

# HOSPITALITY

Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

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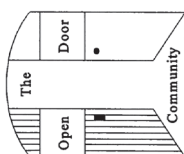


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## Gaza and its Consequences

By Joe Groves

Hamas' attack was a surprise? Only if you think an occupied people living in unbearable conditions aren't going to rebel, which the Israeli government seemed to think. The surprise was the attack's size, effectiveness and brutality.

Why Israel's complacency? Netanyahu thought he had a "bargain" with Hamas. They rule Gaza, receive funding from Arab governments, send some workers to Israel, and receive (limited) supplies through Israel and Egypt. In return, Hamas refuses to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority (PA), allowing Netanyahu to claim he has "no partner for peace." Then Netanyahu is free to pursue efforts to make deals with Arab nations.

On October 7, Hamas wrecked his plans and made sure that Palestinians cannot be ignored. There will be no "new vision" of the Middle East until we resolve the Palestinian issue. The attack and Israel's response has changed the face of the Middle East and raised a passel of questions. Let's look at a few of them. The situation will change significantly before you read this article, but here is what is on my mind in early December.

### The Right to Resist and the Responsibility to Resist Rightly

The UN and the U.S. invoke international law to condemn Hamas and to justify and caution Israel. What's left out is Palestinians' right to resist. In the Geneva Conventions, two parts govern warfare. First, you must have a "right to fight." Second, you must fight "justly." A "just" war must meet both sets of conditions.

Under the Geneva Conventions, people living under occupation have the right to resist. Palestinians, including Hamas, have that right. But they must resist "justly": no massacre of civilians, no hostages, no random rocket fire. So, we should both condemn the Hamas massacre *and* recognize Palestinians' right to fight.

Israel is under the same double obligation. Israel has the right to respond to the Hamas attack. But they must fight "justly." Women, children, the elderly and disabled are "protected"; sanctuary zones (hospitals, schools, places of worship) are "protected"; the response must be proportional; there is no transfer of populations.

Israel claims to abide by international law because it is not "targeting civilians." Israel has killed over 15,000 Palestinians, 10 times the number of Israelis killed in the Hamas massacre; has attacked hospitals and schools; and bombed "for damage, not accuracy." Israel's attack violates virtually every provision for "just conduct" in war.

Both parties have "just cause" for war, but both are egregiously violating the rules of war in their actions.

### Hamas has won — and lost

Hamas has achieved its goal — Palestinians matter again. There is no "new Middle East" without including them. Hamas' attack "succeeded" beyond their wildest imagination. They exposed Israel's military and intelligence weaknesses, devastated the south of Israel, and traumatized Israelis. They have gained popularity among Palestinians by taking action and gaining freedom for Palestinian prisoners instead of just talking. And Israel's response is what Hamas hoped — attack Gaza without a plan.



Christ in the Rubble | Kelly Latimore

that it prioritized protecting Lebanon. Iran and Hezbollah may yet intervene, but both have made it clear that they do not want a regional war.

### Israel has no good options

Israel began a major war with no plan for the crucial question: "Who will run Gaza?" Options are numerous and unlikely.

Not the Palestinian Authority. They are weak and corrupt. Israel doesn't trust them. They have refused to "ride into Gaza on the backs of Israeli tanks." And if they emerge as an option, they will make major demands for creating a Palestinian state.

Not Egypt. Egypt is clear — they will not take over Gaza again, nor accept refugees from Gaza. The Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood are enemies. Would Egypt give refuge to Hamas when they are trained guerilla fighters from the *radical* wing of the Muslim Brotherhood?

An International Authority? The U.S. has suggested an authority with UN or NATO management and troops from Arab countries. Good luck. Israel doesn't trust the UN, and would lose the ability for their army to intervene if attacks resumed. And Arab countries know Gaza is a quagmire. Those issues aside, it's one of the better ideas on the table.

Temporary Israeli control. This will happen. The question is what form it takes, how long it lasts and if Israel will allow any reconstruction.

Permanent Israeli control. This can happen accidentally, because no one else will assume responsibility, or as a deliberate re-occupation. The settler coalition in the Israeli government wants Israeli control so they can re-establish settlements in Gaza.

Population transfer. Various Israeli groups propose moving all 2.5 million Palestinians to a new camp in the Sinai desert in a "second Nakba." Other nations would then take Palestinians in as refugees. This would be a gross violation of the Geneva Conventions and strongly opposed by the rest of the world, especially Egypt, which would have to accept the refugees. Besides that, it wouldn't solve anything. It would simply move the Hamas problem to the other side of the border. As Hamas has proved, the border is permeable. But we must take the possibility seriously. The plan began as a far-right settler idea, but the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence has submitted a written plan (rejected initially by the government), a

**Gaza and its Consequences** *continued on page 7*



# Seeking Justice

A review of *The Fear of Too Much Justice*

By John Charles Boger

*The Divine Comedy*, the fourteenth-century masterpiece by Italian poet Dante Alighieri, has been celebrated for seven centuries as an extraordinary act of literary and religious imagination. Its gripping opening finds Dante’s narrator unexpectedly awakening, “midway this way of life we’re bound upon,” to find himself in a “dark wood, where the right road was wholly lost and gone,” confronted by savage beasts that force him back when he vainly tries to ascend to the sunlit heights above. Dante quickly conjures up a wise and reliable guide, the immortal Roman poet Virgil, who proposes to lead our narrator back to those sunlit heights, though by a circuitous route: by first descending, circle by circle, through the labyrinthine depths of Hell, the *Inferno*, where narrator Dante meets and speaks with a succession of condemned souls, each of whom has succumbed to one of the sins that corrupt any who fall prey to them — lust, anger, deceit, cruelty, selfishness.

The book introduces, one by one, each of the major institutional actors who people the modern criminal justice system, including prosecutors, judges, private and appointed defense counsel, jailhouse informants, juries, prison officials, parole officers and other denizens of this world and underworld.

I hope the readers of *Hospitality* will countenance what may seem an overwrought analogy, yet it was of the *Inferno* I repeatedly thought as I read through this powerful new work by Steven B. Bright and James Kwak. For the authors take readers on a powerful and disturbing journey through the many dark woods and spiraling depths of the modern criminal justice system, revealing one substantive and/or procedural flaw after another — a vision that makes the promise of “equal justice under law” as distant as the sunlit heights toward which Dante looked in vain, especially for America’s racial minorities and its poor.

