

Ordinary Time  
Early February, 2021

# Magnificat



Dear Friends,

We are really missing our annual visit from the University of Connecticut right now – writing this newsletter and looking forward to our mailing process, which will have to be masked and distanced, and without the amazing energy we usually have from those young people's January visit. We hope next year will be more normal, and we can welcome them again to our house and our city!



Most of our activities are curtailed now because of the COVID virus, but we are continuing as best we can to offer hospitality. We ask people to test before they move in, and isolate while waiting for test results. People in

the house mask when not in their own rooms, rotate use of the kitchen, and keep distanced. The distancing means that we can take fewer guests, which is a shame in this time of eviction danger, but we need to keep folks safe. We are able to take a family upstairs and a single person downstairs. At the moment we still have Magaly downstairs and Cassandra and Zayden (4) upstairs. Cassandra is looking for a place of her own, so we will probably have to say a fond farewell to her and to Zayden before too long.

We'll miss them, especially Cassandra's forthrightness and clarity.

We have some great news to share! If you read these newsletters you'll know that we've been looking for several years for someone to become the "anchor person" or hospitaller at Mary's House. It's a big job, involving living at the house and generally running things, helping people find what they need, reminding folks to clean the kitchen; it also involves being part of our social justice and peace work.

We are so happy to say that Sarah Ball is coming to be part of our far flung community and take on the hospitaller tasks! Sarah has been here a couple of times, once to a retreat and at least once with a group on their way home from the School of the Americas, sleeping on a floor and heading out early to keep driving north. Sarah is currently living in Chicago where she is working as a psychiatric nurse and also working closely with Voices for Creative Nonviolence. She comes highly recommended by all our friends! We are entering into a transition process with her which will culminate in her move to Birmingham, loosely scheduled to be in mid-September of this year.

Meanwhile we do the best we can in this uncertain time. We have continued our Wednesday vigils for peace and justice after a pause last spring. Four or five of us take our places at Five Points South on Wednesday morning with our masks and our signs – "Black lives matter", "No War on Yemen", "War is costly, peace is priceless", "No War" – and so on. We generally have a positive response from drivers and passers-by. This morning a young woman brought us white hot chocolates from Starbucks! That took some work, as there's no Starbucks nearby. On Saturday evenings a slightly different crew holds signs at the same intersection, calling for peace and interacting with passers-by. Jim and I haven't rejoined that vigil yet but we do plan to as things open up again.



We were happily surprised by the success of our first retreat by Zoom – our Advent retreat led by Fr Bob Cushing. Around 85 people joined in, from all over the world, and it was a great success. Of course we lose the interpersonal time between talks and at meals – a big loss – but we gain participants who otherwise wouldn't travel to Alabama for the weekend. Many thanks for Fr. Bob for leading that initial venture!

Given that experience we're feeling more confident about our next retreat, also on Zoom, with our friends Suzanne and Brayton from Agape Community. This retreat was scheduled for last Lent and had to be cancelled. It is actually even more appropriate this year as we deal with the effects of Coronavirus and climate change. Brayton and Suzanne are ground-breakers in the search for ways to live lightly on the land, and teachers of nonviolence to people in all walks of life, from college students to prison inmates. We look forward to learning from their wisdom. (See the flyer on the next page for more information.)

We're also planning a book group on Zoom to explore some of the many written Catholic Worker resources. We have several new volunteers who want to be involved, as well as some of us old timers, and Sarah – so it will be a good way to build community virtually while isolating for safety. Email me at [shelleymdouglass@gmail.com](mailto:shelleymdouglass@gmail.com) if you're interested.

Spring is coming soon, and the garden beds at Mary's House need to be maintained. That job is safely outdoors, and if anyone close by wants to spend some time in our garden, just let us know. Sarah has already said that gardening isn't one of her skills, so our vegetable and flower beds can use some interested folks to keep them going. (Same contact!)



