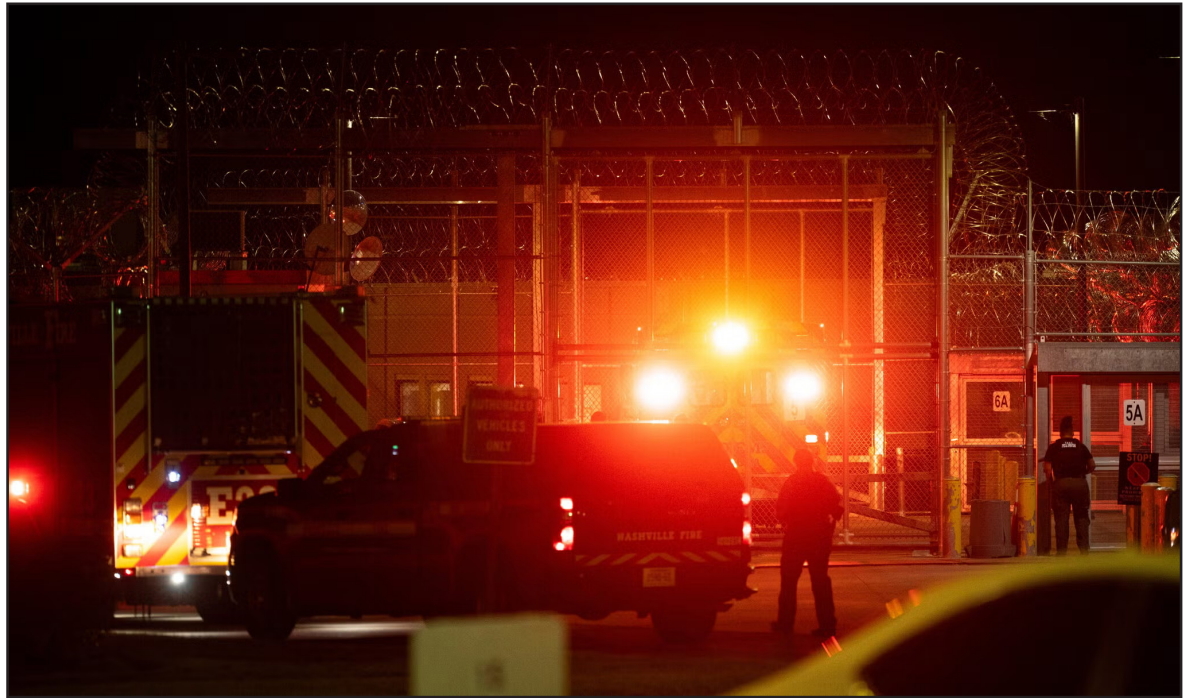




2026 Riverbend Maximum Security Institution | Denny Simmons/Tennessean

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2019 Riverbend Maximum Security Institution | Calvin Kimbrough

By Joe Ingle

In 1977, in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling the Tennessee death penalty unconstitutional, the General Assembly of Tennessee began fashioning a new law that would make it constitutional. There was significant opposition — I was part of it — but after numerous discussions and hearings the legislation was enacted into law. I have continued to be involved in responding to the administration of this horrible law for the 49 years since its passage.

My experiences have led me to understand that this is a totally immoral practice that is cloaked by language which obscures the horror and cruelty of the process. Let us imagine we undertook the following actions: For what we deem a good reason, we imprison someone where he cannot leave and is encased by steel bars and concrete. He never touches grass. We tell him we will kill him either by electrocution or poison. We leave him in this situation for 20-40 years with doom hanging over his head. We have several dry runs where we move him to an area where he will be killed, and he expects to be killed. But it is just practice, so we can determine we have the routine down pat. Then he is returned to his confined space. Finally, we do kill him after he makes the terrible choice of electrocution or poisoning. The medical examiner lists the cause of death as “homicide.”

If we conducted the process I just described, we would be considered cruel, perhaps heartless, and participating in a premeditated killing. Yet this is precisely what the state of Tennessee is doing to its citizens. The assumption is that the passage of the 1977 law endowed the state with the moral right

to kill its citizens. But the law is not moral merely because it is the law. Indeed, every major religious organization that has a position on the issue is opposed to the death penalty. The consensus is that we are created in the image of God; we are children of God and we do not have the right, legally or otherwise, to kill each other.

We cannot continue to allow language to hide what is taking place when the state kills its citizens. Execution is a euphemism for public murder or state killing. It is official “killing,” rather than the death penalty or capital punishment. As the death certificate states, it is “homicide.” To understand the cruelty of the process we turn to Darrell Hines who had a killing date of August 13.

We cannot continue to allow language to hide what is taking place when the state kills its citizens. Execution is a euphemism for public murder or state killing.

Hines suffered a stroke in December 2025. Centurion, the health contractor for the prison, refused to allow him to be hospitalized. He was given aspirin and returned to his cell. In January of this year he experienced a second stroke. He was placed in the infirmary at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. He was blind in one eye, paralyzed on his right side, could not walk, needed help eating, and continued to be untreated.

