

THE SERVANT SONG

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The Marvelous Did Happen

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

“...it was/flame and song and granted us/joy, we thought we’d do, be, revisit, / the marvelous did happen in our lives, our stories are not drab.: but don’t / expect now to return for more. ...” Denise Levertov (“Once Only” from *This Great Unknowing*)

I ponder these words of the poet, Denise Levertov, as I reflect on the completion of *Loving Life on the Margins: The Story of the Agape Community* and beginning a book tour. Four years of effort, left Brayton and me weary of writing, yet aware of “flame and song” that were “granted us” in the process. Taking *Loving Life* on the road these past months, we attempted to ignite the lineage of nonviolent community and sing its praises.

The “marvelous” as Levertov phrases it, “did happen in our lives,” over a span of 40 years. As I read Levertov’s poems in “The Great Unknowing: Last Poems,” written when she was my age now, I know that these encounters with “flame and song” possess a uniqueness and unrepeatability. The fire of community and the song of its unfolding are “our stories,” yes, but they are rooted in time and also belong to the people who inhabit them.

Professor Emeritus of College of the Holy Cross, David O’Brien, comments on “life choices” in his forward to the book. He suggests that individuals in communities like Agape are called “to the margins, or to what Pope Francis calls ‘the periphery’” It is our hope that in telling this story, people will join us there.

What follows are highlights of sharing of our life on the “periphery” that we carried to the first landings of a year-long book tour.

Just Faith and Holy Cross Parish, Springfield, MA

We began the tour last June, with Holy Cross Parish in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, hosted by our Just Faith friends, endearingly spear-headed by Deacon Bill Toller. Agape’s history with Springfield dates back to the 1980’s with Sr. Jane Morrissey and her order, the Sisters of St. Joseph. Just Faith has been a catalyst for ongoing formation in nonviolence in the region, instituting yearly visits to Agape as part of a “border crossing” segment of its curriculum.

At Holy Cross, we were enveloped in a force-field of love reflected in the ethnic and racial diversity of friends who attended. This love speaks perhaps of Agape’s recent attempts to listen to the voices of Muslims, such as Tahirah Amatul Wadud and Mohammad Bajwa from the Islamic Society of Western Massachusetts who attended the signing, as well as listening to the voices of Native Americans and to those experiencing racial and ethnic oppression.

We shared Agape’s interfaith efforts while addressing the theme of racism and white supremacy. That evening, we reinforced the need for all peacemaking communities to make more efforts at inclusivity and diversity.

We confided that our mission is to serve as scribes, faithfully recording a



Winterscape at the Agape Hermitage

Deborah Roberts Kirk

shared legacy. This theme continued to build and grow as the tour continued.

Mustard Seed Catholic Worker, Worcester, MA

Agape shares a mutual and parallel history with Michael Boover and our Catholic Worker “family” at the Mustard Seed soup kitchen. Michael’s recent review of *Loving Life on the Margins* which appeared in the NY Catholic Worker (August-September, 2019) reveals the author’s brilliant writing style and his own history with Agape as he comments on the “synthesis and newness” in our following together traditions of “utopian community’s visionary, pacifist mantle.”

We recalled Fr. Bernie Gilgun, a founder of Mustard Seed, and Brayton recounted the life of his uncle, Joseph McDonald, an early Catholic Worker, who knew Dorothy Day and hosted her at St. Anselm College. The local Manchester, New Hampshire paper decried the presence of a “Communist” at the local Catholic College.

David O’Brien, who, with his wife, Joanne, have been Agape stalwarts, graciously writes in the book’s forward that the “central theme of the Agape story” is that of the attempt with “many friends” for “four decades to live an answer to the question”: “What would Jesus do?”

Certainly, these highlights, shared at each reading, are marvels more than the “once” of Levertov’s poem, and in the next year, we do “expect now to return for more.” We realize that our lives need to be creatively evolved, in the words of Brayton’s chapter “Does Traditional Religion Have a Future?” We will be asking such questions ongoing.

Hardwick Town House, Hardwick, MA

Our home town library in Hardwick, Massachusetts sponsored a reading at Hardwick’s Town House. We evoked “songs” of the sacred land, the Quabbin Reservoir watershed and its Nipmuck Native history. We recounted “the marvelous” when Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Chief of Standing Rock, came to Agape land in Hardwick. We paid tribute to the first peoples here, members of the Nipmuck tribe. This tribal history and Chief Arvol’s visit, memorialized in the book, made of Agape’s 34 acres, a place of “flame” as we lit the sacred fire. We burned the Doctrine of Discovery, the white supremacist legitimization of the theft of native land by genocide, and planted its ashes under a Cedar tree.