We are still in a time of political upheaval but we're feeling glad that the inauguration of Biden went well and that he has begun some good directions on climate change and other issues. No president could actually hope to do what we would want – disarmament, economic equality, welcome to immigrants, a consistent ethic of life, and so on. We know that, and we're grateful for some improvement while we watch the US Empire begin to crumble.

One very good sign is the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which took effect on January 22 of this year. In 2017 the United Nations adopted the treaty, and in 2020 Honduras became the 50<sup>th</sup> state to ratify it, bringing it into force 90 days later. This is a tremendous world-wide effort on the part of governments and peace groups. It's an amazing step in the right direction and a statement of intent by most of the world's countries. We note of course that none of the nuclear countries have signed or ratified, but the die is cast – the "little people" have spoken, and now we have more work to do to create the changes we need to survive. For more information you can check websites of The Nuclear Resister, Nukewatch, the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, and ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. We also include in this newsletter a sheet from OREPA with suggestions on actions we can take to support and make known the treaty.

God's peace,  
Shelley, D

LOVING LIFE ON THE MARGINS:  
FINDING OUR PROPHETIC VOICE

A LENTEN RETREAT WITH SUZANNE BELOTE AND BRAYTON SHANLEY

March 19-21, 2021

In these days of corona virus we hear more and more about the effects of human encroachment on the natural world and the necessity to live more simply, share more, and respect the integrity of nature. Suzanne Belote and Brayton Shanley have spent years learning to live in radical nonviolence, environmental sustainability, simplicity, beauty, and companionship. They confront racism, militarism, and consumerism with a simple Gospel clarity.



Gather with us (virtually) this Lent for an interfaith retreat to explore nonviolence as a *way of life* – more necessary than ever in this time of widespread economic disaster, covid, racism, ecocide, and political divisiveness. Suzanne and Brayton have spent 40 years living an alternative vision at Agape, a lay community in Ware, MA. They will share their insights and challenge us with their questions. How do we make peace with ourselves, with “the other” and with the earth? How then shall we live?

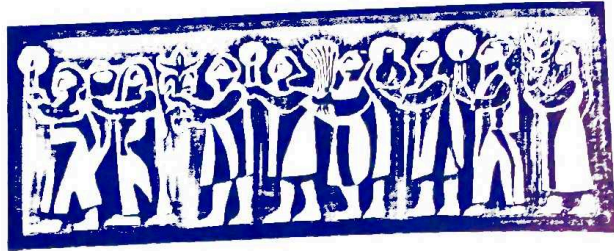
This retreat will be our second to be held on Zoom. There will be one session on Friday evening the 19<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm Eastern Time, several sessions on Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup>, and one on Sunday morning the 21<sup>st</sup>. All session will meet on Eastern time so adjust according to your time zone.

Fee: \$30, which includes a copy of Suzanne’s and Brayton’s book, *Loving Life on the Margins: the Story of the Agape Community*. The book will be mailed to you upon registration.

Scholarships are available!

To register: email [peace@agapecommunity.org](mailto:peace@agapecommunity.org). Your email is essential so that we can send you the link for the zoom calls. To pay: send checks for \$30 made out to Mary’s House to Mary’s House, 2107 Ave. G, Birmingham AL 35218.

# Threads



It's always a struggle to sit down and begin this essay. What can I possibly find to say about life, and our life here, that might be helpful to other folks? Why would anyone care about these musings? I keep putting it off, but eventually the time arrives when there IS no more time, and here I sit. Again.

It's the end of January as I write – by the time you read this it will be close to mid-February, and who knows what will have happened by then? Already in January we had the storming of the capitol, the inauguration of Joe Biden & Kamala Harris, a distinct turn in national direction (so far mostly through executive orders), a doubling down on weird conspiracy theories, continuous news stories about the Corona virus and vaccines, growing hunger and unemployment.... And meetings on worldwide nonviolence, the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, growing local mutual aid movements, continued work for racial equity, what may be a new seriousness about the climate crisis, and a growing awareness that things can't remain the same or go back to "normal".