Seventy-two hours prior to the killing, he was moved to death watch in Building 8. There are four holding cells there, with the lethal equipment down the hall. Given Darrell’s disability, a holding cell had been “remodeled” to accommodate him. We are not

privity to the details, so we wonder. Perhaps he was wheeled into death watch from the infirmary in a wheelchair. Then after three days, transported to the gurney in a wheelchair or a stretcher, lifted up to the gurney and strapped down for poisoning. Who knows? He was killed as scheduled.

Next, we have Christa Pike, the first woman scheduled for killing by the state since the passage of the 1977 law. She is scheduled to be killed on September 30. Then, to complete the killing spree for 2026 we have Gary Sutton, totally innocent, set for extermination on December 3.

As I consider the process and the pending state killings, one word comes to mind: Really?

Addendum

The Tennessee killing machinery revved up to exterminate Christa Pike on September 30th at 10:00 a.m. Surprisingly, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a stay of execution. The State appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and Christa remained in her death watch cell but not strapped down on the gurney. As twilight descended, the Supreme Court lifted the stay of execution (6-3 vote). Christa was taken to the killing chamber, strapped down on the gurney and the killing procedure started out in front of the media and witnesses. The initial injection of

poison did not kill her. There was difficulty, as predicted by her legal team, in finding a vein. The second injection proceeded with the same problems, Christa telling them to



Tennessee Department of Corrections

“Put it higher, it might be better up there.” She lapsed into unconsciousness. However, she was still breathing, and snoring could be heard. The curtain to the killing chamber then was closed. Time went by without anyone knowing what was happening,

as her snoring continued. The media and witnesses were taken out of the killing chamber, and all were wondering what was occurring.

Sometime later, outside in the darkness, a fire truck and an ambulance came rolling up, with lights flashing and a siren wailing. The ambulance disappeared into the prison grounds. After a short time, it returned and left the premises with the siren wailing. Christa Pike was still alive and being transported to Vanderbilt Hospital. On October 6 she regained consciousness and began talking. She is the first prisoner to survive the lethal effort to poison someone. At a hearing on October 7 in Chancery Court in Nashville, the defense lawyers asked the Chancellor to preserve all materials and evidence involved in this attempted killing. The Chancellor granted the motion.

Praise be to God! Christa lives, and the fight continues. Gary Sutton’s December 3 killing has been stopped by Governor Lee, while all of this is investigated. ✠

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.

What Can I Do for My Friend

By Tom Hagood

It was one of those weeks. It began when I received a phone call from the director of the school that leases space at our church. She told me about one of their families. Marina and her husband, Igor, had spent seven years building a life in Decatur with their four daughters.

Igor, who was born in Moldova, worked as a truck driver and had a pending asylum case. While hauling a load from California to Tennessee, he was stopped in Arkansas for an oversize-load violation. He was jailed, placed under an immigration detainer, and eventually transferred by ICE to the Winn Correctional Center in Louisiana.

Marina says Igor had a valid work permit and documentation of his pending

asylum case. But suddenly the life they had spent seven years building began to completely unravel. Igor was their primary source of income. Marina sold his truck and other possessions, applied for assistance for their children, and started a fundraiser. Families from the school surrounded them with support.

They couldn’t free Igor. They couldn’t take away the fear. But they could make sure Marina and her daughters did not face it alone. And perhaps no one has expressed what this family is enduring better than Marina’s six-year-old daughter. After hearing her mother explain that some people do not welcome immigrants, she said: “But if you are not welcome, I am not welcome.”

That is just one family’s story. And the calls keep coming. I received another



Photographs by Calvin Kimbrough

call on Wednesday. This time it was from Caminar Latino, an organization that works with families experiencing domestic violence. They told me about a Guatemalan

mother here in Atlanta with three minor children. Her husband is currently in jail on a domestic violence charge. And now their mother has been arrested by ICE and transferred to a detention center in Louisiana.

Think about that for a moment. *Three children are suddenly without either parent.* Sadly, their mother had never completed an emergency family plan; she probably never imagined she would need one. But now she's been denied bond and is awaiting a court date before an immigration judge. Because the children were born in Guatemala, Caminar Latino is trying to obtain Guatemalan passports for them in case their mother is deported. However, right now, there are much more immediate questions: *Where will these children live? Who will care for them? Where will they go to school?*



On Thursday morning, my phone rang again. This time it was my dear friend Santana. Santana was born in El Salvador and is now a United States citizen. He told me that a friend of his, who was very frightened, had called him. Santana's friend has lived in this country for more than 30 years and even owns his own business. He has built a life here. But he's undocumented. And now he's afraid that the life he's spent more than 30 years building could disappear. Santana called me because he didn't know what to do for his friend. And then he asked me two questions. They're questions that keep echoing in my mind: *"What can I do for my friend?"*

Can you help him?

