

October, 2024
Ordinary Time
Dear Friends,

Magnificat



For the past couple of days I've been watching the path of hurricane Helene across the Southeast, trying to contact friends at risk, and mourning the effects of climate change in real time. By the time you're reading this newsletter we may be tracking another storm, but people will still be dealing with the effects of this one. We here in Birmingham were to the west of the storm, with only some rain and wind and a drop in temperature, reminding us that we've entered autumn.

You may have read about our mass shooting, an event that occurred across the street from our Saturday vigil site, but hours after our vigil ended. Authorities think it was a contract killing. Four people were killed and another seventeen wounded when two men using pistols with Glock attachments fired on a crowd of people waiting to enter a local club. This has been a bad year for our city with murders mounting and guns proliferating. We are part of the global spiral of violence that is bringing us closer than ever before to a catastrophic use of nuclear weapons, something that hasn't been done since 1945. Fear and aggression seem to be conquering human sanity.

It's tempting to give up, but... we're still here. Thanks to you and your support (and our own stubbornness) we're still here. I think we're a little sign of hope for folks in a jam, and I know you are a BIG sign of hope for us. Thank you.

We have said goodbye to both of our guests. Edie has moved into senior housing and thanks to Beeson Senior Services, the furniture bank, and Jeff Bowman, was able to furnish her apartment to her satisfaction and get moved in and settled. Dorrie started classes at UAB and moved over nearer to campus under a program that provides housing as well as tuition. We are working with Jeff to find new guests who need a boost in their journey to stability.

One of the difficulties of having no live-in hospittaller has been that the house has been empty between guests, which isn't good for the house or the neighborhood. We have been spending every other night there when it's empty, but that is something of a strain on our little community. We think we've found a solution to that problem: a volunteer care-taker who will live at the house, take in the mail and put out the trash, etc. This weekend Eddie is moving in to keep an eye on things and save some rent money in the process. As with everything we do, this is an experiment and a work in progress! We hope it will work out well for all of us.

Our friends on the street continue to be a major focus for us. We see many of them during our peace vigils, and we have a chance to touch base while serving the Sunday meal. The neighborhood businesses have hired what amounts to a

private police force, CAP, who are supposed to "clean up the neighborhood" and "make people feel secure". This includes picking up trash and cleaning graffiti, walking people to their cars and providing jumps when needed - and moving the homeless along. The publicity says they will connect people with the services they need, but since there are nowhere near enough services, it basically amounts to moving homeless people along, out of sight. We have watched the process and talked to the CAP employees, who are mostly folks in need of work themselves. They wear uniforms and patrol the neighborhood and when someone calls CAP to complain, they get a walkie talkie message and go take care of the problem. Often the problem is the visible presence of a homeless person, which they solve by moving the person out of sight. As one of them said to us, "We're just doing our jobs."

On a happier note, we have a couple of events coming up that we're excited about:

Especially for those involved in death penalty abolition work, we're hosting a small day of reflection on December 7 at Mary's House so that we can gather and reflect together on our roots, why we continue to do this work, and how we can continue to support each other as we do it. See the next page for information.

And - Alan Storey will be joining us again next spring (April 4-5) to reflect on what life requires of us, drawing especially on Dr Martin Luther King Jr, who was killed on April 4, 1968. Alan is an experienced and dedicated activist in his home country of South Africa. He speaks powerfully from the Christian tradition, challenging us as well as the systems of injustice. This is a preliminary announcement, so that those at a distance can make travel plans and so that everyone can clear their calendar for the retreat, 7 pm Friday April 4 - the evening of April 5th. Unlike our usual retreats, Alan has asked for NO DROP INS because the process is cumulative.

So - we thank you! We invite you! Let's encourage each other for the long haul, because no matter who wins this next election we remain in a huge struggle for the future of the entire planet.



God's peace,
Shelley D.



**Digging Deeper: a Day of Reflection
Staying the Course in Opposing the Death Penalty
Saturday, December 7th, 9am - 3 pm**

This year has been a sad and exhausting one for those of us who work against the death penalty in Alabama. We are on track to kill at least six people this year, two of them by a new and horrific method, nitrogen suffocation. State government and popular opinion are largely in support of the death penalty.

Recognizing the difficulty of continuing an uphill battle, we invite you to join us for a day of reflection to deepen our roots. This isn't a workshop on the death penalty, but an opportunity to share our deep beliefs, the faith or philosophy that compels us to continue this work, our discouragements and signs of hope, and sources of the strength to keep on keeping on.

We expect this to be a small group. We'll gather at Mary's House (2107 Ave G, Bham 35218) from 9 to 3 on December 7th. A simple lunch will be provided. No cost, but please register in advance so that we can plan space and food. To register email shelleymdouglass@gmail.com

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR: ALAN STOREY WILL BE JOINING US AGAIN!
Friday, April 4-Saturday, April 5, 2025
Theme still developing, but drawing on Dr. King**

Alan Storey is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. After 33 years pastoring, he now considers himself a facilitator of personal and political change. In addition to in-depth experience in struggles for justice and peace, Alan holds degrees in theology and applied ethics. His reflections on scripture are both challenging and enlightening. This will be Alan's third retreat with us.



