

THE SERVANT SONG

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From Fear to Love in a Time of Covid

by Brayton Shanley

These times are like no other in our history as a people. To address these interlocking calamities, Pax Christi Massachusetts sponsored a zoom of people who have headed up peace groups for decades in the Boston area. We grappled with the questions: What are the greatest evils of these times that compel our response? What social ills do we need to address first?

Climate change was strongly proposed as the first, the threat of the extinction of life on earth—human, animal, and plant life. That's number one. Or no, it's nuclear weapons. Dr. Ira Helfand founding member of Physicians for Social Responsibility, and a long-time nuclear weapons activist, who spoke at the conference, strongly countered: "With the nuclear weapons we have throughout the world, we still have the potential to end human life on earth. Game over in a nuclear holocaust. And let's not forget that we are making progress. Fifty countries have signed on to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We cannot lose momentum."

And what about the "War Without End" in Afghanistan and Iraq? Will we ever stop living on a permanent war footing? Or no. It's racism. Will we white people ask people of color whose quality of life is levelled by race hatreds, to wait, be patient; we'll get to you after we have made some headway on these bigger problems.

All these manifestly stubborn and harrowing evils draining our life's blood are within the realm of the worst possible political divide in our history. An authoritarian, white supremacist is elected president... **President of the United States**, bringing on the death of factual truth, the death of moral truth. Then, January 6th. Have we hit bottom?

We try to grasp all this while struggling to survive Covid 19 and its variants. The divisions are so great, disunity so total, that we as a people can't even agree on how to stop the spiking of this deadly pandemic.

Are these signs forerunners of "end times", our human culture so clearly in political, economic, and moral decline? Where is the hope to staunch this hemorrhaging human condition with our temporal, mortal lives so apparently in the grip of darkness? Are these apocalyptic times? Are we the modern-day Babylon, that ancient city that rejected the One, True God its citizens, turning their backs on Divine Truth and love, while living high, corrupted, destroyed?

And yet, in this present age, within this vast cosmos, this beautiful and sacred earth with all its teeming life, can we even remember that our beleaguered earth was originally created good, very good, God's precious creation (Gen. 1:31)?

The Divine planetary explosion of life loved into existence is utterly sacred, miraculous. Yet, as good as we have the potential to be, as sacred as life is, inherently, intrinsically, evil has its grip on us. So, can we even recognize our whole, wholesome, and holy selves? Has God given up and stopped listening? And, in the process, have we completely lost our way, our truest non-violent and loving selves?

Jesus and the prophets shared the be-

lief what the Psalmist put forth in Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The world and those that dwell therein are God's possessions.

In the face of the sheer, gargantuan size of what we face us can we manage to only watch and chronicle the apparent demise of God's green earth? Do we still belong to God? Or are we just drifting randomly through the universe?

The New Testament Jesus

the atmosphere will last for 1,000 years or more. However, there remains a short window of time to prevent the most harrowing future.

The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change offers us a once in a millennium challenge: reduce our fossil fuel usage 40% by 2030...What was that? Cut our carbon footprint by half in just eight years?

But life remains God's highest value.

If not to save ourselves, can we

self-destructive Armageddon with no winners. Will we support these weapons and blithely watch as our tax dollars are spent to upgrade them? Or are we finally ready to become a peace-loving and disarmed people and pay the spiritual and material price?

"War Without End?"

Four US presidents are responsible for the horrific end in Afghanistan. 2.27 trillion dollars were squandered building a regime that fell to the Taliban before Americans could safely finish their hasty exit.

How did this 20-year war begin? In response to 9/11, we have invaded and occupied two countries, bombed four others, killed 800,000 people (how many injured, crippled, unable to function?) terrified millions, especially children, tortured hundreds, detained thousands, created a global surveillance dragnet, created at least 21 million refugees, and spent \$6 trillion on its operations. \$6 trillion to kill, terrorize and then... lose the fight decisively while killing civilians in the crossfire.

Are we hoping that our Empire-wielding presidents and their political parties will ever be able to make true peace? If they cannot, are we secretly hoping for a nicer economic, political, and military Empire, and yet want to protect our advantages of Empire, just the same?

We're hooked. In the Book of Revelation, the criterion for righteous conduct is perfect loyalty and devotion to God and Christ, which is demonstrated by absolute refusal to worship the emperor or the State in any manner whatsoever, even though such refusal may get you killed. This is the witness of the first century Christian Communities, our hallowed nonviolent call: to die rather than to kill.

Let's not forget the environmental impact of war. The scientific facts of Climate Change are such an extreme threat to all life that we absolutely cannot squander almost one trillion dollars per year, our current defense budget, on past, present, and future wars. War is always an expensive way to do the wrong thing.

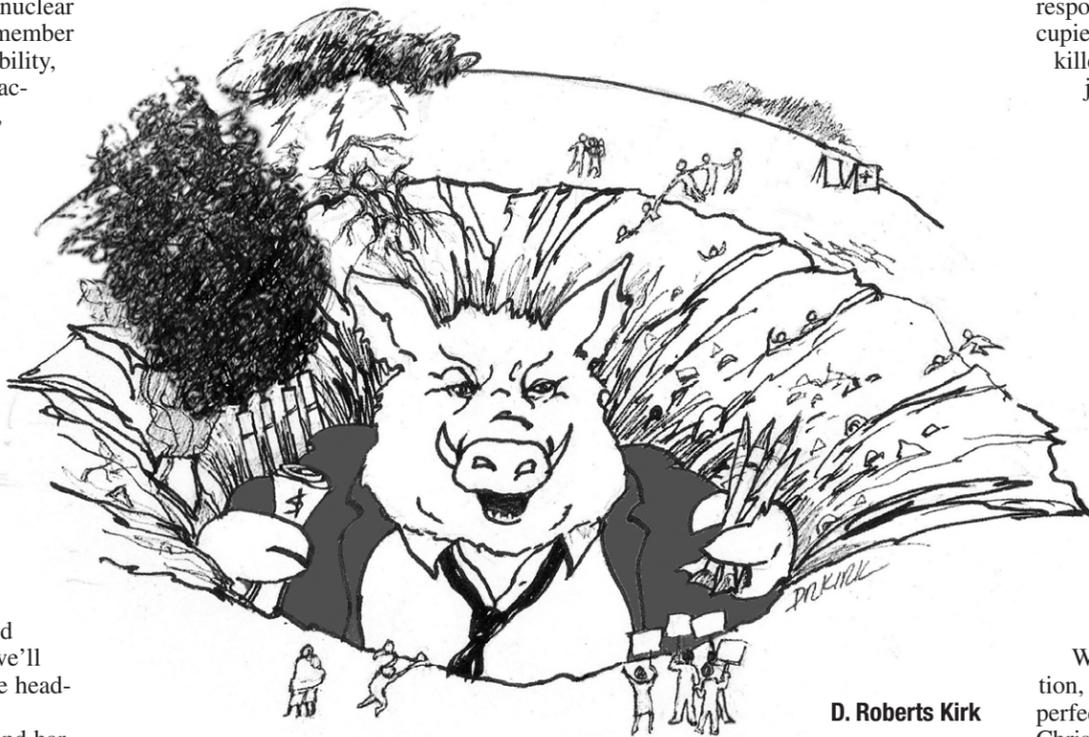
We spend over 400 billion dollars yearly fighting wildfires and rebuilding after hurricanes and responding to drought-stricken farmland and flooded communities. Instead, several trillion dollars per year needs to be spent reinventing human life and more than ourselves on earth and creating a carbon neutral way of life, as soon as humanly possible.