I find myself thinking back over my life, wondering if what I've done and believed is still relevant in this time of upheaval. I find threads from every stage of my life woven together to *make my current Truth*. They're not theology or ideology any more, they're just things that I *know now, having lived them*. And after all, that's the thing about truth – it's true across the board, not just for those who adhere to a particular belief system. What have I found that's true?

We're all one, and we're responsible for each other. When I was a kid growing up overseas, my parents told me to read the New Testament and I couldn't go far wrong. I read it – and that's what I took from it, and from my later youth groups, classes, and studies in theology. I'm my brother's/ sister's keeper. We're all one. When one of us hurts we all hurt. What you do to the least of these you do to me. That's a major truth I first found in Christianity. It's in the other major faith traditions as well, and also in secular and humanist traditions. I think it's kind of a natural law of the universe which operates whether or not we "believe" in it.

The personal is political. Long ago in Honolulu (and after) my women's consciousness raising group shared that insight: what we'd felt as personal discontent or even failure was a function of women's position in society, and our personal struggles were part of a larger oppression. Which meant that our personal struggles, our lives, could change things. This connects to a broader insight which I experienced most in the movement against Trident: we're all connected in the web of life. If you pull on one strand you affect the whole web, often in ways that you can't see and may never know about.

You have to take a stand. I've read so many stories about heroes and saints, from Jesus to Sojourner Truth to the White Rose and Franz Jaegerstatter in Nazi Germany. Most of them believed we are responsible for each other; most of them believed they needed to take personal action. They took stands, and often they suffered for them. Looking back over time, you can see that their stands and their suffering built movements, led to change, and/or kept consciences alive. You have to suffer. Sometimes you even have to die. "The blood of the

martyrs is the seed of the church" – and of movements for justice and peace. (Not so happy a truth if you're one of the martyrs, but I have to say also that in my small experience of going to jail, or being separated from Jim by his going to jail, there has been a lot of beauty and growth. Suffering for a purpose can be joyful.)

And there is some kind of coherence, or force, or spirit – something that Christians would call Providence – that binds us together if we take that stand, no matter how small. Jesus said to seek first the realm of heaven and all else would be added; not to worry about tomorrow.... Or what to wear or eat. In our life as Catholic Workers and peace workers we've found that our needs have always been met, usually with great generosity, and usually in totally unexpected ways. Also usually after we've given up trying to take care of them ourselves, and usually through other people with gifts or work offers or other kinds of help.

I have two different thoughts as I muse on all this. One is a question: these are my truths, that I know in my bones now, after trying to live them for so long. Other people have truths that they know, which are opposite to mine. Is there a way we can come together and dialogue? Can my truth speak to theirs? It's a very big question, especially right now.

The second thought is a challenge, perhaps. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is now in force, so that nuclear weapons are illegal under international law. We're including in this newsletter a page from OREPA which makes suggestions on how we can make the Treaty known and lobby for the US to ratify and observe it. A further action is possible: Take into consideration that nuclear weapons can end all life on earth, and that "The US military is one of the largest polluters in history, consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more climate-changing gases than most medium sized countries" – and if it were a country, it would be the 47<sup>th</sup> largest emitter of greenhouse gases. (June 2019, Neimark, Belcher, and Bigger published in *The Conversation* online) What if we took a simple action to resist this military



machine and its nukes. How does the military survive? Who pays the bills? We do, if we pay our taxes. What if we joined the movement to resist Federal taxes and defund the military? The National War Tax Resistance

Coordinating Committee has plenty of information about the use of our taxes, and about how we can refuse all or part of them in protest at [nwtrcc.org](http://nwtrcc.org).

We can decide to live with an income below taxable level (not really hard for peace workers, or Catholic Workers) or we can follow one of the action suggestions given by NWRTECC.

Or take another step, that makes more sense to you: a risk, based on what you know in your own bones is your truth. Who knows what will happen?

Shelley D

OREPA (Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance) published this list of "things you can do" in honor of the Treaty's entry into force, but except for #11 they should all be on-going efforts — so we invite you to take one or more of these actions, and report in!