You will notice that this retreat is a little shorter than usual. We will be meeting from Friday night to Saturday night. **PLEASE CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR FOR THE ENTIRE TIME: NO DROP-INS THIS WEEKEND!** The work we'll be doing with Alan is cumulative, each session building on the last. Cost: \$60 for the weekend, with meals. Scholarships available. Limited primitive sleeping space available. To register email shelleymdouglass@gmail.com. Watch the next newsletter for more information!

Journey to Hope

“In these uncertain times.” I remember when the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing, this phrase was used incessantly in news stories and television advertisements. It became such a familiar phrase that it almost became meaningless. Well, now we’re living in a different kind of “uncertain times.”

When I first became aware of Mary’s House in 2014, my family and I had just moved back to Alabama from Kentucky after 15 years of education and ministry. I felt I knew a lot about the world and thought I had a lot of right answers to life’s most pressing problems. I thought I knew a good bit about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. I was very “certain” in my beliefs and worldview.

Then, by God’s providence, I was introduced to Shelley and Jim Douglass. My life has never been the same and I get a good laugh every now and then when I think back to how certain I was. Like most things in my belief system, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement were viewed in such a way as to fit my preconceived notions.

I remember my first Mary’s House retreat led by Jim Forest. I went to that retreat believing I was going to be in the presence of a bunch of angry anti-war activists. Boy, was I wrong. I had never been in the presence of a group of people who, while certainly aware of all that was wrong in the world, seemed so joyful and full of genuine peace. It didn’t fit my belief box. In fact, being involved in Mary’s House over the next few years forced me to get a whole new box.

So, back to the “uncertain times.” I confess that it is almost a daily struggle trying to cultivate joy and peace in a world filled with such pain and suffering, most of it being completely unnecessary and unjust. Feeding people who live on the street on Sunday afternoons becomes a weekly lesson in how broken our society has become. Watching them live in the elements without medication, sufficient clothing, any kind of personal hygiene, and certainly no hope can at times become overwhelming. Realizing there’s more than enough money, but not near enough compassion nor political will only makes it harder not to succumb to anger and despair.

When we see our politicians and fellow citizens scapegoat our immigrant friends who daily live in fear of being pulled over or reported to police, or being the target of unfounded social media lies, it takes a lot more patience than I usually have not to reflect the same hate back to its source. What can be more frustrating is the knowledge that many who engage in these tactics fill our pews on a weekly basis.

Being involved in Mary’s House, however, gives me a small glimmer of hope, and sometimes that small glimmer is all we really need. A few years back, Alan Storey led one of our Mary’s House retreats. On the last morning, he shared the illustration of how a small blade of grass or a weed can have enough power to break through the smallest of cracks in concrete. I believe the point he was making was that the concrete represents the hardness of our world that seems to

crush life everywhere we turn. If, however, we live lives of truth, the smallest of cracks can be exposed, and eventually life comes forth. At Mary's House, it may seem like what we do doesn't make all that much of a difference. We don't feed the masses. We don't have a huge shelter. Our death penalty vigils don't garner a whole lot of attention. But to the extent that what we do is grounded in truth and love, life can emerge. I can, without hesitation, say that being involved in Mary's House and seeing how Shelley and Jim have lived their lives according to truth has saved my faith. Who knows how many tiny, life-exposing cracks have been created over the years by the faithful witness of countless donors and volunteers?

Are we still living in "uncertain times?" Absolutely, but we dare not lose hope. Truth can never die. And to the extent we live our lives according to it, the times may become more certain, more just, and more loving for our neighbors who desperately need hope. Thank you all for your continued prayers and support for Mary's House.

- Lee Bean

CATHOLIC WORKER ROOTS

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.

- Rita Corbin

NO MORE KILLING



We've been following the news this week, watching President Biden consider allowing strikes deep into Russia with American weapons; hearing Mr Putin threaten the use of nuclear weapons in retaliation; watching Israel attack Lebanon and Hezbollah retaliate; hearing reports of genocidal violence in Gaza and in Sudan, murders of activists in the Amazon - it would take this whole page to list all the places in our world where people are killing each other. Including our state, where we killed a man on Sept. 25th using nitrogen to suffocate him, where a "mass shooting" took four lives on Saturday the 21st, and left seventeen others wounded, where we're scheduled to kill two more in our execution chamber before the year is out, and where the prosecution will no doubt ask for the death penalty if those who did the shooting on the 21st are ever caught.

