

Ordinary Time  
June 2022

# Magnificat



Roult

Friends,

It's the third house letter I've written since I arrived. Shelley said that the first amicable departure of a guest was a milestone - and that has happened. So we're midstream. There've been five of us in the house for the last few weeks, three women and two children, and we've been trying (with a new, slight, circumspection) to fill the third room.

Calls have been coming in from people looking for shelter, five or six messages each day (many call but do not leave a message). When I get back to Mary's House in the afternoon I settle down with paper and pencil and write out all the numbers, then call everyone. Occasionally there is hysteria. Occasionally, someone calling for her (usually her) daughter or niece or someone who stopped by their church or outside their business when they are locking up for the night. More than you'd think, the police call at 11 or midnight asking if we have room for a homeless woman. Hospital social workers call too, all the time (*wouldn't hospital social workers have more options? You would think*). And many women from Georgia or Florida or Tennessee, trying to make their way back to Birmingham - to escape an abusive lover, or clear out of town. People like to talk. They go on and on. There are the women who are resigned to the fact that most agencies are full and do not - ever! - call you back, and others who are new at the game, living in their car for the first time and angry as hell. Things should not be this way! And while the social worker in me thinks 'oh, but they are, and you'll know it soon enough,' I kick myself to cup and protect this initial flame of anger (which I have never felt, never having been homeless or living in a fifth rate 'boarding home' with no water or electricity - this last from a 65 year old woman I talked to today), that is so easily lost. Or maybe it smolders, waiting for a spark?

The usual trite psychological case studies of modern indifference - Kitty Genovese, the Stanford Prison Experiment - are misleading, and in any case don't add up to much. Throughout Birmingham there is a bustle of people, sometimes acting on their own, sometimes in concert. People *do* help one another. Someone takes someone to the ER or police station, someone brings a grubby, smelling person inside, and googles Birmingham Shelters. Someone follows the plunging career of their grandbaby who keeps turning up in different states, and tries to

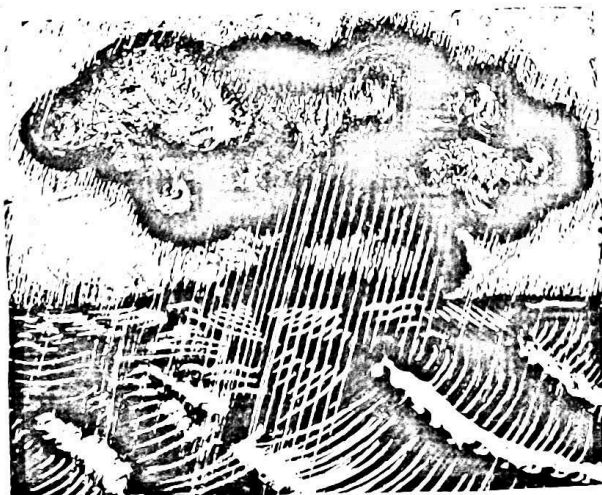
hook them up with rehab wherever they are. All this is going on, across America. This is what you learn on the Mary's House call list. Just as common are the amazing numbers of people who have nothing, who are simply wandering around.

Speaking of wandering around, it is something else how much wandering you have to do as a mom with kids in a shelter. Or for anyone in a shelter, including Mary's House. This is something I only realized in the last year. So I'd like to write a little about what our residents have told me about logistics. If it is raining, and you are homeless, where can you eat your lunch? Most libraries will kick you out (a few do not - this is a gold nugget of information!), you cannot bring your own food into a coffee shop, and who wants to huddle under an awning or eat on the sly? Where can you settle down with your kids for a few hours, on summer afternoons when they are not in school? Wherever you stay, you are going to be looked at, and people will be wondering if you are *homeless*, and when you are going to leave. Your precarious situation is indicated, among other things, by the number of bags you are carrying since you are catching the public bus around town for eight hours with small children, and no particular place to go. Where do you pee if you have to walk ten blocks to catch a bus, and then wait maybe forty minutes for it, and you have no money to spend at a store? Better be careful not to have any coffee before you leave. What do you do when you are a single mom without a car, and you are called to pick your kid up from school in the middle of the day because he is sick, when you are on the other side of town, and god forbid, at work? While I am writing this, and while you are reading it, homeless and single moms across the country are trying to answer these questions.

Wish us luck! Wish us luck that Mary's House can smooth the road a bit for people. Maybe we can.

Sarah

*Sarah Bell*



## A RETREAT WITH ALAN STOREY

FRIDAY OCT. 28, 7 PM TO SUNDAY OCT.30, NOON

Join us for a time of prayer and reflection on the scriptures, the demands they make of us and the freedom they offer us. What does kingdom living look like in our world in our time? How can we be the people we're called to be in these times of war, injustice, and climate emergency? This will be Alan's second retreat with us, and we expect it to be life-changing.