Many of us who work with our immigrant neighbors probably hear those same questions over and over: *What can I do for my friend? Can you help him?* Every week, I receive calls from the immigrant support organizations with whom we work. They tell us about people who are so frightened that they're afraid to leave their homes even to buy groceries. So, we organized teams of volunteers to accompany an immigrant individual or family. They bring groceries. They bring household supplies. They help with practical needs.

But what those volunteers are doing is so much more than just delivering food. They are building relationships. Because living isolated and afraid can become its own kind of detention. And so our volunteers want every person we accompany to know something very simple:

*You are loved.
You have not been forgotten.
You are not alone.*

And still the calls keep coming. Each one a personal crisis that threatens to overwhelm an individual or an entire family. That's when I got a call that threw my own church into crisis mode. I'm not going to use his real name. I'll call him "José." José has lived in our church for the past five years and is greatly loved, not just by our congregation, but by so many other faith communities who have come to know him throughout Decatur.

José showed up for his regular ICE check-in, where he was detained. The reason given was that he had been 30 minutes late for an appointment back in July. It was a blatant lie. For five years, José has faithfully and dutifully been to every single ICE check-in. He's always followed the requirements placed upon him. He's never been in trouble with the law. He quietly goes about his life, working as a bus driver for an afternoon school program at a local church.

But two ICE officers met him at his latest check-in and escorted him away to be processed down at 160 Ted Turner Drive: Atlanta's notorious ICE headquarters. And by one o'clock the next morning, José was walking into Stewart Detention Center after a two-and-a-half-hour drive into the middle of nowhere in west central Georgia.



His attorney is now doing everything she can to seek his release. His wife is terrified that she may never see him again. The children at the school where he works can't understand what happened to José. And the people at our church who've known and loved him for five years are asking the same questions: *What can I do for my friend? Can you help him?*

I could keep going. There are so many more stories. Because the calls keep coming. The emails keep coming. The requests for help keep coming. And every one of these stories is part of a much larger story unfolding across our country. But what truly breaks my heart is that our immigrant brothers and sisters in this country are being dehumanized by a cruel, oppressive and unjust system. They become numbers. They become statistics. They become categories: *"detainees," "cases," "undocumented immigrants," "asylum seekers."*

And somewhere along the way, we lose sight of the human being behind those categories. So maybe part of our work is simply this: *We must keep putting the faces back into the story.* Igor has a face. Marina has a face. Their four daughters have faces. Those three children suddenly without their parents have faces. Santana's frightened friend has a face. José has a face.

And behind every person who's detained, behind every person hiding in fear, behind every person facing

deportation, there's another circle of people whose lives are being affected.

There's a spouse who cannot sleep. A mother who is crying. A father wondering where his child has been taken. A daughter waiting for someone to come home. A child wondering why someone they love has disappeared.



And that's why we are called to do something — to do anything to help our immigrant brothers and sisters because it does matter. We may not be able to change

the entire immigration system tomorrow. We cannot answer every phone call. We cannot solve every problem. We cannot keep every family together. But we can answer those questions: *What can I do for my friend?*

Can you help him?

We can accompany.
We can advocate.
We can bring food.
We can help families develop emergency plans.
We can connect people with lawyers.
We can visit detention centers.
We can show up at court hearings.
We can contact elected officials.
We can stand beside frightened families.
We can speak when others cannot speak for themselves.
And sometimes, perhaps the most important thing we can do is simply refuse to allow another human being to disappear.
We can look another person in the eyes and say:
I see you
I know your name.
I know your story.
And I will not forget you.

Because somewhere tonight someone is sitting inside an immigration detention center.

Someone else is afraid to leave their home. Someone is wondering whether it's safe to go to work tomorrow. Someone is wondering whether going to an ICE check-in will mean never coming home again.

And somewhere else, someone is waiting for that person because Someone loves them.
Someone misses them.
Someone is praying for them.
And they keep asking those questions: *What can I do for my friend?*
Can you help him?

We are called to remember that before anyone is an immigrant, before anyone is undocumented, before anyone is an asylum seeker, before anyone is a detainee, before anyone is a case number, *they are a human being.* And for those of us who come to this work out of our faith, there's something more we dare to say:

Before anyone is an immigrant, documented or undocumented, they are a child of God — created with dignity, worthy of respect, deserving of justice, and called to a life of hope. ☩

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I Walk Into Every Room and Yell Where the Mexicans At

i know we exist because of what we make. my dad works at a steel mill. he worked at a steel mill my whole life. at the party, the liberal white woman tells me she voted for hillary & wishes bernie won the nomination. i stare in the mirror if i get too lonely. thirsty to see myself i once walked into the lake until i almost drowned. the white woman at the party who might be liberal but might have voted for trump smiles when she tells me how lucky i am. how many automotive components do you think my dad has made. you might drive a car that goes and stops because of something my dad makes. when i watch the news i hear my name, but never see my face. every other commercial is for taco bell. all my people fold into a \$2 crunchwrap supreme. the white woman means lucky to be here and not mexico. my dad sings por tu maldito amor & i'm sure he sings to america.

y yo caí en tu trampa ilusionado. the white woman at the party who may or may not have voted for trump tells me she doesn't meet too many mexicans in this part of new york city. my mouth makes an oh, but i don't make a sound. a waiter pushes his brown self through the kitchen door carrying hors d'oeuvres. a song escapes through the swinging door. selena sings pero ay como me duele & the good white woman waits for me to thank her.