It seems that whatever the problem in our world, killing is the solution. It reminds me of my very young, very patriotic self, who thought that the United States was all good and the Soviet Union was all bad. As a young person I believed the use of nuclear weapons would be justified because it would annihilate the evil in the world, leaving only the good behind. If the enemy is total evil, erasing them is the solution.

As I grew up I saw people beaten for trying to order a hot dog in a segregated store, killed for trying to register to vote, living in abject poverty even though they were working. It became clear that this country was far from the ideal, and that made me wonder about the USSR: maybe there was some good in those folks. Maybe we were all a mixture. Maybe we shouldn't be erasing anyone.

When I studied history I learned the back story to some of the violent struggles going on in this world and I realized that there's a back story to every struggle, one that explains what's happening. Just two examples, from the macro to the micro.

The Hamas attack on Israel just a year ago was a shocking and unexpected rampage of death and destruction. There's no excuse for the horrific violence that was unleashed, which ironically destroyed peace and human rights activists among the victims. And yet - October 7th didn't happen in a void. It grew out the oppression of Palestinian people by the state of Israel, the segregation and violations of human rights they experienced. It seems pretty clear that the violence may soon include the whole Middle East as each side exacts vengeance on the other.

The micro: I have a friend who for years was a mitigation researcher for death penalty cases in Alabama. After someone was convicted of a capital crime, he would delve into their background to discover what led to the violence they'd committed. The abuse endured by some of his clients was so horrific that ultimately he had to leave his job to maintain his sanity. The violence they had endured had led to the violence they inflicted.

I look at this world balanced on the edge of nuclear war, already suffering the devastation of climate change, and I wonder: is it too late to stop the killing? Is it too late to listen to each others' back stories and begin to understand? Will the violence we've endured lead to the violence that ends the world?

We've resurrected one of our old signs for the vigil. It says, "Stop the killing". Just that. Maybe if each of us found a way to stop our participation in the killing we could move back from the edge. Maybe we could refuse the taxes that pay for war, break the silence that consents to the death penalty, join one of the groups like Community Peace Teams that witness to another way in situations of war. Maybe we could stop the killing.



WE ALWAYS HAVE NEEDS!



We thank you for your generosity to Mary's House. This house is a community project, and you are an important part of the community. We need your support - we need prayer for ourselves and for our guests, for the planet, for justice and peace. Of course we need money as well, for bills and baby wipes, snacks and sox, and lots of other things! If you'd rather help with in-kind donations, we can use:

- Liquid HE laundry detergent, bleach, Famoso cleaner, dish cloths and towels
- For our friends on the street: Small fruit cups or applesauce cups, snack size bags of chips, baby wipes (ideal are the Parents Choice packets of 100 wipes, which sell for a dollar), backpacks, small toiletries.
New men's and women's underwear; sox, new or gently used; t-shirts and sweatshirts, jeans and pants, ditto.



And We Need Your Presence:

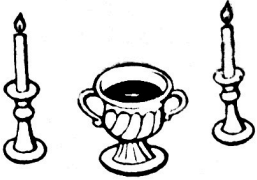


These days it seems violence of all kinds is increasing exponentially, in campaign rhetoric and in neighborhood shootings, in wars large and small all over the globe, in the willingness of world leaders to risk nuclear war and global disaster, in the commitment of states like Alabama to executing people as a form of vengeance.

Come and vigil with us any week. Spend an hour quietly holding a sign ("No War", "Black Lives Matter", "Ceasefire now", "Practice Nonviolence") to say that there is another way to live, with dignity and respect for all. Every Wednesday from 7:30 to 8:30 am and every Saturday from 5 to 6 pm, at Five Points South in Birmingham. We have plenty of signs, or bring your own. We follow a nonviolent discipline.

Sadly, Alabama is scheduled to continue killing people. We will vigil against the execution of Derrick Dearman on Oct. 17th and Carey Grayson on Nov. 21. We vigil from 4:30 to 6 pm at the intersection of Arrington and Woods N, at the county courthouse & the art museum. Again, we have signs or bring your own. For more information and things you can do in advance, go to the website of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, phadp.org.





JOIN US IN PRAYER AND ACTION



FIRST FRIDAY MASS:

6:30 pm at Mary's House, followed by potluck and conversation
(also admiration of all babies).

Friday October 4th, celebrant Fr. Joe Culotta

No Mass on November 1, Holy Day of Obligation

Friday December 6th, Fr Phil Paxton CP

Friday, January 3, Fr. Jon Chalmers



DAY OF REFLECTION: Praying about the death penalty, Saturday December 7,
- 9am - 3pm at Mary's House, 2107 Ave. G, Bham
(see inside for details)

LENTEN RETREAT: SAVE THE DATE! Alan Storey will be leading us in reading the
signs of the times with scripture, drawing on Dr. King, April 4-6, 2025. See inside
for details.

VIGILS: For peace, weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
Against the death penalty, October 17th and November 21st.
For details, see inside.

Mary's House Catholic Worker
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