

Ordinary Time
Fall 2026

Magnificat



Dear Friends,

It's moving toward the middle of September, and Alabama is still under daily heat alerts, with temperatures in the upper 90s and heat indexes over 100. We've broken several heat records in the past weeks. It's been very hard on folks living on the streets. Our efforts are small compared to the need, but really appreciated. I think what's most appreciated is that our group shows up, every week, bad weather or not. People count on us. We come through. That means a lot, even if we run out of socks or deodorant or hot food. We can't all be there every week, but every week some of us can.

And we have the occasional memorable event, which helps build community: about a month ago we arrived and began to unload our tables under a cloudy sky. The folks waiting for us helped set up as they usually do, all of us giving worried glances at the sky. It began to rain as we worked, and someone suggested "Why don't you go ahead with the toiletries because it's starting to rain?" Good idea! We began to give out the lunches-for-later and the underwear and toiletries. It rained harder. C'helle started serving the hot meal she'd made. It rained harder. The wind came up. Things started to blow around. It rained harder. People began to take shelter. The wind blew - it rained harder! With the help of our friends we packed up as quickly as we could (still in the deluge) and drove home through the storm, which by then was huge. We were soaked to the skin, our cardboard box storage system was ruined, and most of the vigil posters which were stored in our car had to be dried out and re-taped. (I had men's and women's underwear draped all around the house that week, drying out.)

Our friends had disappeared quickly to take shelter, but they too were soaked to the skin, without the luxury of dry clothing and a place to change into it. We always come up against that evil: our friends are living on the street without shelter. Still, that storm created a camaraderie among those of us who experienced it. It still comes up during serving times: "We sure got wet that time, didn't we?" "Remember all that stuff got blown across the street?" We're thankful that no trees came down, no lightning struck, and everyone came through safely.

Mostly though, life hasn't been that exciting. This month marks the twenty-fifth year of our twice-weekly vigils for peace and justice. To celebrate we've asked some of our regular vigilers to reflect briefly on that experience. Why they vigil, what it's like to vigil, what they hope for from vigiling - we share their reflections in this newsletter, and remind you again that you're welcome to join us any time you're around.

The house has been well-used lately. We haven't had a live-in hospitaller since Eddie moved out last winter, so we haven't been able to take long-term guests. We have, however, been able to offer hospitality to people "passing through" - Cliff Kindy with some volunteers going to help repair homes in New Orleans made a quick stop; Monica Welch and Evan stopped in, while doing some college-related travel and sharing Monica's CW art along the way.

Zach Sylvester stopped in for a week or so while on his way to an internship at Koinonia Partners in Americus GA. Next week we're looking forward to a visit with Martha Hennessey and Mark Colville, who are on a kind of CW pilgrimage, a "mission of friendship", across the country, and also to a visit with old friend Mike McKale, in Alabama for a reunion of friends who

were students at Berkeley in the 1970s. We're glad we've been able to provide a stopping-place for people going about the business of the Gospel.

We're getting very excited about the retreat coming up December 4th and 5th. It had to be cancelled last Spring because of my stroke and hospitalization, but we've rescheduled. The new version promises to be even better than the first one, because this time we have both Brian Terrell and Betsy Keenan coming to talk about their life together and how we can all find hope and change in these violent times. Please look at the flyer and consider joining us for thoughtful discussion, new friendships, some good food - and even a chance to participate in one of our Saturday vigils! What more could anyone want?

Last, but certainly not least, we have some hopeful news to share. We've been having discussions with a good friend and co-worker who wants to become hospitaller at Mary's House! We're very excited about that, as you can imagine. We've done some preliminary explorations of how that might work, and even checked out the rooms at Mary's House to see how they could best accommodate her and her teenager as well as longer term guests. If all goes well we'll introduce them in our next newsletter!

So lots is going on in our bailiwick, even if it's not always as exciting as a major thunderstorm. Please know that you're welcome to join us for a vigil, for First Friday, or just make a date to visit the house. You can email us through the website maryshousebham.com, or phone me directly at 629 278 3124. And please do read the retreat flyer, and let us know if you can come!

God's peace, Shelley D.

The World Peace Prayer:

Lead us from death to life

From falsehood to truth

From despair to hope

From fear to trust

From hate to love

From war to peace

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe

We pray this prayer in unison at the end of each Saturday vigil.

