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This Joy That I Have

By Joyce Hollyday

Several years ago, I was invited to preach at a college in Pennsylvania during Advent. After the service, I went to the home of the chaplain for lunch. Her 6-year-old son, Kyle, had memorized the story of Jesus' birth from the Gospel of Luke, and he was anxious to recite it with a guest in the house.

He started out strong and did just fine until he came to the part where the angels appeared to the shepherds and proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace." He remembered the "Glory to God" part, but then his mind went blank. He thought hard. Suddenly his face brightened, and he launched into the story again with enthusiasm, attributing these words to the heavenly flash mob: "Glory to God in the highest ... and I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!"

Well, in a way, Kyle got it right. God intends for peace to prevail on earth. But what we see sweeping the globe are gale-force winds of war, destroying everything in their path. Tornadoes of terrorism touch down and spin off into perpetual cycles of vengeance and counter-vengeance. Hurricanes of hatred divide us one from another. And brutal blasts of greed rob the poor of homes and ultimately of survival. Our world is overtaken by tragic, senseless huffing and puffing.

As we await Jesus' birth once more in a troubled time, it seems critical to ask: What force is stronger than these winds? What has the power to tame them? The loudest voices we tend to hear say more violence, more firepower, more sophisticated counter-terrorism. But we have seen over and over the failure of that logic and the tremendous human cost.

When I was feeling overwhelmed and grasping for hope a couple of months ago, I looked to the angels. The shepherds in their field that Christmas night were terrified when God's beloved messenger showed up shining with glory — until she said, "Be not afraid" and assured them that she was bringing "good news of great joy for all the people." (Luke 2:10) As soon as she had relayed

The shepherds in their field that Christmas night were terrified when God's beloved messenger showed up shining with glory — until she said, "Be not afraid" and assured them that she was bringing "good news of great joy for all the people." (Luke 2:10)

the amazing birth announcement of a baby wrapped in bands of cloth who would bring salvation and justice, a jubilant multitude of angels joined her, singing out that good news and heralding the peace that was to overtake earth.

Okay, we're still waiting. But what we do while we wait is critical, because we know that peace rooted in justice isn't going to just fall out of the sky. I decided to stop acting so much like the scared shepherds and more like the joyful angels. In October, my partner, Bill Ramsey, and I joined the Rapid Response Choir. The choir, launched in February of this year in Maryland, describes itself as having several goals, including to "protect our community through song," "express outrage, bear witness, and call attention to injustices," "lend strength and show love to targeted

communities and individuals,” and “sing truth to power.” In the first week that Bill and I were part of the choir, we sang twice outside the federal courthouse in Greenbelt before hearings for Kilmar Abrego Garcia, the Salvadoran man who was mistakenly arrested by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and illegally deported to El Salvador’s notoriously brutal prison, CECOT (Center for the Confinement of Terrorism), then put into detention in the U.S. The following week, we sang on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., for No Kings Day, while many of the 200,000 protesters who showed up for the rally that day streamed past us. Several stopped to listen or sing along on that bright afternoon marked by hope.

The next Saturday we were in Annapolis, behind a dozen boxes holding thousands of petitions we would soon deposit on our governor’s doorstep, urging him to cancel Maryland’s contract with Avelo Airlines, which flies deportation flights out of Baltimore/Washington Thurgood Marshall Airport. The gathered crowd stood in hushed attention as we sang “Leaving on an ICE Plane,” an adaptation of Peter, Paul and Mary’s “Leaving on a Jet Plane”: “... Don’t know if I’ll be back again ... Oh please! Don’t make me go.”

I could describe many moving moments in our first month with the choir. Most poignant for me was singing “Carry It All” outside the Greenbelt courthouse to family, friends and allies gathered on behalf of Kilmar Abrego Garcia. Tears came to my eyes as we sang “You do not carry this all alone ... This is way too big for you to carry it on your own. You do not carry this all alone.”

At the heart of the angel’s “good news of great joy for all the people” is a charge and a promise: Be not afraid, for you have not been abandoned. There is One coming among us who brings salvation, justice and peace. And no matter what else comes at us, no matter how frightening or overwhelming it may feel, we are not



Bill Ramsey and Joyce Hollyday (far left) sing in Annapolis with the Rapid Response Choir at the October 25 protest of Avelo Airlines’ deportation flights.

alone. God is with us, and we are all in this together.

