

Ordinary Time  
June, 2026  
Dear Friends,

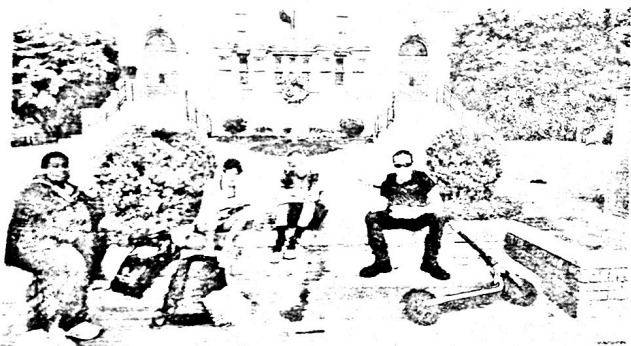
# Magnificat



It's turning into summer in Birmingham - beginning to be hot, with showers and thunderstorms especially in the afternoons. We've had enough rain to move us out of drought, at least for now - but it's very hard for our friends on the street who get soaked and have nowhere to dry off, no dry clothing to put on. We're beginning to get requests for sunscreen and for OFF, which make street life a bit more bearable.

Mary's House keeps on. We serve the Sunday afternoon meal at Five Points South, usually to around 30 people. Numbers go up at the end of the month when checks have run out, and down at the beginning, when checks first arrive. Many of the folks that we serve are veterans. Many are on SSI. Their checks don't cover basic expenses, so they have to stretch them. Our meals, along with toiletries, underwear, socks, and sometimes t-shirts and pants, help them make it through. (The "our" here includes you, who send us the money

to buy underwear and socks, along with donations of clothing and toiletries. We thank you!)



We spend a lot of time at Five Points South. Our twice-weekly vigils for peace and justice happen there, so we often run into our friends on non-meal days. We've been vigiling since 9/11 on Wednesday mornings and Saturday evenings, with signs calling for

peace and justice and the common good. We get a lot of positive responses these days, with honks and thumbs up, waves and "thank you" yells, especially for our Gaza signs.. We also get the occasional half a peace sign, and last Wednesday someone called out "Hippies, get a job!" - to our mostly grey-haired group.

We also vigil when an execution takes place, a state killing done in our name. This week we vigiled for Jeffrey Lee, who was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to Life by his jury, and then was resentenced to death by his judge.

Alabama has finally passed a law against judicial override, but it isn't retroactive so Mr Lee's sentence stands. Alabama also continued to use nitrogen hypoxia (suffocation) as a means of killing. At almost the last minute a Federal court found the use of nitrogen suffocation unconstitutional and forbade its use. Currently the state has asked for a new death date, and to use lethal injection. (For up to date information, go to [shada.org](http://shada.org), the website of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty.)

Things are not getting better in Alabama, but there are also good things happening. We are very thankful for these signs of hope! You, our readers and community, are huge signs of hope for us. We thank everyone who donates, whether regularly or occasionally. We thank the churches that send checks, and St Peter's for food and their religious ed students for a Lenten collection of items for the Sunday meal as well.

Thanks to the priests who give their time and energy for our First Friday Masses, and to the folks who come to join our vigils. Thanks to those who make sandwiches or lunch bags for the Sunday meal, to those who help serve, to those who bring clothing and shoes and their presences. We're very thankful also for the many who stand up to injustice, who stand for peace and human rights and the common good.

We had to cancel the Lenten retreat, but we're grateful to Brian Terrell for being patient and rescheduling. He will be coming for an Advent retreat (see the flyer). Best of all, this Advent retreat will include both Brian and Betsy Keenan, his wife and partner in sustainable farming and craft work. They are real examples of the whole of the Catholic Worker life, including resistance, hospitality, and the constructive program, and we're very excited to have them both come.

I apologize for the small type in parts of this newsletter. It was important that each of us write about what we experienced during my health crisis in the last couple of months - hence more contributors and smaller print!

We still need your support and contributions. We need your prayers for us and for our community, we definitely need money, and we can use in-kind gifts of items like gently used clothing, shoes, new underwear, and travel sized toiletries.

As always, please join us for Mass, for one or more vigils, or just for a cup of coffee and a tour of the house. You'll need to schedule a visit by emailing [maryshousepham@gmail.com](mailto:maryshousepham@gmail.com), or you can phone me at 629 278 3124 and set a time for a couple of us to meet you there. We can explore ways to work together in building the beloved community. Thank you for helping us to keep on keeping on!