BUILDING A NEW SOCIETY IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD

DECEMBER 4-5, 2026

A RETREAT WITH BRIAN TERRELL AND BETSY KEENAN

In December we'll be almost two years into the current regime, which is marked by war, hatred, and violence. We don't need to list the outrages that will be worse by then. The question will still remain: how do we find hope in these times, and how do we resist the inhumanity going on? How do we build a new society based on the common good?



Brian Terrell and Betsy Keenan have been involved with the Catholic Worker movement since the 1970s, when they were arrested together at the US mission to the UN in

1978. Over the next seven years they married, had two children, and did the work of welcoming, housing, and feeding people in need while actively resisting war and the arms race. In October, 1986, Brian and Betsy and their children, Elijah and Clara, along with another family founded Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker Farm in Maloy, IA. There they continue gardening, keeping dairy goats and chickens, and sharing skills in homesteading and crafting. Betsy is a weaver and liturgical musician. Brian has been organizing resistance to nuclear weapons with the Nevada Desert Experience. Over the years his work has brought him to war zones and prisons, and then back to the farm.

Building a new society in the shell of the old requires a deep change in our ways of living, a new reverence for the earth, a commitment to sharing and nurturing life. Not everyone can live on a Catholic Worker farm, but we can all make positive changes in our daily lives and take action to resist evil. Come and reflect with us on building community and resisting the evils of the day.

Date: 7 - 8:30 pm, Friday December 4th & 9am to 8 pm December 5th, 2026

Place: Cristo Rey Birmingham, 1832 Center Way S, Birmingham 35205

Cost: \$65 for the weekend, meals included

To register, go to the website, maryshousebham.com, or email shelleymdouglass@gmail.com

Twenty-five Years of Vigils

In September of 2001 a small group of us had already been vigiling monthly against the sanctions on Iraq. Like everyone else, we were horrified by the death and destruction that occurred on 9/11. We were also appalled at the clear intention of President Bush to go to war as a result. (This was before questions about the event itself surfaced.) We knew that war would destroy civilians and infrastructure and would drag on for years. We believed deeply that "War is not the answer" - ever.

As the government intensified its violent response, we decided to intensify our nonviolent response. We decided to vigil weekly instead of monthly, and then to vigil twice weekly. It sounds ridiculous: a small vigil in downtown Birmingham Alabama as a response to the armed might of the USA. But we were quite serious about it, and for the first couple of years especially it was often scary and even somewhat dangerous. Feelings were high and the officially-encouraged desire for vengeance was very strong, so we encountered a lot of hostility, which we met with as much nonviolence and grace as we could muster.

Over time the intensity of feeling faded, and then as the lies of the government surfaced, eroded seriously. I remember especially that when it became clear that General Powell had lied to the UN about weapons of mass destruction, a man stopped his car by the vigil and called out "You should have signs that say 'I told you so!'" These days our signs about Palestine get some hostile responses, but also a lot of support.

Honks and waves, peace signs, passersby even thank us for being there. We've become something of a tourist attraction, with people snapping photos of our signs. With all the supportive gestures, it's still a rare person who actually stands with us on our corner. We are a small group, sometimes only one or two, usually no more than ten. Our vigil grows when the regime does something especially awful, because we're there every week. Something reliable and simple: no permits, no speakers or sound system, just some folks with their signs, saying "This isn't right!" It helps us to stand there. It seems to raise questions. We think it helps other folks too.

Shelley Douglass

Lexi Ambrose:

At first we had a lot of hostility in reaction to our peace signs. Cars at that time might drive by very close to the curb where we were and spit, or throw a drink at us and call us names.

Once someone came by and tore the signs from our hands and threw them in the street. One guy went by and said he would be back with a gun.. We did leave a bit early that day!

The other day a man became very irate about a sign supporting the Palestinians, but for the most part hostility has greatly lessened. More often we are cheered on or ignored. We are getting more hi-fives and honks and peace signs.



There are many homeless people near our spot and they like us to be there. Rev. Higgs brings them wonderful sandwiches.

