

Ordinary Time
January 2024

Magnificat



Dear Friends,

Life moves on and is full of changes! In our last newsletter we told you how great it was to have Sheri here and what a good job she was doing. Shortly after we mailed that newsletter we all realized that Sheri was going to need to return to Atlanta. She had developed some very concerning health problems and she wanted to be close to the doctor she'd had for the last decade. So we said good bye to Sheri at the end of November! We are very grateful for the time she had here, the care and concern she showed the guests, and the spirit and energy she shared. She says the doctors in Atlanta are beginning to get a handle on her health issues and she's feeling better, so we're glad about that.

We've decided to stop searching for a hospitaller. Instead, we are going to shift our hospitality a bit. We've already begun to serve as more of a transitional shelter, taking guests who are further along in their journey and don't need a constant presence in the house. So far it's working well, and we'll be slowly taking another person or two. Our current guest is working for the city schools as a teacher's aide and is expecting to go back to school to get her teacher's certification. She's one of the many people who suffer from our for-profit health system and have to start all over after health issues. Having a place to stay, an encouraging community, and some financial assistance when needed makes all the difference as people start over again. It gives them the safety to make thoughtful steps toward a new life direction without falling through the cracks again.

We ask your prayers as we meet possible new guests and navigate this new kind of work. And we thank you for your continued support of the work here. We enjoy our weekly meetings with the guests and take inspiration from their stories.

We continue to help serve a meal on the street on Sunday afternoons. We have a hot dish to serve in a kind of pop-up style, a lunch for people to eat later, and baby wipes, socks, and toiletries to share. Warm clothing is popular when we have it.

Besides the new style of hospitality we find ourselves gearing up for a lot of activity this spring! We continue our twice weekly peace vigils which are more needed than ever. Sadly we'll also be vigiling on January 25 against the execution of Kenny Smith by the state of Alabama. This is a particularly heinous state killing. For the full story and things you can do, go to the website phdap.org, from

the only group of death row prisoners who are organized to end the death penalty for everyone.

As you'll see elsewhere in this newsletter, we are again sponsoring a Lenten retreat. From March 1 to March 3 we'll be meeting with Anne and Terry Symens-Bucher, who work in the Franciscan tradition to help people ground themselves through all the upheaval our world is enduring. We also have a visit from Fr. John Dear planned. He'll introduce us to his new book on nonviolence in the synoptic Gospels. There will be copies of his book available to purchase (or bring your own for signing), a chance to meet other concerned folks, and general good will. Flyers for both events are in this newsletter; please feel free to share them.

We are so grateful for you, our extended community near and far, to everyone who encourages us with prayer, notes, phone calls, and gifts in-kind or in money. Please continue to keep us in your prayers, and if you come through Birmingham do stop and visit. If you're already in Birmingham - come visit! But let us know in advance to we'll be sure to be there for you!

God's peace, Shelley D

Dear Friends,

When the last newsletter went out I did not know I would be writing a good-bye newsletter for the new year.

Based on some health challenges I had to make the right decision for me. I have decided to return to Atlanta to be near my physician of the past 10 years. In earlier newsletters I wrote about the ladies in the house and about me, the hospitaller. Now I want to talk about the Mary's House family that I have met and worked with, who accepted me with all my shortcomings and showed me nothing but grace and kindness. I want to mention them by name:

Ashley, you have such a beautiful smile and the flowers from your garden made the altar so pretty. I will miss your stories about James and his escapades, but remember he's just a toddler.

To Cheryl, a kind and gentle spirit, thank you for your love and your kindness.

To Lee, it was a joy to meet you. You have such a servant heart and my prayer is that God bless you and your family as you continue to do his work.

To John, I've only met you a few times. You were so mild-mannered and also I thought you were very handsome. Thank you for being kind to me.

Gladys, you are an inspiration, a strong woman who made me believe I can be who I want to be, and believe in myself.

Jim, when I see you I see the love of God in your smile. Continue to smile.

Shelley you are probably so tired of me but you are stuck with me for the rest of your life. I will be calling to ask for your opinion. You have put up with me when I did not even want to be bothered with myself. Keep fighting for the disenfranchised, the poor and the suffering. I pray many blessings on your life.

To Lexi, Ms Ernestine, and Mrs Yvette Cashio, thank you so much for your donations to Mary's House. To Janice I say I thank God for meeting you. Although you were going through a difficult time you took time to check on me and for that I am truly grateful.

My friends, I want to let you know that one of my favorite times at Mary's House was the First Friday when we would have Mass and potluck. It was such a great time of bonding and listening to Jim's stories. To Melissa, Victor, Mike, Teri, and anyone else who attended, thank you for letting me fellowship with you.

A special thank you to Jeff from Urban Ministries, thank you so much for partnering with Mary's House and helping the ladies in so many ways.

To all the donors that sent those cards with my name on them to thank me, I want you to know that they were a great encouragement, and to all the donors, thank you for supporting Mary's House. I hope you will continue to give because there is so much more work to be done.

I pray ongoing blessings for Mary's House as you navigate the good work that remains to be done.