And that, friends, is a reason for hope. And for engaging in joyful resistance. Our “great joy” comes from another realm, by means of a heavenly messenger, delivered long ago on a chilly night to scared shepherds. As another of my favorite Rapid Response Choir songs boldly proclaims: “This joy that I have, the world didn’t give it to me ... The world didn’t give it, the world can’t take it away.” ✠

Joyce Hollyday, a United Church of Christ pastor and former editor of Sojourners magazine living near Baltimore, has been a friend of the Open Door Community for more than four decades. She is the author of several books, most recently Pillar of Fire, a historical novel, and is the editor of Murphy Davis’ memoir, Surely Goodness and Mercy.

Bishop’s Cross Award

Mary Catherine Johnson, a board member of the Open Door Community, recently received the Bishop’s Cross Award, an honor bestowed by Bishop Robert Wright of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta to recognize individuals for exceptional service, faith and leadership within the diocese. Mary Catherine is currently celebrating her 10th anniversary as the executive director of New Hope House, a nonprofit ministry that serves death row prisoners and their families in Georgia.

Left to right:
Margaret Johnson
(Mary Catherine’s mother),
The Right Reverend Bishop
Robert C. Wright,
Mary Catherine Johnson



Easton Davis

The Fig Tree Has No Blooms

By Catherine Meeks

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

—Habakkuk 3:17-18

Our hearts resonate with the words of this ancient prophetic message each time we hear it, and especially as we approach this season of Advent. Advent begins right after Thanksgiving, a formally designated time to be thankful and to anticipate the season of giving that we call Christmas. This is a good time for us to interrogate ourselves about what these prophetic words have to do with us and the season that we are about to embrace. In the Judeo-Christian tradition this is a season of waiting expectantly for the rebirth of the Christ Child in our midst. A time of regeneration, renewal, remembering and reaffirmation of our intention to live our lives in service to the light, love, energy and power that is embodied in accepting the Christ Child's call to a new way to see and to behave in the world.

It is time to go deep into the heart of the matter and take a good look at what we find in our open hearts as we move toward Advent and other seasons designated for deep soul searching. What will it take to wait and watch with an obedient heart?

If you are like me, you are ready for change. This year has brought many moments of goodness, light, blessings, hope but there have been other moments of meanness, darkness, unkindness and reasons for despair. The challenges have been great, and when the negative thoughts and feelings have come, each of us in our own way has had to try to find a path to follow that led to something other than despair and its immobilizing energy. We can identify with Habakkuk's weariness.

Though Habakkuk lamented to God

about the state of affairs during a period of deep chaos and destruction in his land, he heard the surprising word that God was going to do a new thing that had not been seen before. It seems that we can take these words for ourselves as we navigate



Ricardo Levins Morales

our way forward in this present moment. We need a new thing to happen in this land of ours. We have spent centuries pretending to be far better than we are. We have imagined ourselves as a nation filled with people who are Christians and who want to live in obedience to God's call upon us. While there are times in our nation's life when we have engaged in doing many good things, we have a deep other side, a shadow or unacknowledged side that has managed to very effectively lead us away from doing what is right or good.

The shadow or unacknowledged side supported the early nation builders when they were practicing genocide against the Indigenous Nations whom they found on this land upon their arrival. The shadow side supported the idea that Africans had to be a part of this land as slaves because they were necessary for the development of the land. Even though slavery was not a good thing, the thinking was that it needed to be tolerated. It was this way of thinking that made it possible to bring Mexicans, Asians and other immigrants to this land to work while treating them as less than human. They were treated this way because they were needed to build a new nation on the homeland of those who were here before the Europeans arrived. This was the European way of thinking, that all this exploitation and enslavement was in keeping with the will of God. The unacknowledged side, the shadow, helped to justify all of this behavior.

This idea of life that emerged here — based upon the ability to justify almost any behavior no matter how dehumanizing it was — seemed to be a necessary part of the journey to building a great nation in this new land. And it has led us to this present moment. We are witnessing the results of thinking that the ends justify the means, no matter who is dehumanized. It has led to the behavior of present-day police brutality, ICE violence, an administration cutting access to food via SNAP, demolishing health care, killing innocent people in Caribbean waters, supporting genocide against Palestinians, war and unmitigated practices of greed at the highest levels of the government. Yes, our fig trees are bare, the olive crop looks bad, and many will literally have no food soon. Our fields have food rotting in them and our farmers are going bankrupt. But maybe God wants us to rejoice because a new thing is being built. We might emerge from this dark night with a new way to see.