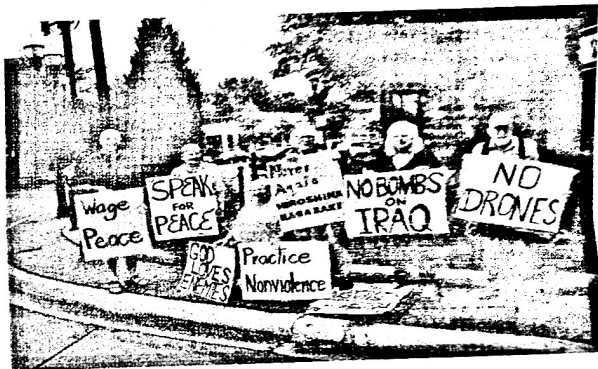
Now most of us are old and have to sit in chairs or wheelchairs but we do our best to keep demonstrating for peace, non-violence and support for all people. We can't give up trying: our world depends on Love and Peace.

Tom Duley:

I've stood on many street corners over the years holding signs of one sort or another. The signs have addressed a range of concerns: stop the war in Vietnam, No Nukes, End the Death Penalty, and more. For the past twenty-five years I've stood on a corner in Five Points South in Birmingham along with many others to call for a lifestyle based in peace and nonviolence.

I do it for two reasons. First, I'm deeply convinced that God's best for humanity is a life based in peace and nonviolence. I want to be a part of a community that works to remind folks that there is another way to live that is healthier and more life giving than what we currently have.

Secondly I do it because I am aware of the mighty power of water. I realize that what we are advocating for is a long way from reality. However I've seen the power of water. Flowing or frozen, water makes a tremendous difference in the landscape. But it takes a long time. Patience is required. The results of what we are doing on that street corner will take a long time to come to pass. Patience is required. But when it comes, the spiritual landscape it ushers in will be as beautiful as that of the Grand Canyon.



Aulton Craig Smith:

The law of karma can be stated in just three words: cause and effect. It is simple but profound. It means that all phenomena arise from antecedent causes and that all actions become in turn causes of phenomena. Thus the universe, we, and all that we experience is the manifestation of karma. Also, everything that we think and do is making the universe of experience in real time. This is why we cultivate altruism and goodwill, and take actions which can produce desirable effects. Such actions include recognizing suffering and injustice and bearing witness to them.

Nancy Sales:

I vigil with others concerned about the absence of peace in this community, country, world because I need to be reminded weekly of the importance of this issue for our sanity and our survival! I do better with communal opportunities to practice a discipline. This is one for me, and even though the vigil reminds us of the horrible obstacles to peace, the fellowship also provides joy and other blessings for which I am always grateful!



Teri Wright:

Vigiling with Jim and Shelley and the crew doesn't require any formal religious status. Together we rise to be the nonviolent change we want to see in the world. Veterans for Peace reports that there are 12,500 big nuclear bombs no. A small nuclear exchange could cause extinction. That's why we vigil for peace: the vigil keeps us afloat and it helps us all get where we need to go.

Jim Douglass:

Why I vigil: Dorothy Day spelled it out in her Postscript to "the Long Loneliness". She wrote that "the final word about the Catholic Worker was not poverty, nor community, "but love: at times it has been, in the words of Father Zosima, a harsh and dreadful thing, and our very faith in love has been tried through fire. We cannot love God unless we love each other." No exceptions, not even those we love least in the human family.

Perhaps the most controversial of our vigil signs puts it this way:

"GOD LOVES ENEMIES."

Each of our signs says the same thing in a different way:

NO WAR - WE ARE ALL GAZA - WE ARE ONE HUMAN FAMILY - Liberty and Justice for ALL - Practice Nonviolence - NO DEPORTATIONS - Endless War Keeps People Poor - LOVE WINS

The way Daniel Berrigan put it was: "Don't just do something. Stand there." In our case, vigil here, at Five Points South in Birmingham Alabama, twice a week, for 25 years. In the responses to the signs we hold for one hour we experience in a small way the challenge of witnessing to the truth. As Dan Berrigan warned, "[If you want to follow Jesus] you'd better look good on wood."