— José Olivarez

José Olivarez is an American poet and educator born and raised in Calumet City, Illinois, son of Mexican immigrants. He earned a BA from Harvard University. Poem Copyright © 2017 by José Olivarez. Originally published in Poem-a-Day on December 1, 2017, by the Academy of American Poets.

Drinking from Wells Previously Out of Sight

A Review of Wesley Granberg-Michaelson's *The Soulwork of Justice*

By Alan Jenkins

It is late into the year 2026. Each week, the crises intensify. Without ceasing, stones cry out for justice — from inside the prison cell whose air-conditioning broke, from outside the unaffordable house where hope bangs on the back door, all enveloped by the pressure cooker of extended drought and intensified storms. Medicaid cuts top one trillion dollars as the U.S. scrapes the bottom of the barrel for every bomb it can find to defend its Israeli outpost — the dying hope for Western dominance of a land that is not ours.

We advocate for and pray, “Thy Beloved Community come.” Yahweh-Elohim, the God of the exodus and the diaspora, beckons us to follow. We are new creations in Christ Jesus, laboring in the work for liberation from the bonds of eternal indebtedness. We lift our voices. We put our bodies on the line. We provide essential suppers. We are Christ’s body. And ... we are human. We are subject to exhaustion, subject to anxiety, subject to despair.

While I live and work on a seemingly idyllic, small regenerative farm east of Atlanta, the following surround me: growing data centers, an expanding electric vehicle plant being constructed over streams and aquifers, a proposed ICE detention center and food insecurity.

Enter stage left: Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and his new book, *The Soulwork of Justice: Four Movements for Contemplative Action*. In these pages we find an invitation to drink from wells previously out of sight. It even seems I hear Jesus’ words take on renewed truth, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mt 11:30) Before reviewing the book’s particulars, however, I want to briefly introduce Granberg-Michaelson and share a bit of the context from which I read his book.

Granberg-Michaelson (G-M, if I may) writes from over four decades of church leadership. He began his ministry in the

The Soulwork of Justice by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

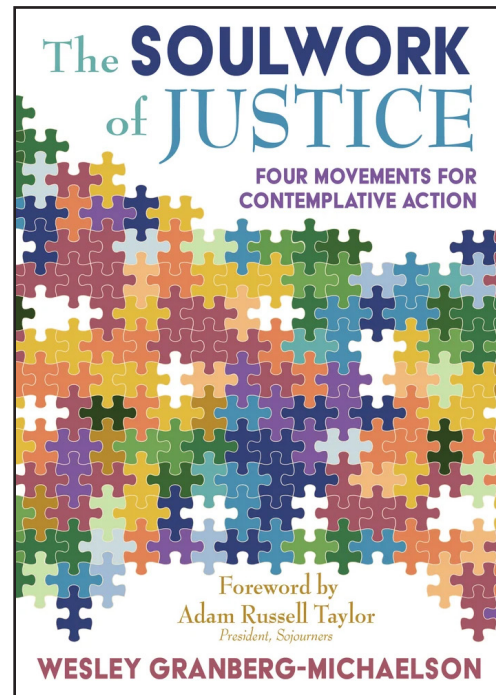
Orbis Books
224 pages
2025
Softcover

political realm as legislative assistant to U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield — an Oregonian who never once approved a military authorization bill, from Vietnam to the Gulf War. I like to think G-M played a role in that stand against Earth’s greatest enemy, the U.S. Military (see Abby Martin’s 2026 documentary, *Earth’s Greatest Enemy*). G-M then served as Director of Church and Society for the World Council of Churches, and he later chaired the board of directors for Sojourners in Washington, D.C.

To begin on a personal note, I shunned inner soulwork early on in my ministry formation as well as in my formal theological education. I assumed that such was all individualist navel-gazing, serving only as distraction (conscious or

subconscious) from the real issues of peace and justice that we must all be about. And now my current context ...

The Soulwork of Justice enters my life right on time, as I hope it will for you. While I live and work on a seemingly idyllic, small regenerative farm east of Atlanta, the following surround me: growing data centers, an expanding electric vehicle plant being constructed over streams and aquifers (the irony is not lost on me), a proposed ICE detention center (these facilities meet Webster’s definition of a concentration camp) and food insecurity, all in the middle of a complex local culture that both embraces and shuns these



realities in seemingly nonsensical ways. The court hearings on these cases exhaust the soul, as our community raised upwards of \$600k to battle 20 private lawyers hired by the State of Georgia.