Yes, celebrate—but be smart about it. Any celebration should include an action item that raises the profile of the Treaty in the US. The first goal is to make people aware of the Treaty. Goal #2 is to make sure they know that it is entering into force. And Goal #3 is to begin to use public awareness to pressure the government to recognize, sign, ratify and comply with

the Treaty. If that sounds like a lot, it is, and it will take time. But it will never happen if we don't make it happen.

Here are some options. Some you can do all by yourself, others work better with a small group (please take pandemic precautions!). Pick one or more of your favorites.

1. Everyone can learn about the Treaty, and you don't have to wait until Jan 22. A quick google search will turn up resources. Some as brief as 90 seconds; others are deep-dive webinars. Need a brief intro? See the Fact Sheet on page 5.

2. Hang or hold a banner in a public space. Activists will be hanging banners at nuclear weapons sites and nuclear military bases across the country. We have a **template on the OREPA web site** that you can use to have a banner made (around \$50 if you go on-line) that you can hang or hold at any federal building—your local post office, federal courthouse, congressman's office.

2b. Think a banner is a bit much? The OREPA web site also has a template for a poster size version of the Treaty that you can hold or deliver or post in the place of your choice.

3. Focus on the \$\$\$\$. Our friends in Europe have been successful in pushing investment funds and corporations to divest from nuclear weapons funding—the Treaty gives us even more leverage. You can find a list of the companies and banks that invest in nuclear weapons at **Don't Bank on the Bomb**. You can hold a poster outside the local Bank of America or Wells Fargo branch office. If your credit card is issued by a nuke-bank, you can change cards or write to the issuer and ask them to get out of the illegal nuclear weapons business.

4. Check out your local university or college. There is a list of US educational institutions that are directly involved in supporting

nuclear weapons production on the ICAN web site. Look for the report: **Schools of Mass Destruction**. Some of them even operate nuclear weapons sites! Your local school not on the list? With a little digging, you might find out where their endowment funds are invested—chances are there is a link to a nuclear weapons corporation or fund.

5. Write your congresspersons—Senators and Reps. Tell them you expect their name to be on the first bill introduced in the new Congress that addresses the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Tell them you'll be watching. It is highly likely that Senator Ed Markey and Congressman Ted Lieu will introduce bills that include a call for the US to join the Treaty.

6. Write a letter to the editor. This is really important—it is a way to broaden your reach through the public media. Mention your congressional representatives by name so their staff will clip the letter and show it to their boss.

7. Share the news on social media—if you use **instagram** or **facebook** or if you **tweet**—you can share the ICAN pages and other news about the Entry Into Force.

8. Donate! You can write a check or give on-line. There are dozens of groups around the country that are dedicating themselves to long-haul work to make the promise of the Treaty a reality around the world and in the US. They rely on donations and public support to keep going. Even a small contribution counts.

9. Commit for the long haul. Find the group nearest and dearest to your heart and join so you can stay

involved, track the progress of the Treaty, and learn about more things you can do to help make it a reality. Get on their mailing list, either on-line or on paper.

10. Report back! This is crucial—even if your action is a simple one. We gain strength from working together and knowing that people all over are taking action. And your effort, large or small, is amplified when it is shared. We hope to build a database of actions and we hope to demonstrate widespread support for the Treaty across the country. You can post your actions on facebook at the Nuclear Ban Treaty EIF group; we will publicize other sites as they become available.

11. Ask your local place of worship to ring its bell for peace on January 22.

12. Ask your local government to join the ICAN Cities appeal—present a copy of the Treaty and ask for a resolution calling on the US to join the Treaty.

13. Deliver copies of the treaty in person or send via mail to congressional representatives and other public officials, and business, financial and educational institutions with ties to nuclear weapons activities, with a warning of their complicity.

14. Watch for more ideas: You are encouraged to post your plans on the Nuclear Ban Treaty EIF facebook group, and to look at what others are planning to do.