Is it time to turn the spiritual light inward? Can we see ourselves as we truly are and discover the true meaning and purpose of being alive?

Racism

Racism is a mindset, a disease, an "original sin" of this our still young country. The most tragic and unjust result of this disease, is that white people form a dominant position of race and class superiority, oppress people of color. In that economic and social oppression, people of color internalize inferiority.

Since 1619, race has been a Black culture issue, a life and death struggle for survival. White people can live comfortably in a white-dominated world of advantage,



D. Roberts Kirk

teaches Christians that while on this earth we are to repent for our cooperation with sin and evil and turn from fear to love. We effect our conversion by laboring to pick up the cross of nonviolent love and follow the ways of compassion, and mercy as the Truth under God.

Could it be that this apocalyptic time is not some great and mysterious force of Satan beyond our control that will bring about the last things? Rather we ourselves bring on a behemoth of dark forces: war, climate change, racism, by living in fear: fear of the other, fear of scarcity and the dreaded sufferings of life and death, thus cooperating with this foreboding dread.

St. Paul wrote of the spiritual choice between doing what we know is wrong and doing it anyway. (Romans 7:19) and the call to live a love that is always "patient and kind." (1 Cor. 13)

Gandhi, one of history's great evangelizers of hope, warned us that "we either progress toward nonviolent love or rush to doom." Are we rushing to doom by the choices we make? As we evaluate our spiritual condition in these times, how do we measure up in this, our beleaguered country?

Climate Change

The nations of the world, particularly our own, have ignored the cumulative effects of their materialist lifestyle and the incumbent burning of fossil fuel since after WWII. And who has the largest carbon footprint? US and China, the wealthy ones like us. The cost? We are unable to stop global warming from intensifying over the next 30 years, even if we stop all fossil fuels today. The CO2 we have emitted into

meet these demands to insure our children's futures? And more to the point, can we protect the future of the vulnerable, powerless poor of the world and their children who do not have the resources to protect themselves from the climate catastrophes that are now seen as inevitable? Can we overcome our fear of losing our "things" so that others may live?

Nuclear Weapons

Over 75 years have passed since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Today, nine countries possess 13,000 warheads scattered across the world. The US and Russia own 90% of them. When we fought this arms race with The Soviet Union from the 1950's through the 1980's, nuclear weapons were considered clearly omniscidal, capable of killing all life in an all-out nuclear war. Because nuclear war is MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) with no possible winners, these weapons could never be used. The unthinkable was called "deterrence."

The Soviet Union and the US kept the world hostage with the fear of mass destruction. Without the Soviet Union in the 1990's we could easily forget that nuclear weapons exist. So today, in our convenient amnesia, we deny that these weapons remain omniscidal.

Now an update: We are planning to upgrade our nuclear arsenal. Projected cost: 634 billion from 2021 – 2030. Pope Francis has weighed in: "How can we ever speak of peace as we build new weapons of war? An accident or one leader's madness can destroy humanity?" So, for us, the American people, this could be our final battle, a

Aging in Place: Four Decades of Community

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

I have increased my “Loud Sigh Syndrome,” sighing as I age in place after four decades in community. Voluble Sighing has become louder and more frequent: Climate Change, white supremacy, the ascendancy of white suburban Republican women in the governor’s race in Virginia, the nearly all-white jury in the Ahmaud Arbery trial—louder and louder.

Being age 76 is a big part of the current sigh mode as our Mission Council members, all of whom are not on-site residents, are searching for the “called” to commit long-term to Agape. These current core members, most in their twenties and thirties, are also involved in expanding the racial, ethnic and gender diversity at Agape.

Nevertheless, the “significant sigh,” is connected to growing old in community as I recall multiple decades of parenting, teaching, preaching, preparing food for large groups, successive Francis Days, negotiating internal community conflicts... and now? Sigh. What next? Who will succeed us?

Then there is death and dying. A septuagenarian, my energy level is different; Arthritis sets in; friends and relatives are gone, requiring trips to covid wakes and burials. As Brayton and I age in place, we, like our residences, Francis and Brigid Houses, the hermitage and Levertov, the Writers’ Hut, require upgrade and repair; but unlike the buildings, which will remain for some time into the future, we are adding to our awareness of “end times” on personal and global levels.

We sigh too as trees on the land are “put down” to be able to create more sun for our community garden and heat for our hearths. Creating more sun, a movement toward the light. Dawn comes, but so too does the fading of light at dusk. Light and dark, beginnings and endings. So too with Agape, life unfolds cosmically and humanly. So much to do while aging in place: supervise workdays, bring in the wood, stack it, gather kindling, catch all those zooms, offer some ourselves, hospitality and on.

The Invisibility of Aging

I recall Sr. Megan Rice’s visit to Agape several years ago. Megan’s recent death at age 91, drew praise in *The Washington Post* and other major news outlets focusing on her two years in prison for anti-nuclear activism. Accompanied by her dear friend and ours, Pat McSweeney, Megan, and Pat sat with Brayton and me on Agape’s porch reminiscing about lives of activism. Our conversation turned to aging, as Megan was in her late 80’s at that time. We reflected on peacemaking and the changes in “witness” over the years, how we as elders might be perceived by the younger generation. I asked Megan casually: “What’s it like to be in your late 80’s, having been in prison for these two years?” Expecting Megan to answer something like Phil Berrigan’s “Don’t get tired” as he wrestled with the effects of 11 years in prison and their cost to his physical health, I was surprised, when Megan, in a soft reflective voice, said: “I often feel invisible.” Pressed to explain, she added: “Sometimes, when you’re as old as I am, you feel that people look right through or past you.”

Honest, transparent, and direct, Megan, the stalwart companion of many Catholic women religious in the Plowshare movement, including Sisters Ardeth Platte, Anne Montgomery and many more, seemed to be saying, that after all the publicity about her age and incarceration, the attention to her jail witness, now back in the “world,” she felt unseen.

I have not yet felt such invisibility personally as I am still actively engaged in life at Agape, so much so that intermittently, I wish I were invisible. Megan’s comment, however, deepened my perceptions of the physical and spiritual realities of “invisibility” linked to aging. I began to question what other community co-founders and “aging” radicals were thinking about

this process. Many of our close resistance friends, co-founders of far-flung communities, have stepped away from the demands of daily community life. Their departures have provided extra impetus to my thinking: What will become of Agape after Brayton, and I are gone?

Good Sighs

I especially treasure my “Good Sighs,” ones I take daily when I harvest Brussel sprouts from the garden, observe the stars at night, sometimes so bright in the increasing cold that I can barely stand to look at them, awakening an aching awe in me. On the positive, non-sigh side, eldering in community means sharing our long years of alliance and resistance across the peace community spectrum, the passionate intensity of the “early years.” Memory takes hold and too often interns, and guests must listen patiently to stories about those who have visited in the past, events and speakers, Dan Berrigan SJ, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Elizabeth McAlister, Mary Evelyn Tucker. Then too, there are interns, stories of their departures, arrivals, cementing a legacy that lives on.