This all drains my soul, to say nothing of the intensifying drought that puts my regenerative farming practices to the test. Further, did you know that the world’s oceans have never been hotter in the history of human civilization than they are right now? Can we really fathom what that means? Climate collapse can now no longer be stopped.

Wherever you find yourself engaging in the struggle, Granberg-Michaelson’s four-fold path nourishes the inner soul for the outward struggle. Below, I draw from the first two of the four main practices that are From Self-Sufficiency to Belonging, From Certainty to Connection, From Grandiosity to Authenticity, and From Control to Trust.

From Self-Sufficiency to Belonging

Arising from his monastery retreats and life with Church of the Savior

(Washington, D.C.), G-M evolves from an admittedly unhealthy place of solitary self-sufficiency. Through critical self-reflection he comes to see that “Belonging in communities of vulnerable relationships and in the intimate embrace of God’s love became comfort for me.” He continues, “In times of crisis, anxiety and pain, instead of falling backward into protective isolation [of the self], you fall forward into vulnerable, loving bonds of belonging.” (pp. 70, 71-72).

We are all exhausted, and that’s not always because the struggle for peace and justice is difficult, though it certainly is that. We exhaust ourselves, too, when we think we are the lone voice of truth. G-M confesses the fallacy of his possessing exceptional leadership, which resides especially in the psyche of Euro-American (white) males, which he and I both are. This acknowledgement (a lifelong process) frees him toward a community of belonging. And in that movement, he finds, “Our thirst for justice can only be sustained if we draw on this love, becoming embedded in the depths of our being.” (p.72).

From Certainty to Connection

Consider this: We of the movement for peace and justice have a tendency to hold our views with absolute certainty, with ‘right or wrong’ binary thinking. Of course, those on the political and theological right succumb to this temptation as well. For our sake, G-M humbly offers the errors of his binary-thinking days, however ‘right’ he may have been.

G-M digs into the world of binary tendencies buried deep in the roots of the Protestant Reformation. He shows how such thinking saps sustenance from our souls, even if we are on the right side of history. He invites us to a different way — a faith led by awe beyond our own perceived superiority, a faith that opens the door to the embrace of community.

Granberg-Michaelson encourages us, “This is never a flight from the world. ... Rather, ... it provides the sustaining, irreplaceable heart of your commitment to justice.” (p.91) He emphasizes, too, that we find community among human communities (communities of faith, neighbors, et al.) as well as among the community of Creation. After all, God,

our ground of being, is also found in that majestic topsoil and all that flows from it. Apart from this community of Creation, we lose our humanity, buried in the idols of technology that turn us toward an inward, toxic wasteland.

On this note of Creation as community, I refer you to the poem, “The Peace of Wild Things,” by agrarian writer Wendell Berry. How very timely was the honoring of Wendell Berry in the last edition of *Hospitality*, just before



Academy Mill Farm

Alan Jenkins at Academy Mill Farm.

the conclusion of his earthly 92 years. As an ancestor now, he continues to be in community with us if we continue to open his books.

If you read the first sections of the book and begin to think that G-M projects too much of his own past struggles onto his readers, you might be right. If you think his writing style scatters a bit, I will not disagree. Moreover, you may not have the time or funds to afford such monastic retreats as he, nor may you have access to cast your line on trout streams, where he loves to decompress.

However, do not let these critiques excuse you from this important work. Alternatives exist that we can all afford, if only in practicing meditation at our bedside

or digging deeper into our respective communities of faith. If you hang in there with his writing, you will find a balm in your Gilead of hearts. You will find practical steps to sustain you in the struggle for the Promised Land on Earth. I promise.

In gut-deep, eyes-wide-open honesty, I feel defeat and despair, anxiety and loneliness will continue to be a part of our journeys to come. Failure and frustration will seemingly rule our days ahead, at least some of them. We will become hot-headed. We’ll lose our cool. We’ll experience depression. (My health insurance premiums increased by a factor of three in 2026, but I still see a doctor to assist me with mental health, and you should, too, if you suspect your mental health keeps you from engaging with life). We will feel alone. We will feel small. We’ll be exhausted and uninspired. Sea level rise will exponentially encroach, from Bangladesh to Baltimore. But be ye of good cheer — the kingdom of God is among you, and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson helps us tap into this kingdom practically, soulfully.