God's peace,  
Shelley D

# BUILDING A NEW SOCIETY IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD

DECEMBER 4-6, 2006

## A RETREAT WITH BRIAN TERRELL AND BETSY KEENAN

By December we'll be almost two years into the current regime, which is already marked by war, hatred, and violence. We don't need to list the outrages that will



probably 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. Brian worked at the New York City house and Betsy at Tivoli Farm. In 1979 they met at a CW house of hospitality in Davenport, Iowa. 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 organizes 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. Save the date, December 4-6, 2006, and watch our next newsletter for specifics.

We look forward to seeing you!



Ashley McCormick

Our Mary's House community here in Birmingham might be considered a bit ragtag by other Catholic Worker standards. We have a house, but don't live together. Some of us vigil. Many of us don't. Some of us meet with guests when we can offer hospitality, others support from afar. We each give what we can, but it doesn't ever feel like enough to live up to what a Catholic Worker community *should* be doing.

And then Shelley had a stroke. All of our hand-wringing about Mary's House identity and what the future looked like mattered a whole lot less. We immediately canceled the retreat we were hosting the next weekend, despite all the work that had been put into organizing it. Our focus became very simple - how can we best care for each other?

When Shelley was hospitalized, it was obvious she would need care overnight, someone to be present and advocate for her when she was unable to do it for herself. I was already at the hospital and available, so I took the first overnight to let Jim go home and rest after a long, terrifying day. That long, terrifying day led into a long, exhausting night. Though conscious, Shelley had not yet regained her faculties and she was terribly uncomfortable. She pleaded with me to help her out of the bed. Over and over again. And over and over again, I had to tell her that I could not. Medical staff floated in and out, bringing different machines, doing various tests and leaving us with a "virtual sitter." The virtual sitter was a blank screen with a camera, atop a stand with wheels, with someone somewhere on the other end "watching" from a distance. Every so often a person would pop on the screen, asking questions of us or the medical staff at top volume. Neither Shelley nor I got much sleep.

The next morning when we had very little answers and things were still quite serious, our local bishop came by and offered Shelley the anointing of the sick. Shelley remained disoriented by it all. Didn't know the year. Or always who we were. Yet, through everything she still offered a tired smile to us gathered, *praying at the foot of her bed*. I wept.

With a lot of work and care, Shelley has since made an impressive recovery. *She is even back vigiling* twice a week for peace with the best of them. Her goal was to make an appearance at the No Kings rally and she did, witnessing with a sign that read "Refuse Illegal Orders".

There's still a lot we're trying to figure out with Mary's House. We're still looking for a live-in person. There's always needs to be met and rarely a straightforward path to get us there. But I feel sure we will be going in the right direction if we keep working from this place of love and care, letting it pour forth from our little community and ripple out into a world so desperately in need of it.



Jim Douglass

On Sunday, March 1st, at 8am, (a few hours after the US and Israel launch the war on Iran), I find Shelley lying face down on her kitchen floor. She is trying to get up. I try to help her but can't. I run to a phone and call Lee. At breathtaking speed he, Sophia, and John drive from Mass across town, fly into Shelley's house, and call an ambulance.

Shelley lies on a stretcher in the back of the ambulance. I sit in front by the driver. He barrels us, siren screaming, to the ER at the University of Alabama hospital. The UAB testing will reveal that there were two sharp strokes in Shelley's brain.

Midway through her five-day recovery at UAB, Shelley is given a mistaken drug treatment which puts her in another dark hole. As the drugs take their toll, our friend Carmen and I stand praying at the foot of her bed. The doctors beside her bed worriedly scan the changes flashing on the screen above her head. They begin pushing her bed on wheels out of the room, steering Shelley as fast as they can to an Intensive Care Unit. I run to keep up. Hooked up to the ICU machines, she lives.

By Friday afternoon, Shelley is miraculously home again. She is sitting up in her chair, smiling at beloved sister Marjie and me. We wonder at the beautiful gift of life in our midst.

The war on Iran continues. At one second to midnight, through the grace of God, we are among those still alive on Earth. Will we realize the gift of life that allows it to continue for all?



Lee Bean

It was Sunday morning, March the 1<sup>st</sup>. I was hosting a group at a local camp where cell phone service was all but nonexistent. When I came back to the only room that had cell service, I saw that I had a voicemail from Jim Douglass. Jim has left me many voicemails over the years, but I knew immediately that this one was different. "Hello Lee. Please give me a call as soon as you can. This is very, very important. It's an emergency." I called Jim and he said that he had found Shelley on the floor and that she wasn't able to get up. I asked if he needed an ambulance, but he thought at the time that he just needed someone to help Shelley get up off the floor. I called Sophia Jaunet, one of our other Mary's House board members and she and John Houser (another board member) were able to get to Jim and Shelley within half an hour. When they arrived, they immediately knew an ambulance was needed. Shelley was taken to a local hospital and stayed a week due to a stroke and other medical issues. Thankfully, Shelley is home and continues to improve.