Lasalette Shrine, Enfield, NH

Fr. John Sullivan hosted us at the Lasalette Shrine in Enfield, NH, with three different groups. John’s spirit is captured in the pages of the book as a “companion priest,” who is a regular at Agape. We took delight in reading to our audiences that John “reminds everyone he meets that each of us in our lay Catholic community sustains him in his ordained priesthood.”

Stonehill College and HOPE Book Launch

Students at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts, hosted a “book launch” involving environmentally aware students who had been at Agape for rural immersions. The students enthusiastically gave us a tour of the Stonehill Farm where vegetables are grown and then donated to local food pantries. HOPE students and faculty coordinator MaryAnne Davey are steadfast Agape regulars, who plant the Agape garden, cut and stack wood, which

keeps community members guests warm through the winter months without fossil fuel.

Sacred Heart Parish, Lexington MA

Fran and Bob Ludwig, leaders in the The Boston Catholic Climate Movement which according to the movement’s website, “serves Catholics in Massachusetts to put Pope Francis’ Laudato Si encyclical into action for climate justice, by undergoing our own ecological conversion transforming our lifestyles and calling for bold public policies” invited us to their parish to speak on the topic, “To Silence a Divine Voice, or Live Sustainably: It’s Our Choice.” Bob with other friends from Lexington helped to build the straw bale house in the 90’s. We pointed to his photo in the book showing his constructing the straw bale walls.

Paulist Center, Boston MA

At the Paulist Center, we relished reconnecting with old friends who had joined us in the 80’s for protests and meetings of our resistance group, Ailanthus, at Haley House. Fr. Mike McGarry, administrator during some of the Paulist Center’s turbulent days in the 80’s and 90’s, was present and joked about initially not really wanting to read the book, but after he started, how he then couldn’t put it down.

Bob and Tara Wegener, instrumental to the early years of community, attended the talk as did a new member of Agape’s Mission Council, Dave Perkins, with his family. The teen Perkins’ daughters, Grace and Hannah, oversaw the Agape table collecting money for the books.

I read from a chapter, “Judy and Jarhar” on the trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the so-called Marathon Bomber, noting how Joe Kebartas, a member of Veterans for Peace, had “paved the way” for Agape and other peace groups for participation in anti-death penalty vigils during the trial. Joe stood alone for many days, with a hand-held sign, “The Death Penalty is Murder.” We all gave a shout out to Joe.

I noted American Catholic Bishops’ support of the invasion of Afghanistan and referenced Agape’s alliance with Pax Christi, Just Faith, Catholic Workers, and religious orders, in creating The Catholic Call to Peacemaking, embracing nonviolence and encouraging resistance in the days of dread, leading to the invasion of Iraq.

Spirit of Life Community

In the evening, after the Paulist Center, we landed at The Spirit of Life Community, co-founded by now Catholic Woman Priest Bishop, Jean Marchant and her husband Ron Hinderlang, rejoicing in Jean’s ministry and vocation, grateful for their congregation’s support.

In addition, our fall tour included Elms College, where we reunited with Eileen Kirk, Sr. Carol Allan SSJ and Agape Latte students. Next, we traveled to The Lower Mills Branch Library in Dorchester, and the Marian Center in DeCice Hall in Holyoke Massachusetts where we were hosted by Sr. Chris Clarke, member of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary.

Fordham University, NY

We connected with Jim Robinson, an

The Hope of Divine Love for a Threatened Planet

by Brayton Shanley

We are going to a place in history that we have never been before. Old systems are dying but not without a fight. Authoritarian, political systems based on capitalism and economic empires are savaging the earth and the human family. The moral outrage of extreme income disparities is common knowledge. Three men own more wealth than the bottom 150 million in the US. The 500 year legacy of Native American oppression and genocide extend to this day. Native people live on reservations that make up the poorest counties in the US. Thayendanegen, Chief of the Mohawks, tells us the truth: "In the government you call 'civilized' the happiness of the people is constantly sacrificed to the 'splendor of empire.'"