Alan Storey is an ordained minister of the *Methodist Church of South Africa*. He holds an Honours Degree in theology and a Masters in Philosophy. He is currently serving at the *Central Methodist Mission* in Cape Town, SA. The last conscientious objector to the Apartheid military, he is currently chair of *Gun Free S.A.*, and has spent his life and ministries working for justice for all people in South Africa. He has been involved in multiple efforts to transform racial injustice, including the founding of schools and clinics as well as facilitating *Diversity Engagement Encounters*, "healing the divisions that still divide us." He is a founding member of *Sacred Worth*, an organization working for the inclusion of LGBT people within the church, and an activist calling for economic justice in the church body itself. Alan travels widely and is known in the US for his work, especially for the *Manna and Mercy* weekends he leads. (This will not be a *Manna and Mercy* retreat.)

Thanks to the folks of *Eastlake United Methodist Church*, we'll be using their facility at 7753 1<sup>st</sup> Ave S Bham 35206. We expect to keep our same low cost, \$65 for the weekend, including meals. If you need lodging let us know and we'll work that out, There is no lodging at the church.

To register, call *Mary's House*, 205 780 2020, drop us a line at 2107 Ave G, Birmingham 35218, or email [shelleymdouglass@gmail.com](mailto:shelleymdouglass@gmail.com) or [sarah.ball7@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.ball7@gmail.com).

## CATHOLIC WORKER ROOTS

"We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know God in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of the bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet, and life is a banquet too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community."

From Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*



From the very beginning Mary's House has been a community endeavor. We'd like to honor some of our community, our roots, in this issue of the newsletter. We are so thankful for all of you, for those who come and work, for those who pray for us, for those who send money regularly or when they can, for those who are available to buck us up with a phone call. Thank you all, thank you for this place of sanctuary which you keep going!

We call out our saints:

Bob Aldridge, who resigned from his weapons building work and changed not only his life but so many others, including ours! Presente!

Jim Tuohy, long-time activist for justice and peace, regular friend and supporter of Mary's House, good friend. Presente!

Martina Linnehan, who co-founded Metanoia Community on the tracks outside the Kings Bay Trident base, patient and dedicated climate activist. Presente!

For these and all the faithful departed - thanks be to God!

We give thanks for all of you who support the house. Thank you for praying. Thank you for staying - for visiting, vigiling, phoning, being present. Thank you for giving regularly to keep us going. Thank you for giving generously once in a while when you can. (The saying is that when a big check comes, it's followed by a big bill. We thank the person who sent a very large check this spring. It was followed by a doubled insurance bill, which we paid in full.) Thanks also to Holy Family Church for their Lenten pocket change collection, always appreciated! Thanks to the priests who come to celebrate our First Friday Masses.

Thanks for in-kind donations: food from St. Peter's, a Pak'n'Play from the Ladies of Peter Claver at Holy Family, clothing and toiletries from various sources (including the police department!).

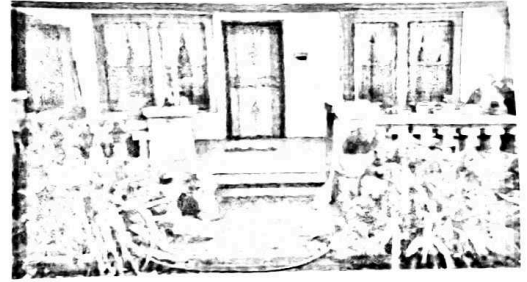
Thanks to everyone who came and celebrated at our open house, breaking bread with us!

Deo Gratias!



## HOW DO I HOPE?

Now that I'm no longer the resident hospitaller at Mary's House, I've moved back to join Jim in South Titusville, the Birmingham neighborhood where we watched for the Nuclear Train over 30 years ago. We still live 70 feet from the tracks, and trains still run day and night. Our block, which had six houses on it when we moved in, now has only three, and one of those is empty. We share the other two small homes, one of which has become Jim's office/library/research center where he holes up for days at a time working on the current book. I live next door to him now (instead of across town at Mary's House) with Lady, our dog, and Justice the African Grey.



I still start the morning with a walk, although a shorter one because of my arthritis. Lady and I know the area around our house pretty well, and to me it speaks of the state of our world now. We have many vacant lots where homes once stood. We have houses that are rotting away, with roofs falling in and holes in the walls. Our streets badly need repair. You can see through layers of patches down to the dirt underneath, and little plants are coming up in those bare places.

Several spots in our area have become informal dumps. The city has "trash and brush pickup" twice a month, but in a day or two the piles of old mattresses, broken furniture, food containers - and so on - have reappeared. Often trains will sit for hours at a time, blocking the most convenient way in and out of the area. Our streets get heavy use by all the cars that have to detour several miles to find other ways to cross the tracks.