For additional reflections on *Soulwork*, feel free to reach out to me at the contact info below. ✦

The Rev. Alan Jenkins (Open Door Resident Volunteer, 2001-2002) serves part-time as chaplain for Pediatric Hospice and Palliative Care of Georgia, manages www.academymillfarm.com in Rutledge, Georgia, and is a minister member of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta by way of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church as a parish associate. (jenkins.alan73@gmail.com)



Claudia Nietsch-Ochs

Meditation in the Spring Rain

In the April rain I climbed up to drink
of the live water leaping off the hill,
white over the rocks. Where the mossy root
of a sycamore cups the flow, I drank
and saw the branches feathered with green.
The thickets, I said, send up their praise
at dawn. Was that what I meant — I meant
my words to have the heft and grace, the flight
and weight of the very hill, its life
rising — or was it some old exultation
that abides with me? We'll not soon escape
the faith of our {fathers} — no more than
crazy old Mrs. Gaines, whom my grandmother
remembers standing balanced eighty years ago
atop a fence in Port Royal, Kentucky,
singing "One Lord, one Faith, and one
Cornbread." They had a cage built for her
in a room, "nearly as big as the room, not
cramped up" and when she grew wild
they kept her there. But mostly she went free
in the town, and they allowed the children
to go for walks with her. She strayed once
beyond where they thought she went, was lost
to them, "and they had an awful time
finding her." For her, to be free
was only to be lost. What is it about her
that draws me on, so that my mind becomes a child
to follow after her? An old woman
when my grandmother was a girl, she must have seen
the virgin forest standing here, the amplitude
of our beginning, of which no speech
remains. Out of the town's lost history,
buried in minds long buried, she has come,
brought back by a memory near death. I see her
in her dusky clothes, hair uncombed, the children
following. I see her wandering, muttering
to herself, as her way was, among these hills
half a century before my birth, in the silence
of such speech as I know. Dawn and twilight
and dawn again trembling in the leaves
over her, she tramped the raveling verges
of her time. It was a shadowy country
that she knew, holding a darkness that was past
and a darkness to come. The fleeting lights
tattered her churchly speech to mad song.

Wendell Berry was born in Port Royal, Kentucky in 1934 and was an American novelist, poet, essayist, environmental activist, cultural critic and farmer. Berry was an elected member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, a recipient of the National Humanities Medal, and delivered the Jefferson Lecture for 2012. He was also a 2013 Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He died at age 92 on August 31, 2026.

When her poor wandering head broke the confines
of all any of them knew, they put her in a cage.
But I am glad to know it was a commodious cage,
not cramped up. And I am glad to know
that other times the town left her free
to be as she was in it, and to go her way.
May it abide a poet with as much grace!
For I too am perhaps a little mad,
standing here wet in the drizzle, listening
to the clashing syllables of the water. Surely
there is a great Word being put together here.
I begin to hear it gather in the opening
of the flowers and the leafing-out of the trees,
in the growth of bird nests in the crotches
of the branches, in the settling of the dead
leaves into the ground, in the whittling
of beetle and grub, in my thoughts
moving in the hill's flesh. Coming here,
I crossed a place where a stream flows
underground, and the sounds of the hidden water
and the water come to light braided in my ear.
I think the maker is here, creating his hill
as it will be, out of what it was.
The thickets, I say, send up their praise
at dawn! One Lord, One Faith, and one Cornbread
forever! But hush. Wait. Be as still
as the dead and the unborn in whose silence
that old one walked, muttering and singing,
followed by the children.

For a time there
I turned away from the words I knew, and was lost.
For a time I was lost and free, speechless
in the multitudinous assembling of his Word.

— **Wendell Berry**

From Farming: A Hand Book (1970)

Seven Steps: Implements of Resistance

By Nibs Stroupe

In the April/May issue of *Hospitality*, I wrote about resisting the current Trumpian regime and mindset, and I asked each of us to find our implements of resistance. The time is now for picking up those implements of resistance to the resurgence of white, male supremacy by the Trumpster and the MAGA movement. One hundred and thirty years ago, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled 8-1 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 to make

because white supremacy and racism are persistent parts of America — those of us classified as “white” believe that white men should dominate. Some of us may be mean and violent about it; some of us may have individual friends of color, but all of us — liberals and conservatives alike — believe that white men should be in charge. That belief is what makes people like Donald Trump possible. To resist this persistent power, we must pick up implements of change and resistance, and I want to suggest a seven-step program as

entitled “Order Our Steps.” Though these seven steps are useful for other kinds of captivity (like sexism) and are also useful for those not classified as “white,” they are meant primarily for those of us classified as “white.”

RECOGNITION is the first and hardest step for those of us classified as “white.” It is the most difficult step for us because it demands that we recognize and acknowledge our complicity in the system of white supremacy. None of us classified as “white” can escape this recognition. It is an absolute necessity if we are to begin to find some liberation from our captivity. This is not a step intended to produce guilt. It is intended as a realistic recognition that we are swept up in the system of race, and the system of white supremacy that evolves from the system of racial classification benefits those of us classified as “white,” whether we are conscious of these benefits or not. I’m not asking everyone to say, “I am a racist,” though that may indeed be true. Rather, this step asks us to recognize that we participate in racism, that we are benefactors of the idea of white supremacy. The beginning point in wrestling with the system of race and its power is to recognize that we participate in it and benefit from it.