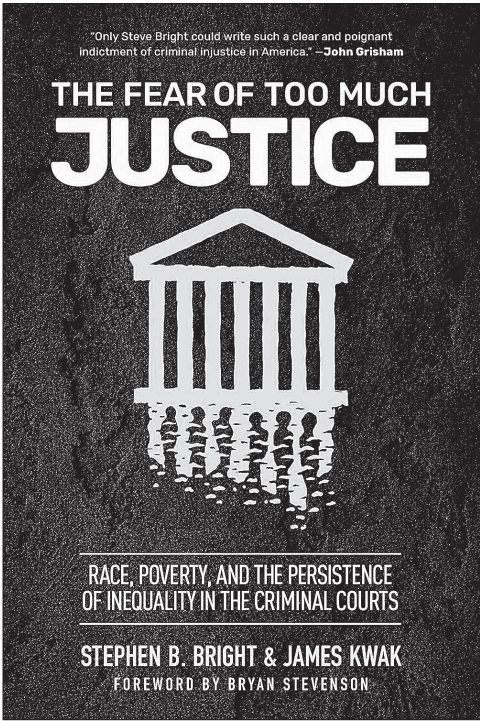
No better Virgil to guide readers here than Steve Bright, the resourceful and undaunted young Kentuckian drawn after law school in the late 1970s first to the nationally renowned Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C., and soon thereafter south to Atlanta and the Southern Prisoners’ Defense Committee, where he began a three-decade career as its leader and moral center. Making his home among a small, underfunded yet fearless cadre of lawyers, Steve fought the death penalty and other criminal law injustices across the South. For years he and others at what became the Southern Center for Human Rights stood side by side with shackled death

row clients, some of them defenseless juveniles, in the rural court-houses of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, raising constitutional claims before impatient, skeptical, or overtly hostile trial judges. Bright’s evident generosity and selflessness, his legal brilliance, and his unrelenting moral clarity drew to his side a remarkable group of talented and dedicated associates, among them James Kwak, along with others who would go on to create state centers for capital defense work, like Bryan Stevenson with his Equal Justice Initiative in Alabama, Clive Stafford-Smith in Louisiana and Robert McGlasson in Texas. Still others like Sarah Geraghty stayed on at SCHR for two decades to litigate against prison and jail conditions or, like co-author Kwak, eventually to become law professors.

Bright and Kwak have chosen in this book to tell not a single personalized story — like the compelling narrative of wrongfully convicted Walter McMillian whose legal odyssey Bryan Stevenson documented in the brilliant modern legal classic *Just Mercy* — but instead provide a comprehensive catalogue of structural problems for the reader. The book introduces, one by one, each of the major institutional actors who people the modern criminal justice system, including prosecutors, judges, private and appointed defense counsel, jailhouse informants, juries, prison officials, parole officers and other denizens of this world and underworld. It then interweaves an account of many current prosecutorial and judicial practices: demanding high pretrial bail or pretrial imprisonment for most defendants; imposing multiple costs and fees; allowing prosecutors regularly to remove prospective jurors (frequently all the Black or minority jurors summoned); appellate courts deferring to the “choices” deemed made by clearly hapless and or uninformed defense counsel or by all-white trial juries; and above all, affording prosecutors the awesome, unchecked power to decide what legal charges to bring against arrestees, whether to reduce those charges in exchange for pleas of guilty, and in many states,

**The Fear of Too Much Justice**  
Race, Poverty, and the Persistence  
of Inequality in the Criminal Courts  
**Stephen B. Bright & James Kwak**  
with a foreword by Bryan Stevenson

June 2023  
Hardcover, 368 pages  
Also available as an e-book



whether to reveal or conceal evidence from defense attorneys that might offer valuable defenses. All of these, they show, particularly burden the poor and thoroughly skew the odds to favor conviction and the likelihood of death sentences for many capital defendants. Step by step, in chapters entitled “The All-Powerful Prosecutor,” “Judges and the Politics of Crime,” “The White-Washed Jury,” “Courts of Profit,” and more, Bright and Kwak cast their eyes on the potential for, and the lamentable presence of, abuses that lie everywhere at hand. Moreover, beyond the confines of the courtroom, DA’s office, and jailhouse, Bright and Kwak discuss the vast, corrupting sums of private money that have poured into judicial and prosecutorial elections in recent decades and that induce many judges or prosecutors to swear to uneasy voters that they will forever stay “tough on crime” and merciless toward convicted defendants. Two features of this book’s descent through America’s contemporary criminal justice *Inferno* prove instructive, if unsettling. First, it provides repeated, real-world examples of astounding acts or omissions committed by ruthless prosecutors, drunk or clueless court-appointed defense attorneys, overworked public defenders, or highhanded and dismissive reviewing courts. We read of injustice after injustice and learn how distressingly many of them, even when brought to light, go uncorrected as innocent prisoners languish for years in prison or go to their deaths by execution. Some of these stories are truly harrowing, almost unbelievable to those who assume that true injustices, once revealed, will surely be remedied.

**Seeking Justice** *continued on page 7*

## HOSPITALITY

*Hospitality* is published by the Open Door Community, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The Open Door is a Prophetic Discipleship Community honoring the Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

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David Payne  
The Welcome Pantry is always open  
to share the abundance of the Open Door Community.

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Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore.





Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



# The Gift of Solidarity

By Murphy Davis

*A reprint from Hospitality, July 2004, vol. 23, no. 7.*

Last month, Murphy, a Partner at the Open Door, was diagnosed with Burkitt lymphoma for a third time and began a course of chemotherapy. Once the chemotherapy is complete, Murphy will be evaluated for a possible bone marrow transplant. Along with the excellent care of oncologists and nurses, Ed, Hannah and the community are giving care and love to Murphy and accompanying her on this now-familiar road. We are deeply grateful to so many of you who have called, written and visited, and to all of you who are helping the Open Door continue its work. The following article, which Murphy wrote after recovery from her second bout of cancer, is reprinted from The Other Side magazine, May-June 2003, Volume 39, Number 3.

Twice now, I have been very, very sick with cancer. And twice now, I have been healed. Every day of my life is an unexpected gift, and I am deeply grateful.