Daily, we pay homage to our mentors and contemporaries whose names and lives are unknown to social justice aware people under 50 or 60, like Gordon Zahn, WWII CO, and sociologist, who uncovered the “solitary witness” of Franz Jaggerstatter; or the engaged and active, Sr. Kathleen Deignan, friend of Thomas Berry and Convenor of the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College.

sighs. Ironically, ancient concepts, such as Peter Maurin’s Agronomic University, seem somehow “new” in their increased relevance given climate change and the sinking participation of young people in “church.”

Elders among us have committed ourselves to listening to the voices of the young, encouraging them to co-mentor and guide us. Hence, talented young people at Agape and beyond have organized and led the last two zoom Francis Days, and a retreat with Jim and Shelley Douglass, garnering eager participation, potent conversations, and major speakers.

Presence of the Past

Something powerful and transformative happens in this intergenerational experience, eliciting a sense of Presence, of the past, and of communion with saints who are still walking with us.

Presence and the Past, became touchingly true when we recently visited Frida Berrigan and Liz McAlister, whom we have known for over 40 years. We shared stories about peacemaker friends, our past resistance lives together, with Frida and Patrick Sheehan, Frida’s husband, and their two children, Seamus and Madeleine. Liz is a cherished Resistance Icon. Only five years younger than Liz, I remember days with her at the Pentagon and watching her pour her own blood on The Blight House, as we called the White House in “those days.”

At a recent intimate lunch with peace movement friends in our 70’s and 80’s,

hearts touched, Presence, Jesus.

A Vow of Stability in Today’s Restless World

Sr. Joan Chittister, in *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, writes about the Benedictine “vow of stability,” a commitment to a place which consecrates the claimant “to work at holiness...to serve...to help make community decisions.” Sr. Joan comments that “life is an enterprise to be undertaken together, not an entertainment to be indulged in alone. ... I’m responsible always, every day, for all these people to whom I am continually related until one by one we have helped one another all the way through life.” (p.118) This is a demanding stretch in a world of divisiveness, shifting values, racial divide, and despair. Such commitment means never being invisible at any age, and practicing instead, relatedness and intimacy

Community members taking a vow of commitment to continuity and stability, could enrich and invigorate eldering communities such as Agape. Stability in community as a vow could open some deep conversation among those searching for a non-nuclear family life.

We could take a lesson from Sr. Joan’s appraisal of Benedictine spirituality, which “intends a nonviolent world where the least favored, the neediest, the totally defenseless are protected and heard and provide for with justice.” Our direction is one of newness, of becoming more inclusive, more allied with our sisters and brothers in the African American, Native, Asian, Latinx, LGBTQ and other communities. How to accomplish such inclusivity is an open question among us, needing dialogue and time.

Eldering as a Call to Revolutionary Change

Simultaneous with our eldering comes revolutionary change. Black Lives Matter (BLM), including *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church* by Olga Segura, presents the need for an all-White residential community to look to the ways we can continue the anti-racist work that Ibram X. Kendi lays out for us in *How to Be an Antiracist*.

A recent find in this regard has been to read *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness*, in which Rhonda Magee shares her struggles as an African American woman and scholar amidst the “effects of social-identity-based bias and deepening connections across lines of real and perceived difference.” A key term for Magee is “vulnerability.” Magee posits that when we are “supported by compassionate awareness of self and others,” we will be able to explore “bold new models for working against injustice with the potential to transform the world.”

Many of us elders move visibly or invisibly into the consciousness of an “eternal realm” preceded by death and dying, topics we loathe to discuss, unless we are book-writing theologians. Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet, addresses this movement into “invisibility” and vulnerability, in his last book of poems, *Human Chain*, by writing of “A letting go which will not come again. /Or it will, once. And for all.” All of us, young and old, live in this “thin place” between the real material world and the spirit world. All of us are involved, in some way, in the great “letting go” amidst the finality of “And for all.”

We are destined to shared histories with our present rising generations, as we rely on each other in community. Dorothy Day articulates such comfort to mean “to be strong together, to have fortitude together.” Dorothy remembers sitting in church “in a misery” and as “waves and billows passed over” her, she thought, “with exultation, ‘I am sharing suffering,’ and it was immediately lightened.”

Let us be strong, have fortitude together, share in each other’s suffering as the waves and billows pass over us and create together community that is intergenerational, interfaith, inter-racial, eco-friendly, and sustainable, where we explore “bold, new models” of living together.



Art by M. Eileen Lawter, long-time friend of Agape since the 1980's offers a depiction of scenes of intergenerational community circles

Art by M. Eileen Lawter. Scenes of intergenerational circles at Agape.

We recently participated in community zoom forum with Kathleen and one of our core Agape non-resident members, James Robinson, a Professor at Iona, and an animator of institutes and other initiatives. A Berry Scholar in Residence Professor Joe Holland, led the intergenerational exchange on Peter Maurin’s New Lay Ecological Monasticism, including Agape, Benecasa and Freedom Farm. These are not invisible moments.

Nevertheless, I realize with increasing clarity that models of community from years past, and our friends who lived them with us, are “invisible” to the younger generation. War Tax Resistance does not, for example, take off as a topic and practice in present-day community dialogues.

Persistent and committed, we keep telling our collective stories, hoping their impact will ignite future generations, who are now dealing with the preposterous circumstances of nuclear war, climate change, racism, endless political and social media disruptions. Often, our dialogue with interns elicits collective, discouraged inward

those of us in the circle shared intimately about the aging process, memory loss, other challenges. We took comfort in the smallness of our efforts and seemed satisfied with our “invisibility,” seeing some of our mutual “fading” as a spiritual time of diminishment, as the Quakers would have it. Our work is done. Take heart. Rejoice.

Intergenerational Circles

In such a vein, my thoughts turn to an intergenerational circle we had here at Agape recently, with members of St. Susanna’s Parish, their pastor, Fr. Steve Josoma, Pat Ferrone, with whom we began Agape, Elena Creef, a professor from Wellesley College, and three Agape interns in their twenties. We asked hard questions of each other: What does rootedness in place mean? How will young people respond to the dire predictions of climate change? We felt great comfort in our shared vulnerability, the young people sharing their despair and helplessness. We elders commiserated and offered the light of years on the path of peace, the gospel rootedness of nonviolence. We ended in a circle of hands held,

My Creatively-Maladjusted Third Age: Centering Anti-Racism

The focus of my lifelong work for peace and social justice, rooted in the teachings of the nonviolent Jesus, has recently shifted to concentrate on community organizing through an anti-racist lens. I am a 70-year-old straight white cisgender man with an advanced degree. Looking back over fifty years of activism, I see clearly that three events led up to this changed focus. The first happened just a year ago.

On a sunny Colorado morning in August 24, 2020, I invited my co-workers at the retirement community where I served as executive director to join me in silently taking a knee in remembrance of Elijah McClain and other victims of police violence. Within minutes of the meeting ending, my cell phone lit up with texts and emails from executives at corporate headquarters. I was told by the leadership of my non-profit employer, which has “Christian” in its name, that I had made many people uncomfortable and that I needed to retract my references to police violence. They walked me off the campus and put me on unpaid “investigatory leave.” Two weeks later, I was disciplined for “proselytizing.” Within a month, I was fired for another infraction.