Well, it is time to go deep into the heart of the matter and take a good look at what we find in our open hearts as we

move toward Advent and other seasons designated for deep soul searching. What will it take to wait and watch with an obedient heart? Where are the answers? Habakkuk is making it clear that at the end of the lament, there is nowhere to go but back to God. His lament invites us to appreciate that the lament is important, but it is not the end of the story. The externals in our lives matter but cannot be allowed to be in charge of us.

The fig tree blooms in our hearts when we dare to rejoice regardless of how we feel. We see those blooms when we join together in community. We see them when we declare, “yet will I rejoice,” no matter the circumstance of the day. ✦

Catherine Meeks was the recipient of the Joseph R. Biden Lifetime Achievement and Service Award in 2022. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Turquoise

and Lavender Institute for Transformation and Healing. She has published eight books, including her latest, *The Quilted Life: Reflections of a Sharecropper's Daughter*, in 2024. She and Nibs Stroupe are authors of *Passionate for Justice* (2019), a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. She is involved with prison work, visits on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty.
(cmeeks@turquoiseandlavender.com)

No Kings Day! 2

Washington, D.C.
10/18/25



Left: **Ed Loring** and **David Payne** rode the train to Washington, D.C., to join the Rally.

Photographs by David Payne

The Christian Right Is on the Wrong Side of Jesus

By Joe Ingle

In the aftermath of the murder of Charlie Kirk, there has been much commentary about the style Mr. Kirk utilized. He would visit college campuses and invite debate with students about the points he was raising. However, there has been little analysis of the substance of what Mr. Kirk believed and promulgated. An examination of the agenda of Mr. Kirk and Turning Point, U.S.A., the organization he founded, reveals some troubling ideas and examples.

Mr. Kirk believed the country had literally reached a turning point. He dedicated himself to mobilizing young people to join his organization by turning the country to embrace Christian principles. Mr. Kirk and Turning Point advocated Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism believes the United States of America is and should be a Christian country. Explicitly, on the local level: school boards, city councils, courts and mayors; on the state level: legislatures, the courts and the governor; and at the federal level, the three branches: Congress, the Judiciary and the Executive — all positions should be occupied by Christians. This is considered by Christian nationalists to be not just their idea, but the will of God.

This political/theological viewpoint is powered by a literal interpretation of the Bible. Mr. Kirk, influenced by conservative

The world view that Christian nationalists inhabit is a binary one. It is a triumphalist vision where their side wins, and all opposed are vanquished. They are dedicated to putting people in power who will fulfill their vision. There is very little mention of the teachings of Jesus in Christian nationalism.

evangelical pastors, stated: “We have these answers, because our book, the holy word of God, is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago.” If one lives a life on the basis of words based on that perspective, it is easy to understand how Mr. Kirk could tell Taylor Swift, “Reject feminism. Submit to your husband, Taylor. You’re not in charge.” (8/26/25) Or how he viewed the transgender question: “We need to have



Leila Register | NBC News

a Nuremberg-style trial for every gender affirming clinic doctor. We need it immediately.” (4/1/24)

The world view that Christian nationalists inhabit is a binary one. It is a triumphalist vision where their side wins, and all opposed are vanquished. They are dedicated to putting people in power who will fulfill their vision. There is very little mention of the teachings of Jesus in Christian nationalism. Indeed, it seems to be a

in the synagogue, he read from Isaiah 61:1-2: “The spirit of the Lord has been given me, for God has anointed me; God has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favor.” (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus then informed his hometown gathering that these words were being “fulfilled today even as you listen.”

In Luke 6:20-28 are the Beatitudes. They turn the way of the world upside down:

How happy are you who are poor:
yours is the kingdom of God.

Happy you who are hungry now:
you shall be satisfied.

Happy you who weep now:
you shall laugh.

Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of humanity. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

version of Christianity that sees Christ as a king rather than a peasant in the Galilee, teaching and healing the dispossessed.

It is time to recall some of the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth and note that they are the antithesis of the man from Galilee from a kingly perspective. Let’s begin with the Gospel of Luke. Jesus has just returned to Nazareth after his baptism by John the Baptist and journey in the wilderness. Teaching

But alas for you who are rich; you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep.

Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. (Luke 6:20-28)

The teachings of Jesus call us to a way of life utterly opposed to Christian nationalism. There is no summoning for anyone to build a state but rather commit to a way of life that includes the poor, the dispossessed, the alien, the stranger and the prisoner.

Recently, a prayer vigil for Charlie Kirk was held in Franklin, Tennessee, a cradle of Christian nationalism. Several hundred people turned out for the vigil. A picture of the vigil revealed only one Black person in attendance.

At the heart of Christian nationalism is a “white makes right” perspective. The movement is overwhelmingly white and has retrograde ideas of Black people. Charlie Kirk described the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 as “a mistake.” This legislation ended segregation in the South. His numerous quotes impugning the ability and intelligence of Black people, such as challenging the “cognitive ability” of Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and of Michelle Obama, are beyond the scope of this article, but are deep concerns for all of us.

Christian nationalism is all for white-washing history. In its view, slavery is diminished as a problem, the genocide of American Indians ignored, the era of segregation brushed over (Jim Crow), Neo-slavery (the convict lease system)

barely mentioned and the New Jim Crow (mass incarceration) unheard of. From their point of view, history is the story of white making right.

Of course, this welds seamlessly with President Trump in his exercise of power and view of the world. This is the man who purchased a full-page ad in *The New York Times* in 1989 calling for the execution of five teenagers of color for a crime in Central Park they did not commit. As demonstrated at Charlie Kirk’s memorial service, Mr. Trump and Mr. Kirk were in lock step.

It is an obscenity to equate the way of power and privilege with the Way of Jesus. It reminds one of the quote from Gandhi: “I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” ♦

The Rev. Joseph B. Ingle is a United Church of Christ minister who leads a weekly Bible study at Christ Church Cathedral in Nashville, Tennessee. Too Close to the Flame: With the Condemned inside the Southern Killing Machine, is his memoir.

Pulled Over in Short Hills, NJ, 8:00 AM

It’s the shivering. When rage grows
hot as an army of red ants and forces
the mind to quiet the body, the quakes
emerge, sometimes just the knees,
but, at worst, through the hips, chest, neck
until, like a virus, slipping inside the lungs
and pulse, every ounce of strength tapped
to squeeze words from my taut lips,
his eyes scanning my car’s insides, my eyes,
my license, and as I answer the questions
3, 4, 5 times, my jaw tight as a vice,
his hand massaging the gun butt, I
imagine things I don’t want to
and inside beg this to end
before the shiver catches my
hands, and he sees,
and something happens.

— Ross Gay

Ross Gay was born in Youngstown, Ohio. He earned a BA from Lafayette College, an MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College, and a PhD in English from Temple University. He teaches at Indiana University. This poem is from his book *Against Which*.

Seventy Years Later — MLK in Today's World

By Nibs Stroupe

This year marks the 97th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta in 1929, as well as the 58th anniversary of his assassination in Memphis in 1968. King was one of the great prophets in American history in both word and deed, and in these days of tremendous repression and oppression in this country, it will serve us well to see what we can learn from King's witness seventy years after he was thrust into the national spotlight in the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. What would he say to us today?

In early 1954, King was finishing his doctoral studies at Boston university. He had been in conversation with Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, about becoming their pastor. The pulpit was vacant after the Reverend Vernon Johns had been forced out for being too radical — his niece Barbara Johns was one of the pioneering spirits of *Brown v. Board of Education* in a case in Farmville, Virginia, where she led a walkout and boycott of schools because of their segregated and unequal status. In their search for a new pastor, Dexter Avenue was looking for someone more refined and less radical. They were impressed with King, and in the spring of 1954 they asked him to become their preacher.

King accepted their call to become the next pastor of Dexter Avenue, and he gave his acceptance speech on May 2, 1954, which was just two weeks before the U.S. Supreme Court announced its monumental and unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In his acceptance speech, King told his new congregation:

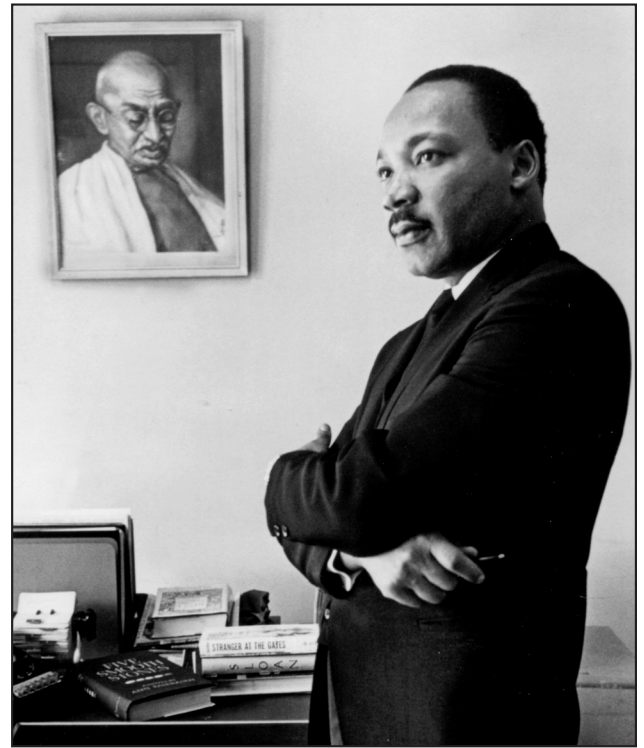
"I have no pretense to being a great preacher or even a profound scholar. I certainly have no pretense to infallibility — that is reserved for the height of the divine rather than the depth of the human." He continued: "I come to you with only the claim of being a servant of Christ, and a feeling of dependence on his grace for my leadership. I come with a feeling that I have been called to preach and to lead God's people." Shortly after accepting this

position, he proposed a list of recommendations for the revitalization of the church. King insisted that every church member become a registered voter and a member of the NAACP. He also organized a social and political action committee "for the purpose of keeping the congregation intelligently informed concerning the social, political, and economic situation." King might be more refined than Vernon Johns, but right away he was leaning in that radical direction. Dexter Avenue was ready, however, and they accepted these recommendations without changes.

The white-dominated South was beginning to be in upheaval as King became pastor of Dexter Avenue. All the white, male governors of the South not only accepted neo-slavery as the norm — they actively participated in maintaining its stranglehold on the hearts and minds of all Southerners, Black and white alike. Yet, the resistance was building and coming. The 1954 Supreme Court decision rocked the white South to its core, and the white "massive resistance" campaign went into full action. In August 1955, Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi, but on December 1, 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott began,

I think that the first thing
that King would tell us
in this oppressive age is
that we must be driven by hope
rather than despair.

spurred on by the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her bus seat to a white person. Part of her inspiration to stay in her seat was her promise to Emmett Till's memory to do something to move the South toward justice. King would soon become president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and they would begin to lead us all out of the wilderness of neo-slavery.



Bob Fitch

From there, King would go on to be one of the main voices of the Civil Rights Movement. From Montgomery to SCLC in Atlanta, to the Birmingham Campaign, to the March on Washington, to the killing of the four little girls at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, to Mississippi Freedom Summer, to the March on Selma, to Black Power in Mississippi, to the Chicago Campaign, to his public opposition to the Vietnam War, to the Poor People's Campaign, to the sanitation workers strike in Memphis, King was dedicating his life and his energy to show us a vision of what equity and justice could look like in the USA. He would do this in the midst of demagogues like Governor George Wallace in Alabama, whose inauguration speech in 1963 touted "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

King lived in a time of the violent repression of Black people and white sympathizers, so he had no delusions about what time it was in America. But he also believed in the power of the idea of equality, an idea that often had him using this refrain: "How long? Not long! How long? Not long! How long? Not long!" So, I think that the first thing that King would tell us in this oppressive age is that we must be driven by hope rather than despair. In these Trumpster days, we live in a time of fear and despair, and King would seek to fire us up to be driven by a vision of hope and equality.

No unrealistic hope here — King lived in an age of white supremacist violence and oppression. He would tell us that George Wallace and Orval Faubus and Ross Barnett or Donald Trump do not have total control over us or over our imaginations. The idea of equality is a powerful one that will not be denied, no matter that white supremacy is now making its comeback.

Second, King would urge us to stick with the idea of non-violence in our resistance to the forces of oppression and tyranny. Confronted by the military and police might of the Trumpster, some of us might be tempted to lean into violence not only as a strategy but as a necessity. King would strongly wrestle with us to stay with the idea of non-violence, not only because it forces us to see the other as human, but also because of what violence does to our own psyches and understanding of ourselves and of others. King used the Jesus approach: be as wise as serpents and gentle as doves. Jesus said these words to his followers not because he was in power but because he was not in power — he was subject to arrest and violence at the hands of the Roman Empire at any time. King wanted his followers to remain true to themselves and true to the humanity of others.