REPENTANCE is the second step. This step asks us to acknowledge our participation in the idea of white supremacy and to make a commitment to seek to diminish its power in our individual and communal lives. It is akin to the biblical idea of turning around and believing in and seeing a new way of life. Once we have worked the first step of Recognition,

Like addicts, we must continue to work these seven steps regarding racism and its power over us. Those seven steps are: recognition, repentance, resistance, resilience, reparations, reconciliation and recovery.

begin with the sixth step of reconciliation, but that step must be preceded by five other steps, steps which will enable us to be ready for reconciliation. I’ll take us briefly through these steps now, and if you want a fuller treatment, see the book that Dr. Catherine Meeks and I wrote together: *Passionate for Justice: Ida B. Wells as Prophet for Our Time*, especially chapter six

this step is a natural corollary. The idea of Repentance asks us to make a conscious effort to change our lives in relation to the power of white supremacy.

RESISTANCE is the third step, and it asks us to find places in our individual and communal lives to resist the power of racism and white supremacy. Those of us classified as “white” must start with



Jack Delano

neo-slavery the law of the land, using the infamous phrase that “separate but equal” was constitutional. Neo-slavery (not “Jim Crow” as it is often called) was already the practice in America, but *Plessy v. Ferguson* codified it. Neo-slavery remained legal until the unanimous SCOTUS decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 overturned it. Neo-slavery was so powerful that it remained in effect until the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. It then went underground before peeking its head out in the Reagan Revolution and then fully emerging in the Trump years. And now, with the recent SCOTUS decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*, in which the Voting Rights Act was further eroded, it feels like we might be returning to *Plessy* days. By the way, both cases came out of Louisiana.

Why so much power for neo-slavery? Why does it persist so strongly and so permanently? It remains strong in American culture because it is a deep and powerful river that runs through American history,

learning that people classified as “other” have been in resistance mode for centuries in this country, including Ida B. Wells, who should become a role model for all of us as the MAGA tidal wave of racism seeks to overwhelm us as it did in her life with the Plessy decision. We are asked to recognize where our imaginations are captured by racism and seek to change the way we imagine our lives and the lives of others. Before retirement, my friend and colleague Inez Giles and I often did workshops together on combatting racism in our lives. She is an African American elder whom I met at Oakhurst. One of our early workshops was with Clergy and Laity Concerned, a liberal group who had organized against the Vietnam War and kept going after the end of the war. At the end of one of these workshops, an older white woman came up to Inez to ask her advice on solving a dilemma in her life. She and her husband employed a Black woman who worked as a maid several days a week, and the woman stated that when she drove the woman home, she allowed her to ride in the front seat with her. But, she added, when her husband drove the maid home, he made her sit in the back seat of the car. She asked Inez, “Which of us is right? What should I do?” Without skipping a beat, Inez answered, “You should give her the car.” The white woman had a stricken look on her face, and she walked away in a state of dismay. Inez’s response points us to this third step of resistance: we must engage our racism and think outside the box in doing so.

The fourth step is RESILIENCE, and in this age of retrenchment by MAGA and other racist groups, we must hunker down for this step. The system of race and white supremacy is deep and powerful, and it is ever evolving. Just when we make a few steps of progress in pushing back the power of racism, it shape shifts and presents itself in another way. It has survived for so long because it is resilient. We must also be resilient in our resistance to it. White supremacy will not fall over and wither because some of us call it out in public, and we must recognize that in

this journey, we are in it for the long haul. Regarding the SCOTUS decision on the Voting Rights Act, it may take us a moment to recover and find a new approach, but we can learn from Ida Wells and others — acquiescence is not an option. In working this step of RESILIENCE, we will need to find communities who are working in this area. Seeking to resist the power of racism by ourselves will burn us up and burn us out.



Mike Luckovich / AJC

REPARATIONS is the fifth step.

Despite the difficult nature of the previous steps, this step of REPARATIONS is often the most difficult for white people, because it usually involves money. It is difficult because it forces white people to admit that our economic status is not just the result of our own individual hard work, but also because of the economic system favoring us. While there are some local governments and churches working on this step, it generally encounters great resistance among those of us classified as “white.” Reparations literally means doing repair work, and in this area there are at least two aspects. One is financial — we will need to find ways to pay for the centuries of financial exploitation that used the free labor of enslaved peoples to build white wealth. Second, we will need to acknowledge that the economic system has been, and continues to be, rigged against people of color in this country and around the world.

RECONCILIATION is the sixth step. Those of us who are classified as “white”

want this to be the first step of this process, but reconciliation can only come after the first five steps have been worked. The word “reconciliation” literally means coming together again, but in American history, we have never been together the first time. We began as slavers and enslaved, so perhaps this sixth step should be re-named to “Conciliation.” If we are to begin a process of seeing one another as siblings rather than as enemies, we must

recognize, repent and resist the current system of white supremacy that seeks to tell us that white men should be in charge. Until those of us classified as “white” can acknowledge the deep captivity to race that resides in each of us, reconciliation is not remotely possible.