In 1995, I was diagnosed with Burkitt lymphoma and very nearly died before several large tumors were removed. This non-Hodgkins lymphoma is said to be particular to boys and young men in the tropical and low-lying areas of East Africa; how this North American white woman ended up with it is yet to be explained! But the surgery and the five months of mega-chemotherapy that I received at Grady Hospital were the needed treatment. The hospital's excellent care, partnered with the fervent and unceasing prayers and love of countless friends and family, put me on my feet again.

After three years I was pronounced "cured." There were no recorded cases of a recurrence of Burkitt after the first two or three years.

Six years after my initial treatment, I made medical history when I was found to have a new primary tumor — again, Burkitt lymphoma. The second round of treatment made 1995 look like



Healing Together | Simone McLeod (Cree/Ojibway)

The first time I was sick, I did not qualify for disability or for the Medicaid program that could have paid hospital bills, because I was "curable." Most hospitals will not treat people without health insurance except on an emergency basis. Expensive, life-saving cancer treatments are not considered such an emergency. My life literally depended on the fact that my city still had a locally supported public health system to absorb the bills from my surgery and treatment.

In my second bout, I did meet the criteria and qualified for one of the only forms of a national health plan. But I am acutely aware that if there were no public system in Atlanta to absorb the costs of my first treatment, I most likely would never have made it to face the second battle.

To put it more bluntly, if I had lived in another city or rural area, I probably would have died the first time cancer struck.

In 1999, continuing cuts in funding for healthcare (and all other social services) meant that Grady Hospital was drowning in red ink. As is often the case, it was determined that the poorest of the poor would have to pay the bill. A new schedule of fees and co-payments was announced at that time that would have put healthcare and treatment out of reach for the homeless and many elderly and chronically ill patients. For countless people at Grady, the policy decisions effectively constituted a death sentence.

Thankfully, a raucous and persistent coalition representing the poor, the elderly and people with AIDS was able to turn the tide and force allocation of funding to circumvent the emergency. But the crisis is by no means over.

All of us who care about making healthcare available to everyone have a great deal of work remaining to do. The goal of universal healthcare will not come easily or soon.

One of the great gifts of my illness is greater solidarity with the poor. I am acutely aware that many people in our country die every day because they are unable to afford or find access to the care they need for critical or chronic illnesses. Many individuals and families are plunged into financial ruin as they try to pay for cata-

I am acutely aware that many people in our country die every day because they are unable to afford or find access to the care they need for critical or chronic illnesses.

a picnic. But after surgery and eighty-five days in the hospital for in-patient chemotherapy over six months, I am once again "cancer-free."

Romans 8:28 is a primary truth in my experience. I never would have chosen this road, but how true it is that "in all things God works together for good with those who love God." Many amazing gifts and blessings have come to me and to my family in this journey with cancer.

But it could have easily been a very different story. For the last twenty years, I have lived as part of the Open Door, an intentional Christian community of "Protestant Catholic Workers" in downtown Atlanta. Like the rest of my family and community, I have been medically uninsured and, therefore, dependent on the wobbling and precarious U.S. system of public health. I owe my life to the fact that Atlanta still has a public hospital staffed by doctors and physicians-in-training from the medical schools of Emory University and Morehouse College. Similar public hospitals once existed in many U.S. cities, but the vast majority have been forced to close their doors.

strophic injury or illness. And the growing stress that the haphazard and merciless system of "care" causes for most people — insured and uninsured alike — is taking a physical, emotional and spiritual toll that will deepen the crisis for all of us.

For many of us, serious illness can be a gift — though we can often see this only in the rearview mirror. It can deepen our faith, teach us more about ourselves, give us an appreciation for our families and communities and surely convict us of the power of prayer.

By saying that "my cancer was a gift" — or even "my cancer brought me many gifts" — presumes the privilege of having had the resources to treat the disease. It is never a gift to have a treatable disease and yet be excluded from the treatment. This is death-dealing oppression.

My journey of receiving care in a public system that teeters on the brink of collapse has bestowed on me the great gift of solidarity with the poor who desperately need healthcare but live and die without it. My prayer is that I will be faithful to such a gift, and that I will use this life well in crying out for those who are too ill to cry out for themselves. ✦

## Open Door Community Press

### Surely Goodness and Mercy

*A Journey into Illness and Solidarity*



Murphy Davis

Forewords by Jürgen Moltmann  
and Bryan Stevenson

### Surely Goodness and Mercy

*A Journey into Illness and Solidarity*

by Murphy Davis



Alison Reeder

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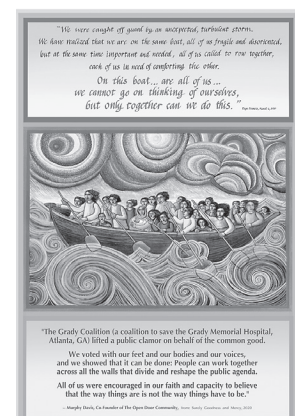
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From artist John August Swanson, who created the beautiful cover art for **Surely Goodness and Mercy**:

"Murphy Davis' book is so powerful and moving that it inspired me to use a quote from it along with Pope Francis's quote on my new poster Storm."



The poster sells for \$15 and can be ordered at:

<https://temp.johnaugustswanson.com/product/storm2020-poster>



# Connections, Connecting the Dots, Intersectionality

The Israeli/USA vs Hamas War, The Hamas vs Israeli/USA War

By Ed Loring

**A** My journey took a turn on October 7, 2023. Not a new road. Not a U-turn. But a sharp turn to the left as I began to listen to the anguish and grief of Palestinians and Jews. I am no stranger to deep, piercing grief. I have experienced sorrow and woe, as I have lived my adult life studying African American History and pursuing solidarity with the outcasts and marginalized. I have walked the road among many in the Black Freedom Movement. I know the Cry of the Poor from death row and prisons. For 36 years I lived in a home with mentally ill, homeless people who were mostly Black, former prisoners, three brothers from death row. I spent hours in labor pools, blood banks, visiting cat holes, Grady Hospital ER



Photographs from ODC/Baltimore

and on many nights, the city and county jails as a visitor and as a prisoner. I hear the Cry of Anguish. I smell the death of poverty. I see the wounds from white hate unleashed upon “the other.” Long is white history. I hear the cries of the genocide of Native Americans, especially through the murder and treachery against the Cherokees. Dayspring Farm, the Open Door Atlanta’s retreat, was situated on Cherokee land. Murphy and I undertook a study of Cherokee history. We cried out against the Death March euphemistically called “The Trail of Tears.” Tears. Tears.