2019 marked the 400th year in remembrance of the first slave ship to enter the US in 1619. A current fact is that if you are an African-American, born in poverty you stand a 5% chance of ever escaping this economic slavery. It is almost impossible to grasp that kind of oppression. The Trump era simply magnifies these horrific injustices.

Yet, there are historic rumblings from people seriously opposing oppressive power structures. Protestors are in the streets with their outrage at political corruption in Haiti, Hong Kong, Chile and Iraq. Their message: "We are not leaving until government leaders resign or respond to our demands for radical change." Many are committed to staying in the streets until leaders step down, risking the real threat of injury and death. Several hundred Iraqi protestors have been killed in the last weeks. Something profound is happening in these protests. Fear of death slows when people refuse to accept injustice. Protestors that are unarmed speak to a higher evolution of human consciousness, facing the violence of the state disregarding severe consequences.

Since the 1990's another storm has been gathering lethal winds--climate change. The 2018 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change rings out the final riot act if we are to survive: By 2030, we must reduce our greenhouse gases by 40%; then by 2050, the remaining 60%. If we do not make these deadlines, a series of unstoppable warming trends in the atmosphere will begin to make life on earth unlivable for human, animals, insects and vegetation.

Human to human strife is under siege. Now the earth under our feet is at risk of total collapse. With the end in sight, what are we to do? I think of the sign over the monastic enclosure at The Trappist Abbey at Gethsemene in Kentucky: "God alone." Is it time? Are we finally ready to turn from our egocentric: "I do not need anyone's help" worldview, which has gotten us into this state? Can we begin to turn toward God?

Re-imagining Jesus in the 2nd Axial Age

Every generation of Christians has to ask the risky question that Dietrich Bonhoeffer did: "Who is Jesus for us today?" Can we allow the mystery of Jesus Christ to come to us in a new way through these times of grave instability? Can God work through this chaos of creation, protecting and saving us from our own self-destruction? God in Jesus did not love us into this creation as a static, unchanging entity. Under the disorder of self-destructive violence to ourselves and the planet, it is precisely this God who calls us to evolve into a higher level of being. In response, we must ask: Do we have the spiritual will to learn to live a peaceful, integrative relationship as one human family? Can



we love and respect the natural world in a creation we experience as sacred? Can we evolve beyond the domination of "me first" anthropocentrism.

A first major shift in consciousness took place from 800 to 200 BCE. A movement of new awareness gathered around Zoroaster in Persia, Buddha in India, Lao Tzu in the Far East. Major Hebrew prophets were preaching God's love of the poor, especially Jeremiah and Isaiah. The Greek philosophers' truths were also challenging our level of being. Humans were going beyond their purely tribal mores of "I believe what the tribe believes." This was a period of world-altering introspection: "Who am I, and what is the truth of my existence?"

Enlightenment was seen through individual consciousness, a major evolutionary breakthrough. For the newly-formed Christian, these forces of altered consciousness found fulfillment in Jesus Christ, two hundred years later. The prophecies of Muhammad then became the Koran and Islam, five centuries after Jesus.

It is now 2000 years since this period. Human political and economic systems are in decline. Right behind the tragic condition of human cultures is the threat of the 6th Extinction, the end of life on earth due to humans' enslavement to modern technology and the fossil fuels that fire it, first coal and then oil and gas in the 19th and twentieth centuries. Our situation is as grave as we could have ever imagined. If we are to survive, we must be re-imagined as a species.

If we are Christians, Jesus Christ must be discovered anew. Historically, Jesus' command of nonviolent love has largely been ignored or unfulfilled. The Jesus who walked the earth in lovingkindness and prophetic truth must be found not exclusively in the story told 2,000 years ago, but now, throughout the cosmos where the Christ has always been. Christ now becomes a universal force that has drenched the cosmos, indeed, all of history, in the truth of nonviolent love, compassion and mercy.

The Christ of the cosmos needs to be the new "Big Bang" of consciousness change. The universal spirit of Christ needs to become more universal and must be experienced as the Divine attribute with all that is, loving all in the sacredness of all. It will be an integrative, interfaith spirituality that will guide the new axial age.

All Religions Are One

Thomas Berry insisted that the earth and all of its life will not survive the oncoming threat of collapse without the world's religions (six major, twenty-two minor). Yet, he warns, "They are insufficient as they are." Religions of the world

must evolve into a second axial vision of interfaith unity.

