (Both phone & door are not answered during our lunch break from 12:15-1:00. Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are closed until 1:00 pm. Please do not make unscheduled drop-offs of clothing, food, etc. on Sunday mornings. Sunday afternoon our phones and door are answered from 1:00 until 5:00 pm

### OUR MINISTRY...

SOUP KITCHEN - Monday-Saturday, 11-12 noon; Sunday 3-4pm

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST - Monday-Friday 7:30-8:30 am SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES - Monday, Wednesday,

Friday - 9:00 - 11:00 am (Be sure to call-- schedule varies) USE OF PHONE - Monday-Saturday, 9am - 4pm.

SHELTER REQUESTS - Monday-Saturday 9am - noon.

BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Wednesdays 7:30 - 9:00 (call for winter schedule)

ALL-DAY RETREATS - Every 6th Sunday (for our household &

volunteers/supporters) - September 11, 12, & 13.

## DOROTHY DAY'S 90th BIRTHDAY A CALL TO CELEBRATION AND SACRIFICE AT THE NEVADA NUCLEAR TEST SITE

### TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE C.W. MOVEMENT

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Recent conversations among Catholic Workers from houses in Los Angeles, New York and Las Vegas have produced the outline of a "Dorothy Day 90th Birthday Celebration" at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site November 6-7-8, 1987.

The proposed three-day event would include:

**FRIDAY** — International gathering of Catholic Workers for discussion, presentations, prayer, parties.

**SATURDAY** — Gathering of Catholic Workers and all friends of Dorothy Day for speakers, presentations, nonviolence training, celebration.

**SUNDAY** — Mass, prayer vigil, and nonviolent civil disobedience at the Nuclear Test Site.

What better place to celebrate Dorothy Day's vision of life and wholeness than at the Nuclear Test Site, the epitome of death and destruction!

We are hoping that this event can be a significant statement of the Catholic Worker as a movement. We invite you to participate. Please use the sheet below to indicate the ways in which you are interested in becoming involved.

Jeff Dietrich  
L.A. Catholic Worker

Tim Lambert  
Editor/The Catholic Worker

Julia Occhiogrosso  
Las Vegas Catholic Worker



## LET'S BUILD A NEW PARK To replace our loss of Plaza Park THE AL SMITH PARK



**FIVE POINTS FOR FIVE POINTS**

1. A new park in the Five Points area
2. A memorial for Atlanta's Homeless
3. A place for all who share Atlanta's streets
4. Water fountains
5. Public toilets

**SAY YES!**

PLEASE CALL AND WRITE TODAY:

Betsy Baker, DEPT. OF PARKS, 880 FORSYTH STREET, ATLANTA, GA 30303 404-571-5151  
Andy Young, OFFICE OF THE MAYOR, CITY HALL, ATLANTA, GA 30303 404-577-6000  
Marvin Arrington, 880 CITY HALL, ATLANTA, GA 30303 404-577-6000

ATLANTA ADVOCATES FOR THE HOMELESS  
876-6977

## A FALL RALLY IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE HOMELESS POOR OF ATLANTA



## WE CALL ON THE CITY TO KEEP ITS PROMISE AND BUILD THE AL SMITH PARK

October 29, Woodruff Park

For more information please call 876-6977

## NEEDS

HAMS - TURKEYS - MAYONNAISE - CHEESE

COFFEE (DRIP-GRIND)

DISPOSABLE RAZORS - BASEBALL CAPS

SOCKS - UNDERWEAR - WASHCLOTHS

MEN'S COATS & JEANS

DISH TOWELS - A FARM - A GUITAR

Please bear with us...

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

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

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