Third, King would urge us to be resisters to the current political rulers. As the Civil Rights Movement reminded us, there is no neutral ground here. King's approach to non-violence did not mean passivity. It meant a strong dedication to seeing others as human, but at the same time resisting the evil ways that they perpetuated and maintained. Those who are resisting the ICE raids are showing us the way; resistance is a must in these days. King was arrested over 30 times for civil disobedience, and one of his great letters was written from a jail cell in Birmingham. King reminds us that we must resist the unjust powers that are currently prevailing, and his life and his death demonstrated the cost of such resistance. As he noted in his "Drum Major Speech" in 1968, we must use all our might and imagination to resist the triple threat of racism, materialism and militarism.

Fourth, King would urge us to refuse to accept others' definitions of our own humanity and the humanity of others. He insisted that we see ourselves as children not of racial classification, or of money,

or of violence, or of religion, or of culture. Rather, we should see ourselves as children of God, by whatever name we call God. King brought a radicalism to this approach to our own humanity and to the humanity of others. Only by knowing our own worth can we withstand the headwinds of the triple threat in our lives.



Chuks Okeke

I don't think that King was a Calvinist, though I have my suspicions. His final word to us would be a caution to keep hold of an understanding of our deep captivity to the triple threat of racism, materialism and militarism. They are always with us, sometimes flowing into an underground stream,

We live in dangerous times, but so did King. And his witness in those times reminds us that we must be true to ourselves, and we must be organizing and resisting in community, so that love, justice and equity can prevail.

at other times roaring at us as they are doing now, seeking to make us bow down and worship them, accepting the definition of ourselves and of others as something to be feared and thus to be oppressed and crushed. We live in dangerous times, but so did King. And his witness in those times reminds us that we must be true to ourselves, and we must be organizing and resisting in community, so that love, justice and equity can prevail.

His own words put it best in his "Drum Major Speech" in the instructions for his eulogy, given at Ebenezer Church two months to the day before his assassination:

"If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long.

And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize — that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards — that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. And that's all I want to say." ✦

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door, retired pastor and author of Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision and She Made a Way: Mother and Me in a Deep South World. He and Catherine Meeks are authors of Passionate for Justice, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. He is managing editor of Hospitality. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)



Annual Homeless Memorial Nashville, Tennessee 12/20/2025

Open Table Nashville, The Contributor, the Nashville Rescue Mission and others journeying with Nashville's unhoused population, hosted this year's Annual Homeless Memorial which is held close to the longest night of the year. The gathering is by the Tara Cole Memorial Bench, at the corner of Lower Broad and First Avenue, by the Cumberland River. Tara Cole, a 32-year-old homeless woman, was pushed into the river in August 2006 as she was sleeping and drowned.

Reflections on the state of homelessness in Nashville were followed by the reading of names of each unhoused person who died during the year, 169 in 2025. There was a time for sharing individual remembrances. Flower petals were then cast into the river to honor those who had died.



Photographs by Calvin Kimbrough



Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

I hope that this finds you and everyone on your end well.

Me... I need knee replacement in both knees, especially the left knee, but the D.O.C. won't pay for it. But they will charge me \$5 for a sick call request each time with three refusals at \$5 each (\$20 total).

Macon Mistake Prison lives up to its name. It is a mistake if you are here. It is also Georgia's slaughterhouse of prisons. More homicides here than any other prison in Georgia. Yes, I belittled Georgia. It makes BIG MONEY off its slaves (prisoners), but does not worry about their health. Food has got so bad, I slopped hogs better.

Store prices are ridiculous, all prices went up November 3. For example, a bar of Safeguard went from \$1.12 to \$2.15! Medical is a joke... this whole prison is a joke. I miss death row and facing death. L.W.O.P. is just a prolonged death penalty.

I miss Murphy and your visits. Al (Lawler) still visits when they will let him. Bless his heart. I hope he lives forever, but like myself and everyone else, reality is really real!

As always, I am truly grateful for the monthly gift. It doesn't go as far as it once did, but I am blessed.