Soren Troffkin:

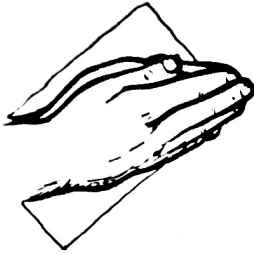
At the end of our vigil, when gathering things, I read our signs as if they are new to me. And I imagine granting them with a wave. The sky in Iran is a clear and smokeless blue. All the war hawks awake as doves. Overnight, every state sets out on shared plans to beat their warheads into (only slightly radioactive) plowshares. One day, our dreams will come to pass. Maybe not through a wave but through hands tending, building, working. But then, what of our vigil?

I hope that our work - the work of being vigilant - changes, but does not end. That we still gather on Wednesday mornings and Shabbos afternoons and remain vigilant of every small victory, and quiet beauty, and each other. That we watch for every passerby and say in a thousand different ways, thank you. And then maybe we will realize that the work did not change after all. And we will go about what we are already doing.

THE WORKS OF MERCY
FEED THE HUNGRY.
GIVE DRINK TO THE
THIRSTY. CLOTHE
THE NAKED. VISIT
THE SICK. SHELTER
THE HOMELESS. TO
VISIT THE PRISON
ERS. TO BURY THE
DEAD. PRAY FOR THE
LIVING AND THE DEAD.



THE WORKS OF WAR
DESTROY CROPS AND
LAND. SEIZE FOOD
SUPPLIES. DESTROY
HOMES & VILLAGES.
SCATTER FAMILIES.
CONTAMINATE
WATER. IMPRISON
DISSENTERS. INFLECT
WOUNDS AND BURN
KILL THE LIVING.



We Always Have Needs

We need prayers, for world peace, for justice, for our friends on the street and for our guests - and for ourselves, for energy, perseverance, and faith.

We do need money: for house bills, street meal food and supplies, the occasional motel, and so on.

We can use in-kind gifts: toilet tissue, paper towels, canned tuna, salmon, chicken, single serving fruit cups, boxes of single-serve bags of chips, spaghetti sauce, pasta, canned fruit (regular size), and fruit juice.

Also, gently used adult t-shirts, pants, jackets, shoes; emergency ponchos, hand warmers, new men's and women's underwear (M,L,XL) and socks.

THANKS TO ALL WHO HELP: MARY'S HOUSE IS A COMMUNITY PROJECT!

We depend on you, our community, for wherewithal to keep going. Thanks to those who contribute regularly and to those who donate when they can. Thanks to those who order things online, and those who deliver them to us. Thanks to those who show up to serve the meal; thanks to the cooks and lunchmakers. Thanks to those who pray with us on First Fridays, who vigil with us (see below), and those who help mail this newsletter. (Thanks to those vigilers who contributed to this one.) Thanks to the priests who take time to join us for First Friday Mass, and for everyone who brings food for the potluck feast.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO JOIN OUR VIGILS: You're most welcome!

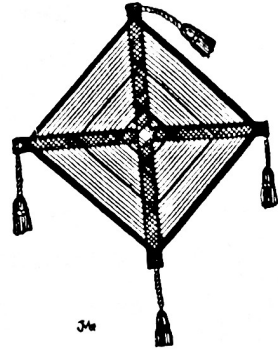
We follow a nonviolent discipline. We have plenty of signs to share, or bring your own. Vigil for peace and justice at the Fountain at Five Points South on Wednesday morning from 7:30 to 8:30 am, or on Saturday afternoons, 5 to 6 pm.

Against state killing:

We vigil on every execution day. We will be at the corners of Arrington and Woods North, near the art museum and the county courthouse from 4:30 to 6 pm. Currently the state kills on Thursday, so these vigils are on Thursdays.

JOIN US IN PRAYER AND ACTION

First Friday Masses in our living room, followed by potluck suppers:
October 2, with Fr Jon Chalmers
November 6, with Fr. Joe Culotta
(no Mass on December 4th - join us for our retreat!)



Vigil for peace and justice: every Wednesday from 7:30 to 8:30 am
Every Saturday from 5 to 6 pm, both at the Fountain at Five Points South.
Vigil against the death penalty on any execution day, 4:30-6pm at the intersection of Arrington & Woods, North. As of now, the state will make a second attempt to kill Jeffrey Lee on September 17. They have also set November 5th as the date for Michael Taylor. (See phadp.org for updates and actions.)

Retreat with Brian Terrell and Betsy Keenan, 7 pm December 4 - 8:30 pm
December 5 (see inside for flyer).