The seventh step is RECOVERY, and although this is an important step in the engagement with addiction, I am hesitant to use it in this context because white people are so anxious to prove that we are not racists. Yet, in this context it accurately describes the level that we can reach if we work the other six steps

in the process. I am more comfortable using the idea that those of us whites who have worked this process will now know ourselves as “recovering racists,” rather than seeking to move toward a sense of innocence for ourselves regarding race. The truth is that because race is so deeply interwoven into the fabric of our beings as white people, we will never reach a time when we will be over our racism. But if we work these seven steps, we will begin to find our way toward life, justice and equity.

IT IS TIME TO RESIST! ♦

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)

A Well-Deserved Honor

By Lee Carroll

Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GfADP) recently named Mary Catherine Johnson as the 2026 recipient of its annual Mary Ruth Weir Human Rights Award.

The award was presented to Mary Catherine at GfADP's annual Awards Celebration on Saturday, October 3, at the headquarters of the Southern Center for Human Rights in downtown Atlanta. The event was hosted by GfADP's Board of Directors and their new Executive Director, Vanessa Griddine-Jones. Since its inception in 1990, GfADP has actively advocated for the abolition of the death penalty in Georgia.

Mary Catherine has served as the Executive Director of New Hope House in Jackson, Georgia, since 2015. Immediately prior to that, she was a part-time volunteer with the Open Door Community of Atlanta and went on to join the community and serve on their Leadership Team. There, under the tutelage of Murphy Davis and Ed Loring, she became deeply involved in prison ministry and resisting the death penalty. Her experiences with the Open Door Community were formative for a life of

compassion and hospitality.

New Hope House serves Georgia's death row prisoners and their families by hosting people when they visit imprisoned loved ones or come for an execution. She routinely visits those on death row and attends capital trials as a friend of prisoners and their families. New Hope House provides a safe, loving, and non-judgmental guesthouse for visiting families.

As a long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community (now based in Baltimore, Maryland), Mary Catherine participates in the mission of the Open Door by visiting prisoners and distributing small monetary gifts to them each month. At Christmas for many years, she has continued the tradition of the Open Door Community by organizing the distribution of the Murphy Davis Gift Package for each person on Death Row.

New Hope House was established in 1988 by Mary Ruth and Ed Weir, with the support of the Open Door Community and other organizations that support the abolition of the death penalty. Mary Ruth became a very important person in Mary Catherine's life and was instrumental in her being called to serve as Executive Director



GfADP
Mary Catherine Johnson (right) with Vanessa Griddine-Jones, Executive Director, GfADP.

of New Hope House. There, Mary Catherine has continued the legacy of Mary Ruth in her gifted practices of radical hospitality. So, it is very fitting that Mary Catherine has been recognized by GfADP as the recipient of the 2026 Mary Ruth Weir Human Rights Award. Mary Ruth would undoubtedly have been very pleased!

Congratulations to Mary Catherine Johnson for an honor well deserved!

Thank you for contributing
to the Open Door
Community. Please scan
this **QR Code** to use Paypal
or a credit card to make
your gift.



Thank you for your loving
support of the Open Door
Community!

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. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

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HOSPITALITY *prays*

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

I, the Lord, made you and will not forget you. (Isaiah 44:21)

Remembering God

O faithful God, You have remembered us through all our years,
and therefore, we dare to be a hopeful people.

You remembered us through your mighty acts of creation,
inviting us to be stewards of your good earth.

You remembered us
as You walked with Moses and our Hebrew ancestors

out of slavery and into the “promised land;”
as You sent faithful prophets and our Lord Jesus to guide us in faithfulness,
embodying your call to seek a just peace;
as You raised up leaders like Martin, Desmond, Teresa, and Murphy,
who were obedient to your promises,
who have lived out your dreams for the world.

Indeed, You have never forgotten us; but we are a forgetful people.

Your prophet, Hosea, spoke for You, lamenting that:

*When I fed them, they were satisfied;
when they were satisfied, they became proud,
and then they forgot me. ¹*

So, we now confess that as *individuals*, we too often act with selfish pride,
hoarding your financial and material gifts for our personal desires,
forgetting your call to serve the poor, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned.

We now confess that as a *nation* we often act with selfish pride,
thinking that political power should primarily benefit the wealthy,
forgetting our own history of slavery, colonialism, and ongoing racism,
squandering your call for us to be peaceful and generous people.

We now confess that as *communities of faith*, we too often act selfishly,
persuaded that our faithfulness is best measured by prominence and comfort,
ignoring your call to work for social justice, to live for those who hunger and suffer.

Please, dear God, help us always to remember your mighty and loving acts.

“Turn our memories into hope;
Turn our gratitude into energy.
Turn our well-being into impatience.” ²

Deliver us from false pride, idolatry, doubts, and fear,
that we shall gratefully remember You through lives of thanksgiving and obedience.

We remember, O God;
Forgive our forgetfulness! ³
AMEN.

— **Lee Carroll**

¹ Hosea 13:6

² Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, p. 103.

³ Adaptation of Mark 9:24.

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)