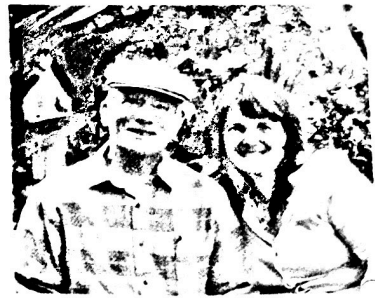
Peace,

Sheri

The Path to Beloved Community

A Retreat with Anne & Terry Symens-Bucher

7 pm Friday March 1 - noon Sunday March 3



We are all painfully aware of what has been called "the Great Unraveling" happening in our world today. Climate change is creating cascading disasters. The natural world is suffering, species are disappearing, island countries are disappearing under the waves. Meanwhile our governmental systems are not working, war and violence are growing, life itself seems endangered. If these facts are breaking your heart, come and join our retreat to learn how to be part of the "Great Turning": the movement to a life-sustaining society which may be the greatest adventure of our time.

In the time of his own great unraveling, Francis of Assisi chose gratitude, singing a song of praise known as the Canticum of Creation. Anne and Terry invite us to do the same thing, and in the process to create the Beloved Community. As they share from a Franciscan perspective, we'll explore through prayer, talks, and discussion what is the work that we are called to do.

Anne and Terry Symens-Bucher are Franciscans who have been married for 37 years and are the parents of five children (and two grands). They are co-founders of Canticum Farm, a community based in Oakland California on Lisjan Ohlone land, and in Sheep Ranch, California on Sierra Miwuk land.

Anne came of age in the Catholic Worker movement and worked for 25 years with the Franciscan Province of Santa Barbara in their peace and justice office.. She has been Joanna Macy's executive assistant since 2006 and has traveled extensively with Joanna offering the Work That Reconnects in the US and Europe.

Terry has an M. Div. from the Franciscan School of Theology and a Juris Doctor from the University of California College of Law. He has been closely involved in Richard Rohr's work with men, including four years as chairman of the board of Illuman, the national organization supporting faith-based men's work.

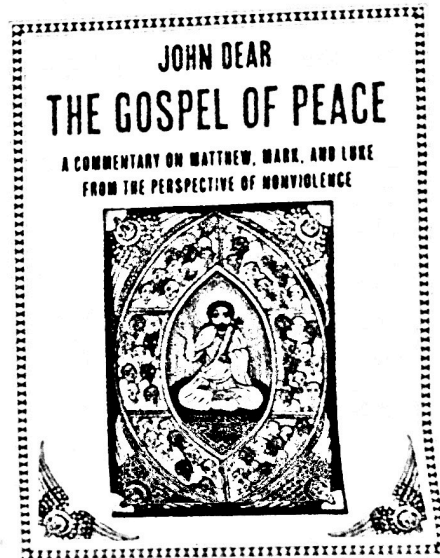
The retreat will be held at the Samaritan Center of Avondale United Methodist Church, 500 40th St South, in Birmingham.

Cost will be \$60 for the weekend, meals included. Plentiful scholarships are available. To register, or for information, email shelleymdouglass@gmail.com, or phone 629 278 3124.

An Evening with JOHN DEAR

on his new book:

“THE GOSPEL OF PEACE”



Peacemaker, author, and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Father John Dear, will be with us to talk about and sign copies of his new book, his life's work: *The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence*. It is the first ever commentary on the Synoptic Gospels from the perspective of active nonviolence in the tradition of Gandhi and Dr. King. In this original work, Fr. John walks us through every line of the three synoptic Gospels pointing out Jesus' practice and teachings on nonviolence, peace, and universal love and invites us to follow him. Join us!

Join us at the Baptist Church of the Covenant
2117 University Avenue, Birmingham
7 pm on Thursday March 14, 2024

For more information contact Shelley Douglass, shelleymdouglass@gmail.com

For further information, visit www.johndear.org and www.beatitudescenter.org where he is the executive director and offers online programs.

What I'm Learning From the Street
Beatrice McCormick

Every Sunday, a small group of people, myself included, gather and serve the local homeless. Although each is different in age, gender, and circumstance, everyone makes a point to make the trek to Five Points to enjoy a meal and some company. I have been serving for roughly four years now and I am thankful for every weekend I get to help people by simply serving food and listening to them. Lindsay Bolcar was the very first to start to venture out to Five Points South around 2020. Being my neighbor and family friend, I asked if I could accompany her and I never stopped. Quickly, I started to cultivate relationships with the people around me. I believe the very first person I met was Big Jim.

I think most anyone who has held a conversation with him would be able to remark that he is best described as stubborn, hard-headed, but kind. Very few things satisfy him. Everything is okay and could probably be improved with sauerkraut or ghost pepper hot sauce that we don't have. Big Jim used to walk to the tables where we distribute all the food and other necessities but after some time, he migrated down to a park close by. Stubborn as he is, he now refuses to walk a short distance to retrieve the things he requires. Of course, as we have all developed a relationship with him during the past few years of serving, we make a point to bring him a meal.