Prepared by The Nuclear Resister, Nukewatch, the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, and the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability.



## WE ALWAYS HAVE NEEDS:

These days we are taking fewer people at Mary's House so that those who stay with us can safely distance in the house. This basically means two "units" of people, either families or singles. We currently have a mom and young son upstairs and a single woman downstairs; they rotate use of the kitchen and are masked in the house. So far it seems to be working.

So – we can always use money! We do buy food, pay utilities, sometimes rent motel rooms, and so on – and our insurance payment is coming up soon.

We can also use in-kind gifts if you prefer – cleaning supplies, Clorox wipes or similar, spray disinfectant, disposable masks would all be helpful. Also paper goods like toilet tissue.

Elbow grease: spring is on the way and we'll need help with lawn and garden work. You can enjoy the outdoors and be safely distanced while helping out with mowing the grass, digging the garden beds, and so on. Call Shelley at 205 565 6017, or email [shelleymdouglass@gmail.com](mailto:shelleymdouglass@gmail.com) to set up a time!

AND WE THANK ALL WHO HAVE BEEN HELPING US SURVIVE – THOSE WHO GIVE MONTHLY, THOSE WHO GIVE WHEN THEY CAN, THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US AND OUR GUESTS: THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!! AND THE GARDENERS AND BUSH CLIPPERS TOO!

AND - we are looking for a reliable used car available for free or cheap, for our guest family whose car is slowly dying and can't be fixed.... Contact Shelley, as above, if you have a lead.



## AND JOIN US FOR THESE EVENTS:



In Person:

Vigil for peace, Wednesday from 7:30 to 8:30 am and Saturday from 5 to 6 pm, both at the Fountain at Five Points South in Birmingham.

Vigil against the death penalty: February 11, 11:30 am to 1 pm in front of the County courthouse & art museum, Arrington & Woods N. If the execution isn't stayed, requiem vigil at 5:55 pm under the Dr. King statue in Kelly Ingram Park.

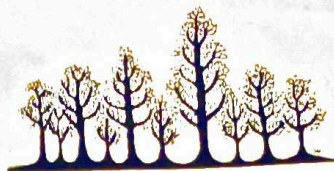
Virtually:

Join us for the weekend of March 19-21<sup>st</sup> as we explore nonviolent living with Suzanne Belote & Brayton Shanley through our Lenten retreat on zoom. See the flyer, p. 3 of this newsletter.

We are gathering a group of folks who are interested in reading and discussing Catholic Worker books & articles. This would be via zoom, and maybe once a month. If you're interested, email me at [shelleymdouglass@gmail.com](mailto:shelleymdouglass@gmail.com).



## JOIN US FOR THESE ACTIVITIES:



Our usual schedule of activities is still curtailed by the COVID 19 virus. Our First Friday Masses are on pause because we don't have enough space to safely distance in our living room. We really miss that time of community and prayer, and look forward to gathering safely again.

### VIGILS CONTINUE:

Peace vigils at Five Points South still go on. Wednesday mornings from 7:30 to 8:30 am, and Saturday evenings from 5 to 6 pm. (Masked and distanced, outside.)

Death Penalty vigils: We're sad to say that Alabama is planning to kill Willie B. Smith III on February 11<sup>th</sup>. We invite you to write letters of protest to Governor Kay Ivey before the fact – go to PHADP website for information – and to join us on the 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 am to 1 pm in front of the art museum at Arrington and Woods in downtown Birmingham. We will be masked and distanced. This vigil will happen even if the sentence is stayed. If the sentence is carried out we have a brief requiem prayer vigil under the Dr. King statue at Kelly Ingram Park at 5:55 pm. (Alabama kills at 6 pm.)



**LENTEN RETREAT ON ZOOM: MARCH 19-21, WITH SUZANNE BELOTE AND BRAYTON SHANLEY. SEE FLYER INSIDE, AND JOIN US FOR A THOUGHTFUL WEEKEND ON GOSPEL LIVING.**

Mary's House  
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