What I am struggling to say, to be, is I am a straight white male of the oppressor class, without admirable, nay with white supremacist ancestors. I know personal, social, class and historical grief and anguish. The gift: I have spent my adult life living, learning, listening, advocating among those in the hell of homelessness and the torture and cruelty of USA prisons; and with a deep abiding hunger for justice for the oppressed by reading the Bible, American history, theology and current events. The quest for solidarity with the outcast became the fundamental theological and ethical journey for Murphy Davis and me. I am not one of the oppressed. Like Moses, I grew up and was educated in the Big House. Like Moses, I had to run to a far country to meet the God of the Hebrews and the Black crucified Jesus. I heard in the 35th year of my life the mandate: Tell Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

**B** I was not prepared for the personal impact of the Hamas terrorist attack or the Israeli/USA war against Palestine. I am discerning a call from the God of the Hebrew to join the movement for the freedom of Palestine, for a secular democratic Israeli state with Netanyahu in prison beside 43, a two-state solution and a peace in the Middle East — of course, not in my life time, but the mission is to “Do the best I can ‘til I can’t.” as Willie Dee Wimberley, ODC saint, said.

**11/30/2013 | Baltimore (right)**  
**Ed Loring** at a Jewish Mourner’s Kaddish service.

**11/1/2023 | Baltimore (left and below)**  
**Ed and David Payne** at a Cease Fire NOW March.

**11/4/2023 | Washington DC (below left)**  
At another Cease Fire NOW March that **Ed and David** participated in, a medical worker attends a person passed out from the heat.



the existential loneliness of the greatest single slaughter of Jews since the Shoah. Her gift was encouragement and grace. “Think hard about the issue,” she replied. “I am not sure you qualify as an antisemite.” Now, a couple of months later, I believe I am not antisemitic; I have much self-interrogation and inner work yet. I will continue this inward journey that will take me the remaining few years I have left to try to get right.

## Blinded by the Light: Beginning to Regain My Eyesight

A few weeks ago, I told Nibs Stroupe that the war has thrown me for a loop, and I am not certain where my feet will land. I am taking a road not taken. I am shaky but growing stronger in a measure from my daily readings of the Hebrew Scriptures and attending synagogue worship by Zoom and listening to sermons by Rabbi Sharon Brous. My work for inner healing and Justice and Peace in the Middle East leads me to the two-state solution. The deeper I listen in word, deed and silence, each time I go to the streets for a ceasefire, when I join with Jewish liturgies and prayers of mourning, I experience a bit of healing. Yet, “I know what I see now is like a dim image in a mirror. ... What I know now is only partial....” (Apostle Paul)



## In the Beginning: A Confession of Sin

Shameful, unfeeling, without empathy for Jewish suffering from the Hamas slaughter, I immediately began to feel empathy for the Palestinians. I have been supporting Palestinian rights for many years. I immediately wanted a ceasefire. Forty-eight hours passed before I heard the cry of desolation mediated to me by the Jewish Left in the USA and particularly “Jewish Voices for Peace” and “If Not Now.” I bowed my head in prayer, seeking forgiveness for my calloused heart. How could I have been deaf to the Cry of the Jewish sufferers? I came up with the question: Am I an unconscious antisemite? I have believed we all suffer, and sorrow is a fundament of human meaning. I have never approved of the question “Who suffers the most?” I have not joined debates like The Middle Passage vs the Holocaust/Shoah. I have a Jewish aunt by Hannah’s marriage to Jason Buc. I wrote to her and shared that I was frightened that I am an unconscious antisemite. It took me 48 hours to appropriate the pain and

I begin with sharing resources for my study and understanding of the current events of the war. I am studying the history of Palestine and the beginning of Jewish settlement in Palestine, from Napoleon’s suggestion in 1799 which went nowhere, to the Zionists’ presence beginning in the early 1900s. I believe there is no understanding of history or the fight for freedom of the “Wretched of the Earth” without grappling with context. Always the questions: Who has the power and who are the powerless? How does racism relate? Are some groups deemed worth more than others? What are the forms of government, if the powerless even have a government? Is there occupation? What is the role of religion? Do one or more groups in the conflict have the religious destiny of exceptionalism? Of Messianism?

The primary document is the Book of Exodus, especially chapters 1-15. I am — the Holy Spirit and Roman Catholic theologians of the left be praised — a Liberation Theologian. The exodus story is the primary story to understand the world situation today. Its socio-political analysis is right, and the way to work for freedom is to be followed with the addition of Martin Luther King Jr’s teaching of the love ethic, necessarily made manifest by non-violence.

**Connections** continued on page 7



# The Dying Death Penalty: A Reflection

By Stacy Rector

In most of the advocacy trainings that I conduct around Tennessee, I am laser-focused. I want to make the most of every opportunity to give Tennesseans the tools they need to become more educated and activated in the work to end Tennessee's failed death penalty.

Last March, I was conducting just such a training for 50 students at Middle Tennessee State University, but this day I was distracted. A proposed bill to make the firing squad an alternate method of execution in Tennessee, in addition to our state's other methods of lethal injection and the electric chair, was up for a vote in a legislative committee hearing. A colleague was at the hearing, and she would periodically text me with updates. Most of them included your run-of-the mill, predictably frustrating comments from the bill sponsors or committee members, but one particular text made me gasp.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I read it again. During the committee's consideration of the firing squad bill, a Tennessee state representative requested an amendment to the bill that would add yet another method of execution in Tennessee. He leaned into the microphone and without hesitation said, "I would like to add an amendment to the bill to include hanging by a tree." You gasped too, didn't you?

With providential timing, the non-partisan Death Penalty Information Center released a report a few weeks after the session ended, shining a bright light on Tennessee's history by tracing the legacy from lynchings and racial discrimination to the current use of the death penalty.

The report emphasizes how the effects of uneven justice continue to delegitimize the state's capital punishment system, along with other state policies, in the present day.

According to this report, Tennessee was the site of approximately 500 lynchings from 1851-1947, with Black people representing nearly 75% of those lynched. As politicians became increasingly concerned about the prevalence of mob violence, they worked to move the public away from lynching and to a greater reliance on the death penalty.