My employer put the focus on my behavior and the discomfort felt by white residents and employees, rather than engage in a conversation about what had happened to Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black massage therapist from Aurora, Colorado (a 15-minute drive from the retirement community) who died after a violent police encounter. Elijah had not committed any crime and was doing nothing illegal. Responding to a 911 call about someone “sketchy” police put him in a choke hold. EMTs injected him with a powerful sedative. And he died of cardiac arrest in a hospital a few hours later.

As Tema Okun points out in his article *White Supremacy Culture*, fear of open conflict is a key element of that culture: “People in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore it and run from it. When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue that is actually causing the problem.”

The second event that shaped my understanding of systemic racism happened six years earlier when I was working as part of the POWER Lehigh Valley organizing team in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Michael Brown had recently been killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri and we were feeling the reverberations in our community. A group of three wise and powerful



black women, Jude-Laude Denis, Camilla Greene, and Phyllis Alexander, co-led a series of weekly meetings, creating a brave space where white, Black, and brown folks together confronted internalized white supremacist ideas and beliefs. I learned what it means to move from being a white ally to showing up as an accomplice. I began to develop the emotional bandwidth, insights and skills needed to overcome white guilt and shame and take action to amplify the voices of Black leaders and leverage my white privilege to further POWER’s goals.

The POWER team succeeded in ousting the superintendent of the Allentown School District (ASD) who had turned a deaf ear to the cries of Black and other faith leaders about the school system’s culture of racial toxicity. Our campaign resulted in the ASD hiring the first person of color as School Superintendent in the school system’s one hundred fifty-two-year history.

In retrospect, I can see that a third life event – one which occurred when I was a young man – had opened my mind and heart, predisposing me to learn from the two events described above. In 1971, I worked with the United Farmworkers Or-

ganizing Committee (UFWOC) in northern New Jersey. Dolores Huerta, co-founder or UFWOC with Cesar Chavez, trained us and directed the consumer boycott campaign to remove non-union picked lettuce and grapes from the shelves of supermarkets in the New York City area. The job paid \$5.00 per week, plus free room and board. I lived with our multi-racial organizing team in a donated brownstone in downtown Jersey City where I gained a first-hand glimpse of the impact of environmental racism on Chicano farmworkers. As a relatively naïve twenty-year-old, I was shocked to see red splotches and lesions on the faces and hands on every one of the farmworkers who had traveled from California to picket stores with us. I learned that these were workplace injuries, sustained when the growers sprayed the fields with toxic insecticides while the workers were picking crops. I remember thinking, “This is outrageous. This would not happen if these were white workers. The growers do not regard these brown-skinned farmworkers as full human beings.” The images of their chemically-burned skin remain with me to this day, a vivid reminder of how system-

ic racism emphasizes profits and production over human lives.

Taken together, these events have informed and re-energized my commitment to organizing in new ways. Now in my Third Age of life (having left behind my forty-five years of full-time employment), I have made a conscious decision to channel my life energy to fulfill three commitments I have made to myself and my community.

My first commitment is to contribute to the work of the Transforming Justice Team of Together Colorado, an affiliate of Faith in Action, a nation-wide network of faith-based organizations dedicated to community organizing through an anti-racist lens. The Team is working to pass state legislation (following the lead of Oregon and Illinois) to stop police deception of youth during interrogations. I learned that the police can legally lie to suspects and that young people are especially vulnerable to these tactics (see Nigel Quiroz’s article “Five Facts About Police Deception and Youth You Should Know”). Research by the Innocence Project shows that false confessions result in 29% of wrongful convictions, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Second, I am committed to becoming an effective anti-racism educator with the goal of widening the circle of white folks doing the necessary deep work of rooting out internalized white supremacist assumptions and beliefs. This fall,

I taught my first course, using Layla Saad’s book *Me and White Supremacy*. Two groups are helping me toward my goal: White Awake www.whiteawake.org and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) www.surj.org.

My third commitment is pure, heartfelt fun! I’ve launched a guitar-gifting program that puts unused instruments into the hands of young musicians who need them. I work with volunteers to collect, test, and, if needed, fix the guitars. This fall, we delivered our first two electric guitars to James Ferro, a young music teacher at Fort Northgate Logan middle school in Sheridan, CO, where twenty-five percent of the students come from families experiencing homelessness. We will expand guitar-gifting in support of BIPOC-led groups like Youth on Record www.youthonrecord.org and the Hendrix Music Academy (see their Facebook page). We call our group Message To Love www.message-to-love.org.

John Paul has been affiliated with Agape, first as a member of Agape’s Mission Council (Advisory Board) and now as a member of our extended, engaged community network.

Catholics Working for Indigenous Rights

by Craig Simpson

Earlier this year news came from Canada of graves of children at former Native Residential/Boarding schools being uncovered. 215 remains were found outside of the Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia alone. More stories came out as the year went on, terrible stories of punishment, abuse, poor conditions, and deaths, perhaps killings of young Indigenous children. 357 of these schools were run by Christians of various denominations all over Canada and throughout the United States. Most schools in Canada were Catholic-led in Canada, and we are learning more about these schools each day.

But we all have known these stories. I have. In the late 60's, I went to school in New Mexico. Right in the Center of Albuquerque there was an Indian School still operated by the government. Everyone heard the stories about children taken from their parents and placed in schools to assimilate and "educate" them. A Catholic Bishop in Canada stated at the time. "We instill in them a pronounced distaste for them of native life so that they will be humiliated when they are reminded of their origins". It was a grand attempt to erase a people from the land.

In Boston, in July, several local Indigenous groups including the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) and United American Indians of New England (UAINE), organized a stand-out in the center of the city at the Trinity Episcopal Church at Copley Square. The participants stretched orange flowers on the Church steps, and speaker after speaker related stories of survivors, of relatives of survivors. All Indigenous People present, talked



1883 Carlisle School in Pennsylvania a native indoctrination into American culture.

about residential schools. They all wore orange clothing, the symbol of the movement in Canada to force the government to make reconciliation with this tragedy.

Talking with Catholics in the audience I asked: Should we organize something like this at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross here in Boston? Should we stand with victims of Catholic schools in the US and Canada? And so we did.

Two weeks later a group of 16 people stood in front of the main Catholic Cathedral in the Boston Archdiocese. Most were Catholics. A few Protestant ministers supported us and talked about their Church's responsibility. We looked a little pathetic-downtown Boston on a hot day in the middle of Summer. People going home from work looked puzzled.

Afterward, we formed a group for the

vigil- "Boston Catholics for Indigenous Rights." A local Indigenous leader asked us to change the name to "Massachusetts for Indigenous Rights." We effected this change.

We are people from the Agape Community in Hardwick, MA, two active Catholics from Connecticut, a professor from Boston College, some people from the Catholic Worker, The Boston Climate Movement and Pax Christi. No nuns or priests, at least not yet.

Speaking out about Residential Schools is where we started, but there is so much more Catholics need to come together on. In the first meeting, we talked about learning about the Doctrine of Discovery (or Domination) and supporting Indigenous environmental and land rights struggles.

Some of our people including myself, spent weeks at Line 3 Minnesota pipeline protests. We wanted to support legislation at the Massachusetts State House, which included five bills introduced by the Mass. Indigenous Legislative Agenda. We also want to raise issues of Land Back, especially in its relationship with the Catholic Church.

It all seems ambitious don't you think? But who else is doing this? There may be other groups like it around the country. The group Call to Action from Minneapolis is certainly doing quite good work around Indigenous rights.