As I look back on those days in March, it all seems like a whirlwind. Making hospital visits, keeping family informed, transporting Jim to and from the hospital, and coordinating care with other board members was hard work, but quite natural for all of us involved due to the fact that we've all been impacted by the Catholic Worker ethos in general, and Jim and Shelley Douglass in particular. And that, for me, is what sticks out in my mind about the whole ordeal. Our "board" is a loose-knit coalition of volunteers who have known Jim and Shelley over the years, and who have in one way or another been impacted by the life they've chosen to live. None of us fit the traditional Catholic Worker description. We don't live together. We all have families and jobs. Sometimes we struggle with how we don't fit that traditional model, but we've made it work. And looking back at those few days of chaos, I'm reminded that even though we don't live in community together, what grounded us during that time was the community we DO share...a bond of *personalism* that holds us together going all the way back to Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day and the sacrifices they were willing to make for whomever was in need. I hope we never have to organize our board again for the same reasons, but if we do, I'm confident that the personalism we've been taught over the years will continue to thrive.



Sophia Jaunet

Early on that Sunday morning Lee called to say that Shelley had fallen. Lee stressed that we had to decide if we needed to call 911 for Shelley. As a relatively new Catholic Worker I knew I would have a hard time making that call because I wouldn't ever DREAM of telling Shelley what to do. I needed reinforcements. I went looking for my neighbor and fellow Catholic Worker, John. It was between 8:30 and 9, he wasn't answering his phone and his car wasn't in his driveway, so I figured he must be at Holy Rosary for Mass. I was in pajamas, but without much thought, threw on boots and flew over to the church.

Now this church is tiny. One room, no vestibule, squeaky doors, and 25 attendees who know everyone who has ever walked through those doors. I also knew that John wouldn't be in the back of the church. I'd have to make my way to the front to find him. I opened the doors and immediately made eye contact with the retired Bishop of our diocese, who was mid-homily. He probably thought I was some kind of bizarre wild woman, stumbling in dressed in my finest jammies but he beckoned me in with his hands. Mortified, I squat-ran up to the front row where I found John and whispered, "I need your help, Shelley fell."

We raced over to Shelley's house, where we found a scene I won't soon forget. John took charge of the situation while I held onto Lady, Shelley's dog, who was quite distressed. We knew immediately we needed to call 911 because Shelley was confused and not making sense, which is very unusual for our opinionated fearless leader. Shelley was taken to the hospital, where she and a combination of Catholic Workers and family remained for the week. We spent that week taking shifts sitting with Shelley and each other through the days and nights, until her fog cleared and the Shelley we knew reappeared.

I haven't known Shelley as long as the others who shared this experience with me. But in all the hours I spent sitting next to her, hoping she'd return to herself, I was so grateful for her and her life, and the way she connects us all. This experience reinforced for me what it means to be a friend or a neighbor, and how we might all hope to be surrounded by our community when we need them.

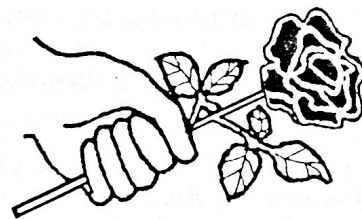
John Houser

I work in a hospital clinic evaluating neurodevelopmental disabilities. A big part of my job is navigating the inequities of our health care system. The wait time for an evaluation is much too long, but how long varies between those on public insurance, those with private insurance, those able to pay - and those I never see, who don't have insurance at all. Once evaluated, there are still gaps in accessing treatment due to ability to pay, the shrinking number of providers in Alabama's rural areas, or the additional hoops families have to jump through to get care for their children. Because of that experience I was struck by the emergency care available as we worked our way through the system. The urgency of the situation forced the system to skip its usual sorting of the best care to those with money and resources. It gave us a little glimpse of the equity we should have in caring for all the people of this country.



Once we realized that Shelley needed to go to the hospital, Birmingham Fire & Rescue quickly came and tended to her, quick and to the point, but gentle in their own way, and no one asked for prepayment or an insurance card. After she was in the ambulance there was no deliberation about what hospital we could afford. The focus was on heading to the hospital that could best serve her needs, and that's where we went. Once at the hospital Shelley was cared for by a litany of different doctors, nurses, and others (with one medication error that set us back a bit, possibly the result of new residents at a teaching hospital). There could still be a massive bill on the way, but at the time it was a nice taste of getting care based on what is needed and appropriate rather than the status of one's bank account!