Historically, Shelby County, home to Memphis, was among the 25 counties in the U.S. with the most recorded lynchings between 1877 and 1950. It is where journalist Ida B. Wells wrote an exposé about an 1892 lynching. The article so enraged white locals, they forced her from her home to relocate to Chicago. It is no coincidence that today Shelby County comprises just 13% of Tennessee's population but is responsible for one-third of the state's death sentences and 51% of Tennessee's current death row. Further, 60% of death sentences for Black defendants have originated in Shelby County. Compared to other counties of a similar size nationwide, Shelby County ranks third in the number of death sentences imposed.

To add to this toxic stew, Tennessee's continued reliance on lethal injection as a method of execution is so problematic that the state cloaks it in secrecy with confidentiality laws. Because of the lack of transparency and the extremes to which states will go to

procure the chemicals used to kill, the scheduled 2022 execution of Oscar Smith in Tennessee was stopped by Governor Bill Lee only an hour before it was to occur. The governor said that he became aware of a "technical problem" with the execution protocol and decided to stop the execution. Mr. Smith had just finished his last communion with his spiritual advisor while the victims' family had been escorted to the viewing room. The last-hour reprieve for Mr. Smith, though an answered prayer to be sure, is also a cruel reminder of the torturous process for those on death row and their families as well as for surviving family members of murder victims,

need, and have endured significant trauma when the process is inevitably botched. The state's unwillingness to carry out executions in the light of day reinforces our belief that we shouldn't be doing them at all.

Now for some good news! As the evidence continues to mount that the death penalty system is not only morally bankrupt but also fails on every level—from its inability to make us safer to its unfair application, from its human and financial costs to its risk of executing the innocent (195 death row exonerations since 1972)—the public is turning against it.

According to Gallup polling, support for the death penalty remains at its lowest level in decades. And in Tennessee, 53% of Tennesseans support alternative sentences to the death penalty when given the option over the 37% who support the death penalty, according to a 2022 Vanderbilt poll.

In November 2023, for the first time since Gallup started asking about the fairness of the death penalty's application, in a trend that dates back to 2000, more Americans say it is applied unfairly (50%) than fairly (47%). This represents a five-point increase in the percentage who think it is applied unfairly since the prior measurement in 2018.

Our voices and especially the voices of those who have been directly impacted by this system are cutting through the noise to give citizens a better understanding of the system's failures. This persistent message of a failed system that serves no one is having an impact.

In 2021, Virginia became the 23<sup>rd</sup> state to repeal the death penalty and the first Southern state to do so. If one includes states where there are formal moratoria on the death penalty or where the death

penalty has not been used in ten years or more, 39 states have ended it in law or in practice. Ohio, a historically active death penalty state, has a bipartisan repeal bill that is moving through its legislature, while in Oklahoma, the state with the highest number of executions



Vigil at Riverbend Maximum Security Prison in Nashville during the execution of Donnie Johnson in 2019.

Calvin Kimbrough

not only trapped in their trauma for decades without the help that they need to heal, but also at the mercy of a system that presumes that their healing is reliant on what happens to the people who have caused them harm.

After Tennesseans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (TADP), attorneys, and clergy held a press conference to urge the governor to stop the four other executions scheduled for 2022, he agreed to do so and subsequently requested an independent investigation into the status of the state's lethal injection protocol. The investigation's report, released in December 2022, found that the Tennessee Department of Correction failed to follow its own protocol, relied on shady compounding drug suppliers and did not provide proper training to staff—all the predictable results of a failed policy veiled in secrecy. Tennessee Department of Correction staff have carried out executions without the guidance that they

The investigation's report, released in December 2022, found that the Tennessee Department of Correction failed to follow its own protocol, relied on shady compounding drug suppliers and did not provide proper training to staff—all the predictable results of a failed policy veiled in secrecy.

per capita in the country, Republican lawmakers are calling for a moratorium because of their growing concerns about the death penalty's reliability.

Executions will likely continue in the short term, though we must do all that we can to stop them, but the long-term trajectory is moving toward the death penalty's demise. If we in Tennessee and across our country truly want to embrace a culture that promotes the dignity of life and public safety for all, our focus must shift from a continued investment in the overly punitive policies of the past, including the death penalty, to an investment in trauma-informed solutions that focus on accountability, healing and early intervention in the lives of those whose basic needs are not being met. We can't punish our way out of violence, but working together, we can find ways to heal and prevent it. ✦

*Reverend Stacy Rector serves as Tennesseans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty Executive Director; a vocation that she began discerning as a member of the Open Door Community in 1996. For 10 years, Stacy visited Steve Henley, a man on Tennessee's death row, and served as his spiritual advisor when he was executed in 2009. (stacy@tennesseedeathpenalty.org)*

<sup>1</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/02/execution-hanging-by-a-tree-tennessee-republican>

<sup>2</sup><https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-special-reports/how-racial-history-informs-tennessees-death-penalty>

<sup>3</sup><https://mlk50.com/2020/08/26/pervis-payne-and-the-color-of-capital-punishment-in-the-south/>

<sup>4</sup><https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-special-reports/how-racial-history-informs-tennessees-death-penalty>

<sup>5</sup><https://app.box.com/s/cxeblwhscz6a8mbngp6cylwbsz2c7jx/file/1102145253665>

<sup>6</sup><https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/public-opinion-polls/national-polls-and-studies>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.wate.com/news/vanderbilt-poll-asks-voters-about-criminal-justice-reform-abortion-and-more/>

<sup>8</sup><https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/news/poll-for-the-first-time-more-americans-believe-the-death-penalty-is-applied-unfairly-in-the-united-states>

<sup>9</sup><https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-year-end-reports/the-death-penalty-in-2022-year-end-report>



# MLK' s Most Radical Speech

By John Blake

*This is an excerpt from an article by John Blake, who is an online columnist with CNN. It was written for CNN in January 2023, and is reprinted with his permission.*

It's been called "the moment that changed everything," the day America "turned the mystic corner," and "the greatest political speech of the 20th century." As the nation celebrates the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s national holiday, millions of Americans will once again hear what has become the day's unofficial soundtrack: King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

The speech King gave 60 years ago in Washington has been endlessly replayed, dissected and misquoted. Here's another way to look at it: It's also the most radical speech King ever delivered. That declaration might sound like sacrilege to those who will point to King's thunderous takedowns of war, poverty and capitalism in other sermons. But "I Have a Dream" has arguably become his most radical speech — not because of what he said but because of how America has changed since that day.