We heard from Mahtowin Monroe of UAINE about the Missionaries Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They have a base in Lowell, Massachusetts. The Oblates in Canada and US have run 48 residential schools in Canada including the same Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia. They seem to own several buildings in Lowell and Tewksbury. One is the Workers Shrine in Downtown Lowell which I have frequented several times. The Oblates apparently have helped revive the French-Canadian Churches in the area. I talked to several people involved in Tewksbury Indigenous politics who belong to the churches and who have never heard of the Oblate connection with residential schools.

Like many Catholics we know nothing about what our Church does. Maybe we can get our churches and their leaders to acknowledge their role internationally in the schools and help with reconciliation and reparations.

I may be a little hopeful and naive on this. That, it seems, is what we need to be to make changes in the Church. Won't you join us?

"I'm Tearing Up My Boston College Diploma"

by Sister Megan Rice SHCJ

Sr. Megan Rice, SHCJ who was born to Eternal Life, on October 10, 2021, wrote this article for Agape's Servant Song, Spring 2006. Megan called Agape when she heard of our joining over 200 faculty and a small coterie of students, many of them involved at Agape at the time, to protest the awarding of an honorary degree to Condoleezza Rice, the architect of the invasion of Iraq and Secretary of State under George W Bush who ordered the invasion of Iraq. We feel truly privileged to have known Megan who sent this letter to us after she sent a copy to BC President William C. Leahy, SJ.

Today, here in the Nevada Desert Experience, a movement of 25 plus years of vigilance at the Sacred Lands of the Western Shoshone People, which, since 1951 has experience more than 900 Atom Bombings, rendering their sacred land the most nuclearized place on this planet. The fall-out in radiation sicknesses in this country, and on thousands of test site workers has been immeasurable.

I first studied Radiation Biology in my graduate studies at Boston College from 1958-62, before being missioned as a biology teacher to West Africa.

During the 80's, I learned that Boston College had invited Oliver North to give a lecture in its stadium for something like \$12,000. I wrote from Nigeria to withdraw from my membership in the Alumnae Association for this activity. I saw it inconsistent with the writings and teachings of Pierre de Chardin to whom I had been introduced by the head of our Department, Professor William D. Sullivan, SJ, who taught us Cellular Biology and Protozoology in most illuminating styles, introducing us to the wonders

of Teilhard's "Human Phenomenon" and "The Divine Milieu."

And now, I am compelled to tear up that certificate of MS in Biology from Boston College since Boston College so miseducates a generation of graduates and students by paying tribute to the Caesars of our times. Such Caesars lead the world into conflict with so devastated a people as in Iraq and elsewhere, polluting their sacred air, land and water with the effects of radiation from the tons of "depleted" uranium which line almost all weapons now in used, backed by the present mis-administration, of which Ms. Rice seems to be the consistent proponent and spokesperson.

I had hopes that attitudes at BC had changed when I discovered large contingents of students attending the School of the America's Vigils these past few years since I returned from Nigeria in 2003. It is so sad to think that the present administration at BC cannot learn from the insights and inspirations of its students and numerous faculty members who rightfully speak through their lives for justice and compassion and above all, peace in our suffering world as did their leader and servant, Jesus of Nazareth, with a similar Empire in this day.

Sister Megan's activism resulted in her arrest on numerous occasions and, at 82, being sentenced to three years in federal prison, where she was released after serving two years. Despite her selflessness and quiet demeanor, Sister Megan earned national recognition for her nuclear disarmament activism. She was featured on the front page of the New York Times, invited to testify before Congress, and the subject of a documentary, the Nuns, the Priests and the Bombs. (from official funeral parlor obituary).



Becky Perreault, Boston College graduate and member of Agape's youth group, The Creatively Maladjusteds, holds a sign, "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" at the Condoleezza Rice Protest.

Circle of Being

Making Space for the Next Generation: Francis Day Zoom, October 2021

By Brian Ashmankas

I had the privilege this year of serving on the planning committee along with Agape Community co-founder Nancy James, Edgar Hayes of Freedom Farm, Andrew Borus who is new to Agape, and our chair and longtime Agape mission council member (and my fiancée) Samantha Leuschner.

For the second year in a row, the realities of the ongoing pandemic necessitated an online Francis Day by Zoom. While we ache to be in a common space once more, the Zoom format also came with the advantage of extending our reach to spaces beyond Massachusetts to our wider Agape community and network. It was the theme of giving and being given space that most stood out in this year's gathering about love and fear in the time of COVID.

It was our third speaker, Rhonda Miska, a pastoral associate and advocate for a greater voice for women in the church who came to us from Minnesota, that brought this theme into focus. She told us how we're all called to both the humility to not take up unnecessary space in the world and the magnanimity (or great-souled-ness) to recognize our own worth and dignity, our own rightful space in the world. The injustices of this world seem to all come down to some taking up too much space causing others to be given too little.

Vicki Machado, a Pax Christi USA national council member and resident of Florida, opened the day talking about climate change. She called us to recognize all the various lifeforms and entities of this earth as our sisters and brothers. When we do this, really do this, we allow and encourage them to flourish rather than seeking to dominate or push them out. In other words, we give them their rightful space and don't take up their space for our own benefit.

Sr. Melinda Pellerin, Sister of St. Joseph, and longtime friend of Agape, shared with us the long, terrible, and ongoing history of racism within the Catholic Church. It is a story of our black and brown sisters and brothers being locked out of spiritual spaces by white authorities.



Brayton reminded us that the divine explosion of life on earth is inherently good yet gripped by evil. All life has been given abundant space to survive and thrive, to cooperate and evolve. But because some take more space than they need out of fear, out of a sense of scarcity, or out of a fear of death, there isn't enough space left for others... for people of color, for women, for nature. The conventional wisdom is to take more space, to live in a scarcity

mentality, to fear the other, and to embrace empire. To reject this makes us crackpots in the eyes of the world...so, as Suzanne suggested, let's be crackpots!

As the day wrapped up, we began talking about solutions. In a word, the solution is love... nonviolent love, communal love, universal love, Agape love.

The panel told us to begin to open our eyes to how love allows us to transcend our limitation and accept our limitations. In other words, it makes more space and keeps us from overextending our space. It allows us to do the next right thing for the other and teaches us to share our space through community giving each of us more.

For over thirty years, Suzanne and Brayton have led Agape and built up its community – both the residential and the extended community. It was they who in love found their space and shared their space. This year they gave space in a way that forms a particular milestone. This was the first Francis Day planned entirely by a committee not led by Suzanne and Brayton. As we contemplate the future of Agape and what space it will have in the world over the next forty years, they are making space for the next generation, allowing them to take on leadership and contemplate how it will evolve.

All works of justice are about making space. Let's make space for nature to thrive, make space for women and people of color to flourish and have a voice, make space for the other and for the crackpot. Let's also make space for ourselves, remembering we also have dignity and needs, make space for future generations to shape the future, and make space for new ways of thinking abundantly and without fear. In short, let's make space for love.

Brian and Sam Leuschner, a long-time Agape stalwart and former intern, and a member of Agape's Mission Council, were recently engaged and have magnificently animated and organized this year's zoom Francis Day. Brian was recently ordained in the priestly order known as The Good Shepherd Companions.

A Journey of Faith: Community and Permaculture

by Sarah and Jared Dunham

On a cold January morning we sat in our little living room in Jamaica Plain, Boston, with bowls of cereal, a pad of paper, some colorful markers, hearts full of prayers, and began to dream aloud. What was the vision God was whispering in our hearts?