A Native American story mirrors this unity. Lakota Chief Crazy Horse was at a pipe ceremony with the legendary fellow Lakota Chief Sitting Bull. Crazy Horse recounted that since the Indian defeat of the US cavalry in 1876, he had tried to live in peace, but was constantly provoked by the white man. "I see," he envisioned "a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of humankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole earth will become one circle again."

Hindu mystics were among the first to teach that "all life is one; the oneness of all creation, that all reality is one." This integrates the cosmic, the earthly and the human. If we must seek a new level of awareness in these urgent and uncertain times, three realms of unity or integration are needed. First: the unity of all faith traditions, accomplished with a respectful, listening dialogue with other traditions outside our own, recognizing a common bond all seekers share in the pursuit of the sacred.

As we stay in relation with the "other", we learn our own truth at a deeper level as we are challenged by what they believe and how they live. I have been changed by Asian spiritual practices of diet, Yoga and meditation, practices I was not exposed to growing up Catholic. It feels quite natural for me to revere the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism and sense my soul still contains them as I continue my Catholic practice and Christ-inspired style of living. Can we accept that our own faith is not complete, and that no one tradition has all truth?

I learned to engage in social justice actions in a more contemplative, quiet and compassionate way by the example of Buddhists. Conversely, the Dalai Lama said: "If we Buddhists want to learn about social justice, we must learn from Christians." We will unite, not over doctrine, but through the urgencies and dangers of our present world. We will bond over the gratitude we feel in the presence of the faith of others' that authentically completes our own.

Second: The unity of the way of nonviolent love. Because the way of love is the foundation of all creation, the Creator is love. We must become one people who are determined to co-exist on this earth and to live under the banner of unarmed, unconditional love. Mahatma Gandhi once proclaimed: "We progress toward nonviolent love or rush to our doom." This Divine Love is eternally available and can never be extinguished as profoundly stated by the God of love to the prophet Jeremiah: "I have loved you with an everlasting love"

(Jer 31:3). The power and miracle of this Divine Love is the only force that can reconcile humans with each other and heal the divisions and traumas of violence and domination we have inflicted on each other since our beginnings.

Third: We must work towards the unity of humans with the earth. In our human evolution into God and higher states of consciousness we exhibit an increased awareness of our own state of being and our surroundings. Evolve means "new". Franciscan, Elia Delio, writes: "As humans evolve, they will grasp that nature is a complex series of fluid, dynamic, interlocking and communicative relationships." This reality is an echo of oneness. We humans are part of nature; indeed, we *are* nature.

Due, in part, to the rise of the Industrial Revolution and to machines in the 19th Century, humans became increasingly alienated and separated from nature, replacing it with a passion to control her. We lost the sacred connection with our Mother, the earth, which we now use as a resource for our own greed-driven advantages and not as the Source of the Divine.

Delio elaborates: "The human person lost transcendence with the more than human world and created new gods of technology, personal autonomy to science, exerting a power and violence over nature." The new, transformed human must surrender back to nature, to the Divine Womb of all creation's love and sustenance.

We must pray for this evolving, new and increased awareness. Sr. Kathryn Duffy, also a Franciscan, instructs: "There must arise 'gusts of being', sudden fits of awareness of the unity of all life. The earth is speaking. This is her language, deep connectivity, interdependence, sacred depths." Do we understand her language? Do we hear her calling?

Humans need to awaken to survive. We need to recover reverence in this more enlightened age to come. A beneficent Divine Mother is always ready to ally herself with humans who have strayed and to assure us of the inner tranquility in the transformed world of human/earth eco-harmony.

The Community—Our True Home

To awaken will require a major movement away from "I" and a conversion into "we"--we the human race; we, all that lives as the spark of the Divine. "We" is the most powerful source of unity consciousness. This second axial age of which humans are a part of right now, evolved from the individual consciousness of the first axial age over 2,000 years ago. At this moment, we are unfolding from the limitation of "I" and advancing to the "we" of spiritual community. Buddhist Thich Naht Hanh offers a radically new possibility: "The next Buddha may not take the form of an individual. In the 21st Century, the sangha (community) may be the body of the Buddha."

Being transformed, freeing ourselves from the isolation of me and mine, into a collective way of living and believing is biblical. "Me and God" is not the paradigm of the Hebrew or Christian scripture. Instead, those who penned sacred texts speak for us, the people, and the community. The times we are entering are so potentially dark that it is hard to see where we are going. We will not meet the current challenges alone.