The core concept in King's dream is racial integration — and it still terrifies many people 60 years later. Integration is "too threatening to the status quo to ever consider fully," says Calvin Baker, author of *A More Perfect Reunion: Race, Integration, and the Future of America*. The concept of integration that King evoked in his "I Have a Dream" speech is the most "radical, discomfiting and transformative" idea in U.S. politics, adds Baker, a professor at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. "It's the thing the mainstream fears the most," he says. "It's a beautiful speech and it's descriptive of integration. It sounds really good. And then you understand — whew — the work that's required."

This is the tragic irony behind King's holiday. Millions of Americans applaud the idyllic vision of integration he depicts in "I Have a Dream." But many of America's schools, churches and neighborhoods remain racially segregated today — a racial status quo that people on both the left and the right have come to accept. If that seems like an overstatement, consider this: When was the last time you heard a prominent religious or political leader use the term "integration" while talking about solutions for racial injustice?

To understand why King's message is so radical, it's good to ask what he meant when he evoked integration at the climax of his speech. At first glance, the answer seems to be physical proximity. In his speech King declared he dreamed of a day when "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood."



Bob Fitch

but something even more ambitious, even spiritual: an America where mutual mistrust between races and religions would be virtually eliminated by people living, worshiping and going to school together. They would see their common humanity and celebrate their shared identity as Americans.

It can all seem abstract, but Steinhorn distills what that world might look like in one pithy example: "If an African American knocks on the door of a white neighbor and asks for a cup of sugar, that white neighbor should see a neighbor." Here's another reason why King's dream was so radical. His concept of integration is what Baker calls "the biggest threat to the existing racial order." The existing racial order is still defined by one dynamic that shows little signs of changing: Many white Americans, on the left and right, refuse to stay in communities where the ratio of Black people exceeds a certain level. When non-white people arrive in larger than token numbers, whites invariably tend to move out. Sociologists

King's ultimate goal was not just equal economic opportunity but something even more ambitious, even spiritual: an America where mutual mistrust between races and religions would be virtually eliminated by people living, worshiping and going to school together.

But King didn't just preach that all Americans should be able to sit at that table, historians say. He also said they should all have an equal chance at getting a slice of the economic pie being served. "What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't earn enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?" King once said.

King never saw integration as assimilation — urging people of color to act like white people. "He didn't have in mind a romantic mixing of colors, or what I would call a kind of 'rubbing shoulders and elbows' approach to integration," says Lewis V. Baldwin, author of *The Arc of Truth*. "Dr. King meant mutual acceptance, interpersonal living and shared power." The power part is what often gets edited out during the ritualistic replays of King's speech. There is an economic component of King's dream that's hardly ever mentioned. The original title of that August 28, 1963, event, for example, was the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." "Integration is not just hanging out (together). It's having access to credit, it's seeing the value of your home increase, it's accumulating wealth," says Leonard Steinhorn, co-author of *By The Color of Our Skin*. "It involves employment, quality education and all of those things together."

King's ultimate goal was not just equal economic opportunity

have a name for this phenomenon — it's called a "racial tipping point." This dynamic is why what looks like a racially mixed neighborhood is often one that's on the way to becoming all-Black, says Steinhorn. "Integration exists only in the time span between the first Black family moving in and the last white family moving out."

This impulse to flee communities turning Black and brown goes deeper than abstract debates over property values, neighborhood schools and freedom. It's deeply rooted in American history, as the late author Toni Morrison said in an interview with *Time* magazine. She said every immigrant group learned that to be associated with Black people is to be associated with someone at the bottom. "In becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me — it's nothing else but color," Morrison said. "Wherever they were from, they would stand together. They could all say, 'I am not that.'"

Here's another irony associated with King's acclaimed speech. King's potent critiques of capitalism, war and poverty were shocking at the time. He turned off allies when he called for the redistribution of wealth, argued for a guaranteed income and came out against the Vietnam War. Those positions don't sound so radical anymore. After the 2008 Great Recession, the failed Iraq War and polls showing a majority of young Americans now hold a negative

view of capitalism, his views on those issues wouldn't sound out of place today. But his calls for integration have been virtually banished from public discourse. The concept of integration that King evoked has become so discredited that even many of those who believe in its goals no longer use the term.

One reason King's speech is so powerful is that it goes to the heart of how Americans are taught to define themselves: by adherence to a set of ideas, not by superficial physical appearances. It's no accident that King quoted from or evoked the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address in his epic speech. In his telling, integration was seen as a fulfillment of the American dream — the endpoint of the pursuit of a more perfect union.

"It was the ultimate expression of the melting pot idea, that the most victimized and vilified part of American society could be integrated seamlessly into mainstream life, and the white majority could overcome its prejudice and welcome Black Americans as full brothers and sisters in our national community," says Steinhorn. How many Americans still believe that is possible? Not Baldwin, the King scholar who has spent his life studying the civil rights leader. He talks movingly about growing up in segregated America and going to hear King speak in person two years after the civil rights leader gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. Close your eyes when Baldwin talks and his rich, honeyed Southern baritone even sounds like King.

Baldwin says the election of former President Trump, a new wave of antisemitic harassment and the rise of Christian White Nationalism has convinced him that King's vision of an integrated America really is just a dream. He, too, doesn't use the term "integration" anymore. "People tend to want to be associated with their own kind. That seems to be a natural tendency in the human spirit," Baldwin says, adding that he questions "the full actualization of the kind of integrated society Dr. King had in mind."

If racial integration is implausible, though, that leads to another question: Without racial integration, can the U.S. still call itself a democracy? King didn't think so, Baldwin says. "Dr. King made it clear that integration occurs before you have a multiracial democracy," he says. "We have to learn to live together as a single people before we can create this kind of democracy." Baker says the country can't continue to give up on the dream of integration. "When hope dies, you're defeated," Baker says. "If you believe that it is possible, it is in fact possible. If you stop, you've given up the race before it's started. It's hard and demanding, but it's deeply necessary."