After several years of living in intentional communities and ministering to folks caught up in human trafficking and people experiencing homelessness in urban contexts, Sarah (formerly working at the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston) and Jared (formerly part of Innerchange in San Francisco) met, fell in love, and married. While dating, we felt God calling us to seek out something a little bit different, and maybe radical. We spent our first year of marriage changing as little as possible, figuring that being newly married was change enough. Nine months into that year, however, as 2017 rolled in, we felt the calling to explore a different life stirring within us.

As the colors swirled on the page, we found we were excited to live in a community with other followers of Jesus, that is radically hospitable to people suffering from mental illness, trauma, addictions, or other difficult situations that have pushed them into the margins of our society. The community would hold a safe space for healing, recovery, and friendship in a rural, sustainable lifestyle.

Did something like this already exist? We decided to travel the country and seek it out. We set up three ideals we were looking for in a community: sharing life together in a diverse community with others who love

Jesus; radical creation care and sustainable food growing; trauma informed hospitality for friends in recovery.

With the blessing of our church, family, and friends, we put a futon in the back of our minivan and began an adventure through the US and Canada. In the first year we visited over thirty different communities and sustainable living projects. We learned about restorative living such as permaculture gardening, earth building, and ecological ways of producing energy on a small scale. We witnessed many different expressions of community, and learned the importance of healthy communication, clear leadership and governance structure and adequate housing in sustaining a healthy community. We experienced many beautiful moments and some really challenging ones as well. We miscarried our first child while at an Ecovillage on Vancouver Island and testified to our faith in Christ while leading a procession of people of various spiritualities to bury our child under a Sand Cherry Tree while singing together "It Is Well with My Soul."

On multiple occasions community leaders and members shared their grief and frustration as they reflected on the overwhelming whiteness of their communities and the intentional community movement. These were some very profound moments for us as we continued to consider what kind of community we wanted to be a part of.

After the first year's whirlwind road trip across North America, we decided to spend six months interning at an Ecovillage on Vancouver Island British Columbia to

dig a little deeper into sustainable living. We spent the following eighteen months in a converted school bus at a very transient community in Alabama called Nomads Land. Our son Cedar was born here in April 2019. We invited the visiting travelers, train hoppers and friends from Rainbow Gatherings (google it) to work, eat, pray, and play alongside us and our friends as we went about our days.

The transience of Nomad's Land made us hungry to learn from a more established community with families who had lived together for many years, with hopes of learning more about raising our family in community over the long term. We volunteered at a 40-year-old community called Jubilee Partners in Georgia over the next nine months. While there, we enjoyed working with refugees, asylum seekers, helping in the gardens, and with the animals. We were poured into by community mentors and made some lifelong friends. Still, we didn't feel it was where we were called to stay.

While reaching out to a few places on the west coast, we felt a nudge to reconsider New England. Desiring to experience the Northeast growing season and a more intentional therapeutic farm, we volunteered at Spring Lake Ranch in VT for the month of July. The 100-year-old secular community encouraged us that a therapeutic farming community can stand the test of time if it is able to adapt and reinvent itself as needed along the way.

We spent August and September interning at Agape Community in MA. Agape gave us another set of rural Christian community mentors in the Northeast. We trea-

sure our experiences of shared meals, long conversations about cultivating non-violence in community and family life and working side by side in their kitchen and in their no till garden. Cedar, now two, loved ringing the bell and helping to light and blow out the candle during each day's rhythms of prayer.

With all the many great places we have been over the past four years, we have not yet found a community that we feel called to stay in for the long term. We wonder if God has us casting a vision for something new.

This winter, we are in a community house in Central Falls Rhode Island that is part of "a network of individuals of Christian faith building relationships across socially prescribed boundaries, sharing their lives and resources," called the Traction Network. We are excited to live in community with our friends in this racially diverse network and explore collaborating with them in founding a healing farm somewhere in New England. Our second baby comes in February as we help with Traction network projects in an urban setting.

Though the road ahead is hazy, we are excited to continue moving forward with friends along the way and we trust the Holy Spirit will continue to guide our steps in the beautiful and often unexpected ways God works.

Jared, Sarah and Cedar visited Agape with their friends Anna and John, also searching for community, and their four children in mid-November. It was a lively weekend.

Sacred Earth

A Little Teacher, An Infinite Story

by Louisa Rossel

Stories help us to reflect and reconcile, turn inwards and shape how we act outwardly. They are supposed to have a distinct beginning and ending, along with a clear message that sticks within the minds and hearts of the people who listen. What if I told you that the story I'm about to share isn't meant to have an ending? What if I told you that the line "once upon a time" doesn't apply here because this story continues to unfold? Would you still listen?

My story begins with a brisk, silent walk through a forest path. Silent. No spoken words danced through the air. But the leaves crunched beneath my feet; my shoes pounded faster and faster into the Earth as I raced to complete a project task on time. I didn't need to speak a single word; the music of the forest revealed my secret: stress and impatience clouded my mind on this afternoon excursion. I began banging metal poles into the soft, damp Earth to set up signage for fellow hikers to learn about the history of the trail. A seemingly innocent and helpful task, right? Wrong. Like oil and water, impatience and an invasion of the Earth, no matter how small or for our own human good never mix well. One harmonious substance will never form.

With a loud "bang" of the metal stake pounder (a tool used to drive a wooden or metal stake into the ground), I forced the Earth to greet the cold, metal pole of my first trail sign. The piercing boom of metal-on-metal echoed through the forest. The trees and mushrooms and creatures of all kinds watched in a foreign, pure state of silence as three, deep maroon drops of blood fell to the ground from the depths of the hollow stake pounder. Drip, drip, drip. Drop.

Out came a small, nutmeg brown mouse with unblinking eyes shaped like round black beads. In a trance, I stared into the eyes of the mouse who had previously made her home inside the seemingly safe, cozy nook of the stake pounder; the same stake pounder that I was using to complete this project. I remained silent and continued banging the stake pounder, each boom cutting like a knife through my lungs. Attempting to catch my breath, I stole glances at

the mouse to the left of my foot, now gently covered by a blanket of oak leaves. At my first glance, the mouse's black, bead-like eyes stared back at me in agony and fear. At my second glance, her eyelids gently enveloped her terror-stricken eyes with a wave of peace and serenity. I followed her lead by closing my own eyes and took a deep breath for both of us.

More than anything in the world, I wanted to stop. To reverence. To mourn.

And yet, the pressure of finishing this project weighed heavy on my mind, so I carried on. Walking once again, my feet shuffled through the leaves faster and faster, displaying my anxieties and restlessness to finish this project before the setting sun disappeared below the horizon.

Suddenly, I felt sick and physically couldn't continue down the path any longer. I stopped by the bank of a beaver-dammed pond and gave myself a rare gift. I permit-

ted the clear, warm substance forming in the deep grooves of my eyes to freely flow. Down, down, down my cheeks they fell, dripping onto the soft, moss-covered Earth below. I looked up at the setting sun and felt an enraged voice rise from the depths of my body. It screamed "How dare I take part in the killing of this mouse and do absolutely nothing to acknowledge the loss of a fellow living being!" I felt the anger rise within me like volcanic magma bubbling, ready to explode at any given moment. Not entirely sure of my audience, I screamed under my breath at Creator or Mother Earth "Please be angry at me. Please show me your disappointment or fury." I crumpled my body into a tiny ball. Like cold and warm air colliding, my desire to be punished and my need to be nurtured and cared for by the Earth swirled within the walls of my body. I became a living, breathing storm.