Within the ethical matrix of nonviolent spiritual community, can we mount an inner revolution, a conversion of ultimate hope with God and God's people, as to how to change and survive?

Creative, Resilient Ways to Create Community

by Stellan Vinthagen

I am preoccupied with the contradiction between potential of “people power” and the state of the world today, and am therefore focused on how we can learn from each others’ experiences—both successes and failures—to build on these experiences together.

When visiting Brazil, I was inspired by landless workers—who occupy land and create settlements when they get titles to land. Numbering some 1.5 million people, such settlements represent hope, these workers, achieving something even more than Gandhi was able to. Gandhi’s “Building up a New Society” in the form of the Constructive Program was unsuccessful, but the landless workers HAVE been able to achieve this “new society”.

While visiting a recent land occupation settlement, I saw their successes: a soccer field; community kitchen; a garden and a health clinic, all built together from their scarce resources. Some of them have been evicted 10 times over 7 years, but with assistance from urban, middle class supporters, including lawyers, they later prevailed, starting over from scratch, eventually getting the rights of a piece of land. Their resilience wore out the “state” as the movement succeeded in liberating land the size of Cuba, since the 80s!

When some days later I visited an established community of the landless workers movement, one created after they had won the land titles after years of occupation, I saw a new and modern health clinic doing natural medicine and offering conventional medical assistance by doctors and dentists to all in the area for free, it became clear for me how these communities were “planting the seeds of a new society.”

I saw the same kind of constructive resistance in building up a new society among the Native Americans at the White Earth reservation in MN, when I visited them. In their fight against the planned pipeline they do as they have done for hundreds of years to prevail against colonial genocide: recreating their culture and community.

They were recreating the old tradition of wild rice farming, using solar energy to heat, farming hemp plants, and creating camps to prepare for more people coming to resist. I saw a “Welcome Water Protectors” billboard for people, inviting also white folks to join their movement to stop the pipelines. These are creative resilient ways to create community WHILE we resist.

At Resistance Studies, our work intro-

duces people to this type of resistance and to build a knowledge base of our earlier struggles. We try to build bridges and form collaborations between the experienced activists – the “professors of the street” – and the activist-oriented academics, forming new knowledge about how to resist domination in effective and resilient ways. We see a contradiction with the preoccupation with “protests”, where we as activists believe we can radically change society by shouting our demands to the rulers, and appeal to the system to change itself. We need to get out of the ritual of going to our capitals to march and shout, as that is not what ultimately matters; rather, we need to find transformative creative ways (shouting slogans doesn’t always make a difference) to include a “Yes” and “No” component to our actions. It is a matter of creating direct action, creating the solutions and the transformation of society, and undermining the dominance ourselves, here and now, not appealing to the rulers.

Let the rulers come and protest our changing of the society instead. Some years ago, I wrote a book about this, suggesting a new *Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works* (ZED Books). And our unique academic journal, *The Journal of Resistance Studies* is a place for critical reflections on these ideas. My latest book, which will be out in November, *Everyday Resistance*, is about how ordinary people who do not call themselves “activists”, without being organized, are individually doing seemingly small, and often disguised or hidden, forms of resistance in their everyday, in neighborhoods, in their family, and at the workplace, something which is often not recognized.



Many think this form of micro-activism is mundane, petty, and ineffective. But when thousands and sometimes even millions of people are, for example, working slow, and “borrow” equipment at their work, use work hours to do private things, it can amount to a tremendous accumulated force of resistance. And, sometimes this kind of hidden, everyday resistance is the only alternative. In some very brutal regimes, standing out with public and collective resistance makes the resisters targets for very brutal repression.

We need to build a revolutionary movement, and then we need to understand from where our capacity to create mass mobilizations comes.

Remarks on

St. Francis Day, Oct. 5, 2019

We live in a time of a fundamental crisis regarding the systems of our economy, our politics, and our culture. We see a climate that is collapsing in front of us.

Global inequalities between people are increasing every year and the dignity of all people is neglected as our colonialism continues and our military is increasing. We have a fundamental challenge to renew the world, our society and humanity. The answer is not individual bravery or technical innovation, government actions or corporate solutions, and institutional religion. All of them are somewhat needed, yes, but these entities will only move if we do.