This is the part of the world where Jim and I will probably live out the rest of our lives. It's here that world events will affect us, here that climate change impacts us, here that systemic injustice hits home, and here that nuclear war may find us out. That's true for all of us, of course. The place we call home is the place where theory meets reality. Whether we live in a track-side, under-served neighborhood or a suburban one with well-paved streets and well-kept homes, we are part of this interlinked world. The current horrific war in the Ukraine is a clear example, with global gas and food prices rising, starvation increasing, and the overarching threat of nuclear war. Behind the obvious effects are the corporations making huge profits from sales of arms, oil and gas and the jockeying for global power which has ignited this powder keg. The fact that our neighbors can no longer afford gas to get to work or food to feed their families, that hunger continues to invade the suburbs, and that we all watch the news nervously for word



of war abroad and civil unrest at home - makes obvious that we are all living in a web of relationships. It is often a web of death, but it can also be a web of life.

The difficulty lies in recognizing the terrible realities without losing all hope. I love the point that Rebecca Solnit makes, that regardless of all predictions, the future is uncertain and in that uncertainty lies hope. Uncertainty allows us to throw ourselves into working for a future, for life for the planet and its people. Uncertainty gives us just an inch of leeway to make a difference.

I know of a group of women who have decided to learn everything they can about natural healing, survival skills, growing food, and so on - so that they can nurture life when our systems crash. I know people who are planting gardens in the city to grow food in "food deserts". There's a program in one of our neighborhoods that helps young people train for meaningful work and also helps them to home ownership so that they are invested in their neighborhood and want to improve it. At least 86 nations have signed the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons even though the nuclear nations have not signed. A group of religious leaders goes to Ukraine to pray with the people there for peace. Work continues to address climate catastrophe, world hunger, to call for negotiations over Ukraine, to build peaceful mechanisms for conflict resolution.

None of these initiatives is guaranteed to work. Each of them is conducted against the overwhelming reality of brutal war, wild storms, flooding, heat waves, systemic injustice and all the other evils of our time. Each of them counts on that uncertainty: maybe things could change. Maybe the worst could be averted. Maybe life can continue and people can thrive. Maybe.... Because the future isn't certain.

Dorothy Day says, "The sense of futility is one of the greatest evils of the day... People say, "What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we can only lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment."

Hope is the discipline of acting consciously and responsively in the present moment in spite of our sense of futility, in honor of the uncertainty of the future. So be it.

Shelley D

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 BURNS  
KILL THE LIVING.

## MARY'S HOUSE NEEDS:

Household standards: cleaning supplies, paper towels and toilet paper, toiletries, dish detergent, and laundry detergent are always needed (they are used up surprisingly quickly).

For our weekly soup kitchen in 5 Points South, men's and women's clothing (especially shorts and t-shirts for the summer, and belts), travel-size toiletries, men's and women's shoes, sandals and socks, and men's and women's underwear.

Monetary donations are always welcome, especially since grocery and gas prices have been increasing. With two kids in the house, tickets to the McWane Science Center, Birmingham Zoo, etc, would be much appreciated!

We are looking for someone to give residents rides to appointments, and for someone to fill in for a night or two at the house (please contact me for details!).

For questions about donations, volunteering, or even to just to chat, please call 205-780-2020, or email [Sarah.Ball7@gmail.com](mailto:Sarah.Ball7@gmail.com) And as always we would love to have you stop by :)

## EVENTS:

Please join us for a vigil for peace every Wednesday at 7:30 am and Saturday at 5 pm by the fountain at 5 Points South.

The only kinds of fights worth fighting are those you are going to lose because somebody has to fight them and lose and lose and lose until someday, somebody who believes as you do wins. In order for somebody to win an important, major fight 100 years hence, a lot of other people have got to be willing - for the sheer fun and joy of it - to go right ahead and fight, knowing you're going to lose. You mustn't feel like a martyr. You've got to enjoy it. - I. F. Stone

Vigil against the execution of Joe Nathan James: Thursday, July 28, from 11:30 am to 1 pm in front of the art museum and the county courthouse, Arrington & Woods N. If the execution is carried out, short requiem vigil by the Dr. King statue, Kelly Ingram Park, 5:55 pm (the state of Alabama kills people at 6 pm). Please check the PHADP (Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty) website for more information.



**PRAY AND ACT WITH US:**

**FIRST FRIDAY MASSES** at Mary's House, 2107 Ave. G, Bham 35218



- Friday July 1, Fr Joe Culotta, 6:30 pm followed by potluck
- Friday August 5, Fr Ray Dunmyer, 6:30 pm followed by potluck
- Friday September 2, Fr Phil Paxton CP, 6:30 pm followed by potluck

**VIGILS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE** at the Fountain at Five Points South:

- Wednesday mornings, 7:30- 8:30 am
- Saturday afternoons, 5-6 pm



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Join us for a fall retreat with Alan Storey, reflecting on the Gospel and its call to us in this day and time: 7 pm Fri. Oct. 28 - noon on Sunday Oct. 30 - see flyer p 3.

Mary's House  
2107 Ave. G  
Birmingham, AL 35218