Storms do not last forever. I opened my eyes and the golden hue reflecting off the trees and onto the still, beaver-dammed pond soothed my aching heart. There was no lightning bolt that came down upon me or black bear that chased me out of the forest as I'd wished for. Rather, like the mouse, I reached a profound state of serenity. I listened to my body and granted myself permission to cry, process, grieve, and heal.

How often in this world do we give ourselves permission to do so? In return, I was given the wisdom of learning how to move forward. I will forever keep the memory of this little mouse in my heart. My hands have the power to cause great harm and great healing. Which path will I actively choose to take? Just as I deeply care for, nurture, and listen to the Earth with every bone in my body, the same unconditional love continues to be returned to me. The story of the friendship between the Earth and me has no distinct beginning and end; it simply exists and continues to unfold. For that, I choose to be grateful.

Louisa, a Stonehill College graduate, continues beyond her summer internship to live at Agape while she works locally at the town of Hardwick's East Quabbin Land Trust, teaching children Environmental Education.



ARTIST KATIE CHAMBERLAIN

A Glimpse of Light: Life at the Border

by Fr. Paul Frechette

Four detention centers supported by the Federal government are located in the geographical area of San Felipe de Jesus Parish. It is in Cameron Park, one of the poorest counties in the USA, located in Brownsville, Texas. The International bridge over the Rio Grande begins on the USA side and ends on Matamoros, Mexico where hundreds of immigrants live in tents.

Our parish has four detention centers for Immigrant youth. One center has 100 girls, ages 6-12 who have come up from Central America with hopes to reconnect with an adult family member in the USA. Many of these youth have seen drug gangs in their own neighborhoods.

The pastor, Fr. Tony O'Connor SM has served in this parish for 8 years and has begun many services to these youth in the parish and in the detention centers.

Every Sunday at 3pm he offers Mass in the parish church for 100 teens who are bussed in by their centers. Following the Mass, A team of 15 adult parishioners makes the snack plates with coca cola, which the kids love. Two young Jesuit priests have joined this reaching out program to the immigrant youth, and 4 Dominican sisters as well.

We have known Fr. Paul Frechette S.M. since the 1980's. Paul and other Marists have been supporting Fr. Tom in this important yet difficult ministry.

We Uncovered a Peach Tree

Workday hosted by Agape for Paulist Center of Boston, Care of Our Common Home Ministry

A winter squash vine crept like a python on the peach tree. We wielded shears on overgrown hedges. When they stood back, we saw the peaches. Our daughters threw like spears the cuttings, then wander to the swing before lunch.

They had set out to the garden as we came around the hedges overgrown to the gravel road. Bob Wegener, Agape architect, and Paulist Center friends A.E. Cerino and Trudy Macdonald set out to the garden. Bob noticed us, the young family arriving, and brought out gloves.

Afterwards, homemade bread awaited on the counter. A photograph of Thomas Merton wearing a cowboy hat. A Quabbin Reservoir picture above the teas. A "Stop Executions" postcard below.

A table waited at the door to the chapel with bells, a gong, a clay pitcher. Beside it a piano and a music stand set with J.S. Bach's "Polonaise."

"The chapel was the dining room at first," Bob said. Indigenous sacred images adorn the interior. "We put the windows south facing, for passive gain".

In the bathroom a stitched sign reads "Blessed Are the Peacemakers..." (Mat. 5:9). As one daughter pees, her sister pushes a pink Barbie doll Mercedes-Benz. They play with the Picasso tiles and the wooden train on the rug in the library next to a Tomb for Unknown Civilians Killed in War.

Brigid house waits to prove the smell of straw. A wall opens to the straw in a cross, another says as much with Fr. Dan Berrigan, SJ (d. April 30, 2016) whose death card pins his words for a '93 retreat: "These many beautiful days cannot be lived again/ they are compounded... /And I take them in full measure toward whatever lies ahead."

C.R. Spicer is a stay-at-home dad, member of Massachusetts Peace Action, Witness Against Torture, Somerville Human Rights Commission, and Pastoral Council of Paulist Center of Boston. For more writing see crspicer.net

Voices

Sr. Melinda Pellerin SSJ, a leading anti-racist voice in Springfield, MA, member of Agape's extended community, co-authored this response of the National Black Sisters' Conference, to Catholic Archbishop Gomez's public reprimand of BLM and social justice groups. (Excerpted here):

We would have expected that you and your brother bishops would have stood in solidarity with your African American brothers and sisters. ...For the most part, you have remained mysteriously and regretfully silent ...failing to call out hate groups for their racist ideologies and violence.

We are especially troubled by your comment: "...the church has been 'antiracist from the beginning,' (ignoring) the

Church's involvement with the slave trade, with the segregation of churches; with Black people often being relegated to the back of churches and forced to receive Holy Communion after white parishioners; the rejection of Black men and women who desired to enter seminaries and religious communities. Over four hundred years of slavery, trauma, pain, disenfranchisement, and brutal violence have been a part of the fabric of this nation and the American Catholic Church. <https://www.nbsc68.com>.

Philip Schmidt is a friend of over 30 years, part of the extended Agape family in Toronto.

I've started "A Vigil for the Church in Search of the nonviolent Christ of Unconditional Love" which arises from my voicelessness in the church as a gay Catholic in Canada. I prayed aloud at the Cathedral after writing 40 people to join me. So much fear of authority. ...I cannot bear another generation of gay Catholics without a place in the church.

Rev. Johnathan Betts Fields, Youth Pastor at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, MI, received his BA from Howard and his Master of Divinity from Harvard. Johnathan has been involved in Agape events since 2018.

Thank you for such a royal welcome and for expressing such deep interest and care during covid. Thank you for hearing me; I truly felt held and heard; Thank you for sharing so much of yourselves. ...to this Agape land, these woods and the former trees that kept us covered and warm, thank you. This was/is the perfect place to level up spiritually and thank you for the part you played and the pieces of breaded revelation you fed me. May His peace continue to heal all our members—internal, local national and global.

Linda Reimer is the co-founder of Sirius Community, who, with her husband, Bruce Davidson, were early partners in the Agape experiment. Linda has returned to Agape many times since Bruce's passing.

Agape's presence, embodiment of the spirit of service, love, compassion and wisdom, steadfastness in being, lead to inspiration for those who are called to become the inspiration and servants for an ever-unfolding consciousness. The younger generation needs the encouragement and EXAMPLE of those who have tread the path before them. Together, not separate, we serve the transformation of consciousness.

Where Light Speaks *for Haiti*

by Nancy James

Oh, beautiful island so torn with strife,
our hearts ache for you.
Where light speaks
through her iridescent leaves,
banana leaves light green transparent in the sun,
mangos and rice fields, cassava,
mountainous landscape footpaths lie twisted and steep,
barefooted villagers gracefully carrying loads too heavy
for shoulders or necks, sure-footed arrive.
Day after day, up and down
and up again,
for water, for school, for more water, to the market or city,
trying to make Voodoo drums beat faintly, then loudly. always there.