Steinhorn says he puts his hope in a new generation of young Americans. The Gen Z generation, born from the late '90s onward, is the most racially diverse in the nation's history. He says polls show that they are more open on questions about race, ethnicity and sexual identity than any other American generation. "When you have a critical mass of that generation that subscribes to those principles and sets them as their North Star to be able to live in a society like that, that gives me a little bit of hope," Steinhorn says.

King believed in hope, too. "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." What's the alternative to losing that infinite hope? Bill Moyers, a former White House press secretary under President Lyndon Johnson, once offered an answer while describing Johnson's views. "He thought the opposite of integration was not just segregation," Moyers said, "but disintegration — a nation unraveling."

What would that unraveling look like? It might look something like what we've seen in this country in recent years: the Jan. 6 insurrection, a resurgence of antisemitism, the "very fine people" marching with torches in Charlottesville and white supremacist groups being designated as the nation's biggest terror threat. It may no longer be fashionable to talk about integration, but the alternative is worse: a nation unraveling. ♦

*John Blake is an award-winning journalist at CNN.com. He is also the author of More Than I Imagined: What a Black Man Discovered About the White Mother He Never Knew. He has been honored by the Associated Press, the Society of Professional Journalists, the American Academy of Religion, the National Association of Black Journalists, the Religion Communicators Council and with the GLAAD Media Award. He was most recently the winner of a 2019 Sigma Delta Chi Award for excellence in journalism for his online columns on race and politics.*



Gaza and its Consequences continued from page 1

“moderate” opposition lawmaker has suggested a “voluntary resettlement” plan, and government leaders have “suggested” options to the U.S. Most importantly, two powerful organizations behind Netanyahu’s judicial reform are now supporting population transfer. One, the Kohelet Forum, is *the* major Israeli right-wing think tank. The other, the Tikvah Fund, is a U.S. non-profit that funds the Kohelet Forum. Both have strong ties to the Federalist Society, and the president of the Tikvah Fund is none other than Elliot Abrams.

Where does that leave us?

We are in a radically uncertain moment. Possibilities will change, but here are a few thoughts on what may or needs to happen.

For any viable solution to emerge, Netanyahu must go, the PA needs new leadership, and Hamas leadership in Gaza must be replaced.

The PA has potentially strong leaders. But they are in Israeli prisons. Marwan Barghouti, a leading prison organizer, would win the Palestinian presidency in a landslide if an election were held. His leadership and resistance give him street cred throughout the

West Bank, even with Hamas supporters. Palestinians regard him as their Nelson Mandela. Israel wants ineffective PA leadership, but if we are going to resolve the Palestinian issue, Israel must negotiate with strong, effective leaders.

“Terrorist” is a term used to dehumanize opponents and organizations that a government wants to dismiss — or kill. Does Hamas engage in terrorist actions? Yes. Should those actions be condemned? Yes. But Hamas is also a political party and a national liberation organization with a broad political and social services wing and a military wing. The military wing uses terror tactics at times. The political and the military wings have separate leadership that don’t necessarily coordinate their actions. One difference in the current situation is that Yahya Sinwar, the political leader, is deeply involved with the planning and execution of the current Hamas attacks.

Israel can kill the current Hamas leadership. But they can’t kill Hamas. Hamas has an estimated 30,000 fighters and a substantial base of followers among Palestinians. Hamas is a minority, but Israel will have to include them in negotiations. Despite Israeli denials, they have been negotiating for years through various governmental and non-governmental channels. So, negotiations can happen.

My biggest concern is where Israeli leadership will come from. All the Israeli political parties are war parties right now and the Israeli public supports the invasion of Gaza by a wide margin. Who in Israel has the vision and courage to step up and be a peace party? We’ll find out.

We are in a moment of tragedy and suffering. It is also a moment of possibility. An unsustainable stalemate has been shattered. Most parties recognize that we cannot return to the *status quo*. A “new Middle East” requires a resolution that includes Palestinian freedom and political rights in some one-state/two-state/confederation with Israelis. Can that be achieved? That needs to be our hope and prayer. ✚

*Dr. Joseph Groves taught Peace and Conflict Studies at Guilford College and International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University. He directed Interfaith Peace-Builders (now Eyewitness Palestine), a delegation program for peace activists to Palestine and Israel. He has worked with FOR, Nonviolence International, and the Resource Center for Nonviolence. He has been a friend of the Open Door for 25 years. (jgroves210@comcast.net)*

Connections, Connecting the Dots, Intersectionality continued from page 4

I have found the following news sources the most helpful:

Best coverage of Palestine is “Democracy Now: The War and Peace Report” with Amy Goodman and others. I began listening 12 years ago.

Rashid Khalidi, “The Hundred Years War Against Palestine.” Book and several lectures on YouTube. Dr. Khalidi is the Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University.

A person who is transforming my seeing, even as she is one whose light blinded me, is Rabbi Sharon Brous of Ikar Synagogue in Los Angeles. I have listened to 15 of her sermons thus far. She brings to the Hebrew Torah interpretations of radical insights. I have worshipped by Zoom with Ikar twice thus far. I have never before experienced the love ethic for all people expressed in the heart of suffering and anguish. This is totally new for me. Ikar Synagogue has a YouTube channel. Here you can find Rabbi Brous’ sermons. In my story of faith, it may be true that the Rabbi is transforming my life as did MLK Jr in 1967-68. I had to get out of the South and into Drew University under the guidance of the most influential academic teacher of my life, Dr. Gordan Harlan, before I was transformed into a Kingian Disciple of Jesus. Who knows what is next? A Kingian Mosaic Disciple of Jesus?

The BBC World News is excellent. The NYT gives many points of view. Many are helpful. Particularly the editorials by Thomas L. Friedman. I will discover more as I walk along the new path. Do you have any suggestions for me?

Thank you, Shalom, Peace be with you, As-salamu alaykum. ✚

*To be continued in the next issue of Hospitality (March/April, 2024)*  
*We pray and we march and we petition and we write letters and we make phone calls to the powerful men of war. Maybe, just maybe the war will be over by then. Netanyahu and his far-right government says: “Not so.”*

11/4/2023  
Washington DC  
At the White House with the Cease Fire NOW March.  
Photograph from ODC/ Baltimore



*Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/Advocate/Ally at the Open Door Community in Baltimore. Pronouns: he, him, his. (edloring@opendoorcommunity.org)*

Seeking Justice: A review of The Fear of Too Much Justice continued from page 2

A second feature deepens the reader’s distress. Bright and Kwak refute any suspicion that they may have selectively chosen outlier examples by sharing multiple credible empirical studies, carried out over decades in dozens of states, that find significant percentages of convictions or sentences have been tainted by one or more of these evils.