God Bless & Prayers,
Prisoner

Ed,

Thank you for this book, but also for sharing the letter Murphy wrote four days before she crossed over. And also your poem. Both touched my heart. (You may have seen my tears in my tiny Zoom window.)

I'm grateful to have been in the HARP study with you (*Healing Affluenza and Resisting Plutocracy* by Ched Myers). I am thankful also for your decades — lifetime dedication to the work you do. As Duncan, my husband, and I start our Catholic Worker in New Hampshire, we will keep you in the loop. And we'll love to reach out with open hearts for guidance & wisdom.

Your Friend,
Bethany Hobbs
El Paso, Texas

49th Annual Pow-Wow

Baltimore American Indian Center
11/15/2025

The BAIC was founded by Lumbee Tribal Members in 1968. BAIC is open to Native community members from all tribes and nations. It serves as a hub for the American Indian community's social and cultural activities.

Below: **David Payne, Nancy Davis and Ed Loring** represented the Open Door.



David Payne



HOSPITALITY

newspaper issues
from 1982 to the present
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HOSPITALITY

Volume 1, No. 1 January, 1982

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.

Although many of you know something about us and about our comments and our work, we decided to include a word about ourselves as a way of introduction. The Open Door is a Christian, covenant community of 4 partners, a children and a street friend. Murphy Davis, Bob Johnson and Carolyn Johnson were at one time all members of Clifton Presbyterian Church. Ed and Murphy were there for 5 years, during which time Ed served as pastor. Carolyn and Bob joined the congregation in 1976 and Bob served as a ruling elder for two years. Out of a common concern for mission at Clifton, we four began to intensify our Bible study and prayer in the Fall of 1979. During these times we discerned that God was calling us to serve the poor and to live our lives based on the Scriptures.

From November '79 until Easter of '81 we provided the leadership to begin and sustain Clifton's Night Hospitality Ministry. This ministry used donations and volunteers to provide transportation, shelter, food, clothes, showers and hospitality to approximately 30 homeless ones every night for almost 2 years. (With our leaving, the Clifton congregation took over the leadership and continues the night hospitality work there.)

As the work with our homeless friends grew, we did our commitment and work with prisoners. We all began to share more deeply in Murphy's and Ed's ongoing work with Southern Prison Ministry. As we have found it important to share that same heart ministry with women and men who are jailed inside the prisons and jails of our state. God's good grace calls us to visit a simple act of compassion where we meet again and again Jesus Christ and learn of his suffering in a world filled with unrepentance.

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Issues of *Hospitality* are posted to the Open Door Community website under the "Archives" Tab. If you would like to be notified when we post *Hospitality* issues, updates, photographs and writings on our website, please go to www.opendoorcommunity.org and at the bottom of our main page enter your email address and subscribe. Subscriptions are free.

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HOSPITALITY *prays*

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

A Prayer for the Journey

We journey, O faithful God,
seeking to escape all that enslaves us:
to escape religions that worship idols such as money, ego and comfort,
to escape politics corrupted by a lust for power, ego and self-interest,
to escape economic structures that unjustly oppress many people.

Along the way in our life journey, there are moments ...
when we feel utterly lost, lonely, unaware,
when we fear the future,
when we wonder where we're headed.

As we journey...
we often assume that escape is impossible,
we often surrender to the evils that define our space,
we often fear that you have withdrawn from us and no longer care.

But,
then we remember how you journeyed with your people out of slavery in Egypt,
then we remember how you restored your people from their Babylonian captivity,
then we remember how the resurrected Jesus walked alongside his disciples,
bringing hope-filled joy,
promising that your Spirit will always be with us,
affirming that you are a God of resurrection,
a God who is forever present,
a God of justice, peace and love.

So, Lord God, help us continue to journey with hope.
Help us find our way because YOU are journeying with us.
It is a joyful journey, O God, for YOU are our destination, our true home!
And we are deeply grateful!
Amen and amen!

— Lee Carroll

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

Houston Wheeler

1/4/1947 - 11/14/2025

The Open Door Community is sad to share the news of the passing of Houston Wheeler on November 14. He and spouse, Anne, were longtime comrades and justice workers with us and with many other organizations.



We especially give thanks for his support and work in the Imperial Hotel takeover, People for Urban Justice, the Grady Coalition and so much else. Witnesses and friends like Houston rarely pass our way, and we give thanks that we received so many gifts from his life and his witness.