Another blessing that accompanied this scary moment was all the interlocking communities coming together to provide care and support. Sophia, bursting into Mass at Holy Rosary in her pajamas to pull me out during the homily, who had been called on by Lee and Ashley, who had been called by Jim when he realized something was wrong. Once at the hospital we had all those Mary's House board members plus old friends like Carmen and Lindsay rotating through to stay with Shelley and Jim. Shelley's sister Marjie drove down from Nashville to help as well. Deacon Neal Kay, who had seen me rushing out of Mass, provided us guidance based on his previous life as a cardiologist, as well as bringing Bishop Raica by to give Shelley the anointing of the Sick. The circle extended outward to include our spouses doing extra duties at home while we kept vigil at the hospital, the out-of-town family and many friends watching, praying, and tracking updates in her recovery. Looking back now, with Shelley back to her old self, during those days of worry and waiting it was a grace to be among a communion of saints, dare I say, working together as the Body of Christ.



PS from Shelley: Reading John's reflection reminds me that for most of our lives our family had no insurance, health or otherwise. It's only since we've aged into Medicare that we've been lucky enough to have readily available health care. And although this newsletter is centered on our community, we're well aware of the cuts to health insurance and health care, to food assistance, to affordable housing. In our non-hospital lives we do as much as we can to support those who are suffering and advocate for change to what Dorothy Day called "this filthy, rotten system". By the way, the only bill so far came from the ambulance service, for almost \$900.



Shelley D

Saturday night, February 28, was a busy night for me. I was making new vigil signs, working on lasagna for our retreat, figuring out what to take to the Sunday meal. And then I wasn't. Sometime between 8 pm on Saturday and 8 am on Sunday, I had a stroke, or maybe two, and the next few days are lost to me.

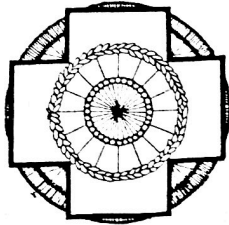
I don't remember the ambulance ride or the emergency room, or even the early time in the hospital. I spent most of the time asleep, sometimes almost waking to try and get up, or respond to questions. (I don't think I was a very compliant patient.) I must have been told where I was, and why, but I don't remember that. What I was aware of, every time I surfaced, was a friendly familiar face and voice. Jim, often Ashley ("No, you can't get out of bed!"), my sister Marjie.

Lee and John came in the evening after full days at work, Sophia found time in her hectic schedule to spend the night, and Marjie came for a whole week. Between them they made sure someone was always with me, and kept the far-flung family aware of what was happening. Coming back to awareness was a slow process, being awake more and longer, beginning to understand what was happening and to appreciate the care of the staff and the presence of friends like Carmen and Lindsay.

After five days in the hospital a kind doctor let me go home, realizing that I'd be much happier here. That turned out to be a community process also. Marjie stayed some extra days. Daughter-in-law Lesley arrived for two weeks. Friends brought (so much!) food. Jeff helped get us set up with home health care.

Probably the strangest thing about those days is that I was unaware that I might die. I wasn't in serious pain. I was very uncomfortable but didn't feel sick. I was deeply asleep most of the time. Because I was kept in bed by IV hookups and monitors (and Ashley) I didn't realize how much I couldn't do. A week later the neurologist showed me the brain scan from the ER, which looked like someone had emptied a bag of confetti all over my brain. I'm still amazed (and grateful) that I don't have permanent, serious disabilities.

I didn't share the immediate panic of witnessing my stroke(s), but we all seem to have learned the same lesson: the importance of relationship and community. Those days in the hospital are still a blur, but what continues to stand out is the presence of people who cared. I think I probably would have been afraid as well as disoriented had there not been those familiar faces always present. I never doubted that things were ok because they were there. And that was true - things were ok. Not only with Jim, but with Lady, and Justice the bird, with the meal, where people took up the slack seamlessly, with Mary's House, with life. It took a lot of stretching and readjusting by families and friends, but things were ok. I certainly won't ever think I'm indispensable and I won't try to stand on my dignity any time soon. But I will continue to build up - and rely on - the beloved community.



Come and join us!



First Friday Masses in our living room: 6:30pm, followed by potluck and visiting:  
Friday July 3, Celebrant Fr Joe Culotta  
Friday August 7, Celebrant Fr Hugo Esparza CP  
Friday September 4, Celebrant Fr. Frank Muscolino  
Friday October 2, Fr Jon Chalmers  
Bring a dish or just yourself!

Vigil with us for peace and justice, at the Fountain at Five Points South  
Wednesdays from 7:30- 8:30 am and Saturdays from 5 to 6 pm  
We have signs or bring your own. We follow a nonviolent discipline.



Stand against the death penalty on the day of any execution: corner of Arrington and  
Woods N. from 4:30 - 6pm. We have signs, or bring your own.

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