Before beginning to serve downtown, I had an extreme lack of understanding for the homeless. Of course I was able to see that they had their own issues to grapple with, but I didn't understand them. I assumed that these suffering people would just be grateful for everything given to them, I couldn't have been more incorrect. Big Jim, although living in less than superb conditions, will turn down soaps, soups, and pretty much anything and everything else. He makes decisions for himself and he finds a way to thrive in his current conditions. Big Jim utilizes the tools that are accessible around him and is able to get by. Although he lives on the very bare minimum, he is still a fully functioning person with many, many opinions.

I am forever grateful for the experience of getting to aid these people in relatively small ways. I cherish the moments I get to spend with them, hoping that they are comforted by the small group of us paying attention to them and their needs.

Beatrice McCormick is 13 and in the eighth grade. She will be confirmed this spring and has chosen Catherine of Alexandria as her saint.



How do we live in these days?

Since 2001 we've been vigiling for peace twice a week. It's not a very big vigil - often only a couple of people. But sometimes it grows and new people come, or former vigilers return. What does the vigil accomplish? Who knows?

It does remind us of who we are (or who we're trying to be). We hope that it raises some questions for those who drive by. Maybe it affirms people who feel buried in the hostility of our times, which answer questions with condemnation. Lately our sign that says "Palestinians and Israelis share a right to life" has gotten a lot of honks, as have the "Cease Fire" signs. Standing for peace includes standing for justice, because without justice there can be no lasting peace. Standing for peace and justice includes trying to meet a few of the needs created by our current systems of injustice. (Sometimes those efforts are less popular than our signs.)

I keep trying to think of what we can do to live well in this fraught time, with the looming threat of nuclear war and the progression of climate disaster. How do we live in these days?

It makes me think of a trip we made, Jim, me, and our Senegal parrot Joseph. We drove up to New York City not long after 9/11 to join with a few friends in discerning a response to those end times. After a weekend of thought and discussion and prayer, we decided that for us at least, the answer was to keep on doing what we were already doing, but to do it better. That's the only answer I can come up with: keep doing what we're doing, and try to do it better and more truthfully.

Shelley D.





We always have needs:

We need your prayers as we move into the future - for our guests, for clarity, for patience and courage.

We can always use money because it's so versatile. We do have some bills to pay, we buy food for the street meal and sometimes for our guests, hand warmers and bus passes - the list goes on.

In kind donations this time are mainly needed for the street meal: small containers of fruit, packaged snacks, bottles of water, socks, gently worn warm clothing like sweatshirts, jackets, scarves, mittens & hats. Adult clothing only - any size.

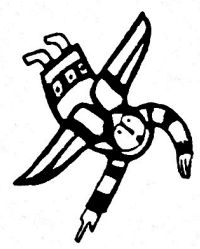
We give out lunches "for later" on Sundays at the meal. If anyone wants to volunteer to make sandwiches for the lunch, we need 22 sandwiches, meat and cheese (but no pork) on whole wheat bread. If you want to take a Sunday, call or email me (Shelley) at shelleymdouglass@gmail.com or 629 278 3124.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS HELPED SO FAR!

THANKS to our regular donors and our irregular donors too. Thanks to the parishes that help - St Peter's, St Francis Xavier, Holy Family. Thanks to those who've dropped off food for the meal, and those who've dropped in for a visit. Thanks to those who join us for peace vigils and those who stand with us against the death penalty. A special thank-you to the priests who make time in their busy schedules to celebrate First Friday masses with us.

REGULAR ACTIONS THAT YOU CAN JOIN:

Vigil for peace, Wednesday from 7:30 to 8:30 am, Saturday from 5 to 6 pm at Five Points South. We have signs or bring your own.



Stand against the death penalty: Thursday January 25th, 4 to 6 pm at the intersection of Arrington & Woods N in Birmingham. Stand against the execution of Kenny Smith by nitrogen hypoxia. This vigil will go on even if the execution is stayed (which of course we pray will happen).





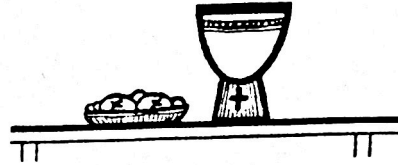
JOIN US FOR PRAYER AND ACTION

First Friday Mass: always at 6:30 in our living room, followed by a potluck and good food!

Friday February 2, celebrant Fr. Joe Culotta

No Mass in March, join us for our retreat!

Friday April 5, celebrant Fr. Frank Muscolino



PEACE VIGILS: Wednesday 7:30-8:30 am, & Saturday 5-6 pm, at Five Points South
AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY: January 25th and any day an execution is scheduled, from 4-6 pm at the intersection of Arrington and Woods N, in Birmingham. This will take place even if the execution is stayed.

Hear Fr. John Dear: Join us for a talk about Fr John's new book. There will be copies for sale, and Fr John will be signing books. For info see inside flyer

Retreat with Anne and Terry Symens-Bucher, 7 pm Fri, March 1- noon, Sun March 3,
"The Path to Beloved Community and Care for Our Common Home"
See inside for information - this is going to be inspiring!

Mary's House Catholic Worker
2107 Avenue G
Birmingham AL 35218