Like *The Divine Comedy* itself, which did not heartlessly abandon its narrator in the ninth circle of the *Inferno* but gradually guided him through *Purgatorio* toward the *Paradiso* resplendent above, Bright and Kwak, at each point in their journey, share with readers a series of enlightened criminal justice practices that have been adopted in some model jurisdictions that might well work to eliminate, or at least curb, the worst abuses and practices that they have just disclosed. Conscientious legislators, judicial oversight committees and social justice advocates like *Hospitality* readers could all rely on this book as their guide for reform, demanding a system that at long last lives up to the promise of providing criminal justice. One mystery is why so many states and localities fail to do so. Why do so many harbor a fear of too much justice, as the book’s

title laments? Whatever the answer, Steve Bright and James Kwak clearly show why readers should set their shoulders to the wheel to resist oppression and work for a world that would impartially deliver equal justice under law. ✚

*John Charles (Jack) Boger is a longtime friend of the Open Door Community: While a death penalty defense lawyer with the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. from 1978-1990, he frequently worked with Murphy Davis in support of Georgia Death Row inmates. Jack later taught at the University of North Carolina School of Law, serving as UNC’s dean from 2006-2015.*



Becca Conrad

# HOSPITALITY

newspaper issues  
from 1982 to the present  
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## HOSPITALITY

Volume 1, No. 1  
January, 1982  
910 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E. Atlanta, Ga. 30306 404-874-9652

### What Is The “OPEN DOOR”?

This is the first edition of The Open Door’s newsletter and needless to say, we are excited about it! Hopefully you will hear from us 5 or 6 times a year with news about our ministry, our common life and the needs of our sisters and brothers on the streets and in the prisons. We value such a newsletter as a very important way to keep in touch with you, our co-workers and supporters--the folks who make our work possible.

**Our website is back, please stop by for a visit!**

# Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed & David,

In the midst of this time of mourning and grief for all the violence we live with, guns in this country and war and genocide in Israel and Gaza, I am thankful for *Hospitality*, particularly the last two issues.

I wish I could send you more of a donation, but I hope this helps a little because whatever I can offer where I *know* it will be used for furtherance of peace and justice, I will do.

I was thankful to hear you now have a Prius!

Blessings,

Nancy Davis  
Los Angeles, California

Dear Ed,

Susie Smith and I went to a wonderful “Cease Fire” rally Sunday led by Palestinians and other Muslims, Jews, Christians. I didn’t know there were so many Palestinians in Greenville. Many waving the Palestinian flag and little children leading chants. Beautiful.

I love you,

Nikki Day  
Greenville, South Carolina

## HOSPITALITY Prays

*Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism.*  
— Ron Ferguson

## Prayer for Generosity

O God of abundance, you are far more generous with us than we deserve.  
You give us the gift of life.  
You give us family and friends to walk alongside us.  
You give us vocations that add meaning to our lives.  
Most of all, you give us Jesus, the Christ,  
the one who invites us to live in beloved community,  
the one who calls us to serve those living with illness, poverty, or injustice,  
the one who brings us great joy as we worship and serve you.

Too often we overlook your generosity,  
cloistering ourselves in a self-centered world of our own private spirituality,  
fearing that there won’t be enough “stuff” to meet our desires,  
ignoring your call to live for justice and peace.

Our coins boast, “In God we trust,”  
when, in fact, we are often more inclined to worship the “almighty dollar,”  
when, in fact, making a profit is often the driving force behind our actions.

But you, dear God, have called us  
... to serve *you* more than we serve money,  
... to shun the idolatry of greed,  
... to give gladly to others, as you have given to us.

So, come, Lord Jesus, and dwell in our heart of hearts,  
so that we shall forever be your generous servants,  
so that we shall value you and our neighbors more than our possessions.

Come. Lord Jesus!

—Lee Carroll

*Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community. (lcarroll@ix.netcom.com)*

## The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring

“Violence can only be concealed by a lie, and the lie can only be maintained by violence.”  
— Aleksandr Solzenitsyn  
(Sent by Weldon Nisly)

### The Prayer Tree

In order to be truthful  
We must do more than speak the truth.  
We must also hear truth.  
We must also receive truth.  
We must also act upon truth.  
We must also search for truth.  
The difficult truth.  
Within us and around us.  
We must devote ourselves to truth.  
Otherwise we are dishonest  
And our lives are mistaken.  
God grant us the strength and the courage  
To be truthful.  
Amen  
— Michael Leunig

### Distracted

Basically our lives are, to a large extent, spent in avoiding confrontation with ourselves. And then you can begin to make sense of the enormous amount of our culture’s daily activities, which attempt to distract us from ourselves, from deep reflection, from deep thinking, from existential confrontation. There’s a wonderful phrase by the philosopher Kierkegaard, “tranquilization by the trivial.” I think our culture has mastered this better than any culture in history, simply because we have the wealth and means to do so.  
— Roy Walsh  
(Quoted in *The Search for Meaning* by Phillip Berman via [www.herondance.org](http://www.herondance.org))

*From Murphy Davis’ Prayer Book*  
“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”  
— MLK

give the gift of

## HOSPITALITY

A \$10 donation covers a one-year subscription to *Hospitality* for a prisoner, a friend or yourself. To give the gift of *Hospitality*, please fill out, clip and send this form to:

**Open Door Community**  
**PO Box 10980**  
**Baltimore, MD 21234**

- ☐ Please add me (or my friend) to the Hospitality mailing list.
- ☐ Please accept my tax deductible donation to the Open Door Community.

name:

address:

email:

phone:

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- ☐ Pop Tarts
- ☐ Single Serve Oatmeal Packets
- ☐ Assorted Small Cereal Boxes
- ☐ Pretzels
- ☐ Crackers
- ☐ Granola Bars
- ☐ Baby Wipes
- ☐ Travel Tissue Packs and Toothpaste
- ☐ 2 in 1 travel shampoo - 1oz. size
- ☐ small hand sanitizer containers

We have an Amazon Wish List: <https://tinyurl.com/yfjcr3bm>