The people of this island, Ayiti (Haiti) with tortured past,
Strong, yet fragile, trying to find a way.
Black, brown, light skinned, Indigenous Tainos and Arawaks,
African slaves, against their will, hauled on ships,
bought, sold, forced to work, day and night,
sugar cane fields for France, rum, rubber, sisal.
Revolution, charismatic leaders:
Christophe, Toussaint, Dessalines, Duvalier, Aristide, Jovnel Moise.

Power, violence, destruction, interventions,
more violence. earthquakes, cholera, despair,
rebuilding, trying to go forward,
gangs emerge from lives with no future kidnapping,
no hope, only violence and death.

When will it end this cycle of oppression and sorrow?
We long to see you prosper, oh beautiful island,
with non-violence and peace, someday.....soon, when Lord?

Nancy, with her husband Steve, parents of six children, co-founders of Agape, devoted over 35 years of their lives as nurse and doctor, in the Hospital Le Bon Samaritan, in Limbe. They are currently both serve on Agape's Mission Council and offer us all a deep reality into the "beautiful island". The title of Nancy's poem is from a book of the same title by Sato Sandy.

The Value of Vigils

by Thomas Roepke

I first met Suzanne and Brayton at a Catholic Worker meeting in NYC. Their descriptions of the Agape Community moved me deeply. Now I find myself visiting to experience what had resonated so strongly in my heart that evening.

The Agape Community has a long history of holding vigils in a nearby small town of Ware, Massachusetts in recognition of the moral imperative to abolish the death penalty. However, the atrocity of executing human beings on death row still exists in 27 states, by the federal government and the U.S. military. One might wonder if the practice of

standing silently with a sign in support of a cause has any value.

Yesterday, Julius Jones, an innocent on death row, was scheduled to be executed by the State of Oklahoma. It was time to hold yet another vigil. We drove into town and unfolded a large white banner that expressed our position in three words: No Death Penalty.

While standing next to a busy main street, a steady flow of traffic passed us. Some people gave an encouraging thumbs up, a honk or a wave as they drove past. While the response was easy to receive, I prayed that their supportive gestures would be coupled with continued actions aimed at

ending the death penalty.

Other people passed without a glance as they continued to stare blankly ahead. Had they taken a quick look and decided to ignore the sight, or was the lack of noticing due to a numbing inability to acknowledge injustice?

Several people expressed strong opposition to our message. For example, one person shouted "kill them all" while driving past. While these angrily spoken words were difficult to hear, they were also a call for compassion, a call to acknowledge the pain and suffering this person may be experiencing.

I wondered which of these groups was most in need of compassion. Those who responded with anger were an obvious first

choice. Then I realized that maybe the people who passed by seemingly unaware of our presence had an equal if not greater need for compassion. In the end, the need for compassionate understanding is one we share as human beings.

Hours before his scheduled execution, Julius Jones was granted clemency and his sentence was commuted to life in prison without parole. While joyfully surprised by the news, I was also aware that justice had yet to be fully served.

Vigils have value for many reasons, but especially as opportunities to awaken and cultivate compassion within us.

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increasing that superiority as if white race oppression did not exist. The French poet, Charles Baudelaire, sheds light on this subterfuge: "The loveliest trick of the devil is to persuade us, that the devil does not exist." Ten years of murdering Black people in broad daylight is proof that white supremacy is alive and fully visible in prime time.

Agape Community is a white Christian Community. At Agape and communities like ours, we are ready and willing finally, to move down from our high horse of advantage and privilege, offer up our advantages and provide reparations to Black and Native peoples. Will we be willing to move down the ladder of economic advantage to meet our Black and brown brothers and sis-

ters and free them of the disadvantages we have imprisoned them in? Could that be an image of a just reparation?

We at Agape are considering giving back Nipmuc Indian land stolen by white colonial forebears to the Nipmuc tribe. We need to repay African Americans the unpaid labor they gave as slaves, to build this country into a world power. The latest approximation of reimbursement is \$11 trillion. Are we ready to pay up?

We have been given life to live, to love, to flourish. Can we revert these deadly evils into a vision of a healed way of life, thrive into a reinvented, redeemed humanity? Now? Right Now.

We find hope despite the odds. The prophets of the Civil Rights movement called it finding a "way out of no way." This "way" must transcend and move be-

yond the hope of politics and economics alone. Tired, worn-out ways will not save us. Only religious and spiritual forces of truth and love will. The healing forces of ultimate things can rescue human beings from our ego-centric selves and our fear-filled aggressions. In this Agape love, there must be an absolute refusal to worship Empire, the State, and its reliance on violence, power-politics and greed that devastates humans as well as the natural world.

The ultimate forces of life-giving goodness will truly change us and compel us to act now and to turn from evil, regardless of the cost.

May we learn to live the prophecy of the divine spirit and give witness in the name our Mother, the earth and all of her life-giving Divine Feminine; to The Great Spirit who sees all life as sacred; to Allah,

the All-Merciful One; to the Compassionate Buddha; to ahimsa, the non-injurious, harmless love of God, and the Nonviolent, Jesus! Christ

So, let us follow the "radiant star of hope," the way out of "no way." Martin Luther King Jr. spoke directly to the discouraged Black Civil Rights workers who were feeling tired and hopeless. His words ring out still: "So let's have faith in the future. I know it's dark sometimes. ...I know a lot of us are sitting around asking the question: How long will we have to live with this system? When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night and pluck from weary souls, the manacles of death and the chains of fear? How long? How long will justice be crucified, and truth bear it? I can just tell you this afternoon... not long."

News Notes



PERFECT CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Loving Life on the Margins: The Story of the Agape Community, Suzanne and Brayton Shanley's Agape story is still available after their book tour was ended with Covid. You can purchase the book from the Agape website: www.agapecommunity.org or by calling Agape or sending a check for only \$20, a great Christmas gift.

Daniel Berrigan Collective: Promoting Contemplation, Community, and Resistance, 100th anniversary of Dan's birth and anniversary of the 1964 Peacemakers' Retreat in Gethsemane with Thomas Merton, Dan and Phil Berrigan. <https://www.berrigancollective.org/> New documentary, *The Berrigans: Devout and Dangerous*, <https://www.amazon.com/Disarmed-Dangerous-Radical-Daniel-Berrigan/dp/046503084X>

Pillar of Fire by Joyce Holladay is a sweeping historical novel that captures the extraordinary witness of the medieval mystics known as Beguines. <https://wipfandstock.com/9781725282230/pillar-of-fire/#> Christmas Discount.



Tom Roepke, second from left, joined Agape for a months' long volunteering time at Agape and assisted in two back-to-back Agape workdays in November.



Two families with five children among them, parents Jared and Sarah, Luke, and Anna, came to Agape for a weekend of community discussion.



Leslie Moore, second from left, a member of Traction, a network of Christians building relationships across socially prescribed boundaries, in Central Square Church, Cambridge, joined in the community discussion.



Second November Workday crew getting Agape ready for winter, cutting, splitting and piling three cords of wood.

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Covid 19, its variants and the arrival of the winter months, force our event calendar to be tentative. Please stay tuned to Agape's facebook and website for events as they will be occurring throughout the winter.

Sat. Dec. 11, 5:30 pm--We invited Agape friends to participate in our first in-person Advent Agape vigil in two years!!

Sat. Feb. 12th, 5:30 pm, Brigid Night in person, with vaccinated friends, RSVP please.