We need first to love every living being, people of all kinds, as well as our opponents. We might not feel the love for all, but we have to act in loving care and that counts also for our four-legged relatives. But our love will not be a loving care if we are not also resisting the systems of dom-

inance exploitation. Our resistance will be futile if we are not creating new ways of living together and creating alternatives to the imperialist system we try to transform. We need to build up the new societies through constructive work and to recreate what it means to have families, to have education, health and agricultural politics, as well as trade amid societies of diversity. Our new societies must include the dignity of all genders sexual orientations, races and identities, religions, ages and abilities.

Our communities of love, resistance and construction in diversity will be the seeds of the transformative force of a new humanity. Our “yes” and “no” will have to be strong enough to transform our world. Nothing less is needed of us. Don’t be fooled. This is exactly what is needed, and the only answer. We’re not alone in this big challenge. We can be guided and inspired by those who are going ahead of us, those who live in the frontline communities.

Communities of love, resistance and constructive work such as those in Brazil and Minnesota, with the passionate energy and the daily work of both the “yes” and the “no”, are the future such communities. They create what we need instead of the dominant systems, but they also demonstrate the resistance against what is still denying dignity in life. Agape is one of those transformative forces for the new humanity and a possible future.

Stellan Vinthagen is a professor of Sociology who directs the Resistance Study Initiative at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Stellan has offered his experiences in many settings at Agape, and we are eager to learn more.

Finding My Way Home

by Dixon George

I have lived at the Agape Community for almost five years and have been unable to produce an account of this time for this publication. Gentle prodding has had no effect at removing whatever blockage has been stopping me. Recently, however, I was asked if I would respond to a prisoner serving a life sentence who had written asking whether anyone would be willing to “share with me what life is like there in Agape Community.” Somehow this seemed more doable than “writing an article for Servant Song.”

I stumbled upon Agape about ten years ago somewhat accidentally. For almost five years I had an off-again, on-again relationship. Time would go by and I would receive a call from an intern saying something like “You are invited to our St. Francis Day event” or “We would love to have your help at our annual June work day.” This tenuous connection gradually strengthened to the point that I was volunteering on a weekly basis and considering a residency period. When my living situation required a change, Suzanne, Brayton and I decided to go ahead and try it out for a

month. A month became three, then six, then a year and now it will be five years in March.

I came without any religious formation to speak of, and no formal training in non-violence. I had grown up on a homestead of sorts, and have been self-employed for most of my life, so I felt at home with the daily routine of work and simple living. I was told early on that at Agape “we work hard and pray a lot.” I felt right at home with the first part of this, but I had no idea about praying.

I had tried it a few times on my own and nothing seemed to

come of it, whereas I could build a house or barn or bookcase and have something to show for it. Another way of saying it was that I had the *labora* and needed to learn the *ora* part of St. Benedict’s rule.

I have lived at Agape for about as long as it takes to get a college degree, and I see certain parallels. If I had come to Agape to learn to pray, what else did I need to know? My freshman first year here was about figuring out what happened at an intentional lay Catholic community. The second, sophomore year was discovering how I could contribute and

what I had to offer. In the third year, I began to get a sense of meaning and mission, such that I could be a more active participant in the life of the community. By the fourth, senior year, I could begin to find ways to become more effective at carrying out what I understood Agape’s mission to be and how I intersected with that.

I am now, by this metaphor, into post-graduate work. The path before me is clear. Agape has become my home and where I am supposed to be. I still have much to learn, and I can think of no better place to do it than here at Agape.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

Agape Co-founders Introduce the Day

by Nancy James

Steve and I are grateful to be here to celebrate 30 years of Francis Days, on this beautiful, sunny, chilly fall day, with trees still filled with green leaves and a few turning gold and red. Many willing hands helped to set up the chairs in a semi-circle against the back-drop of the surrounding forest. The sacred fire burns throughout the day. Buddhist monks arrive from the Peace Pagoda in their robes, chanting up the driveway to Francis House. They bring reverence and set the tone for the day. Gentle Hawk, a member of Worcester Intertribal Indian Council, sang a deeply moving Native American chant with his drum.

Over the years, we have returned from Haiti to Agape to add to our spiritual enrichment and to carry the love we receive back to our brothers and sisters in Haiti. So the circle continues.

“Choose life so that you and your children may live”
(Deuteronomy 30:19)

by Steve James

Having just left Haiti, we want now to celebrate with you, all that has been given to us. We come from a people suffering greatly at this time. We feel that for us in Haiti, all these years, Agape has been a life-giving bridge in so many ways, to so many suffering ones.

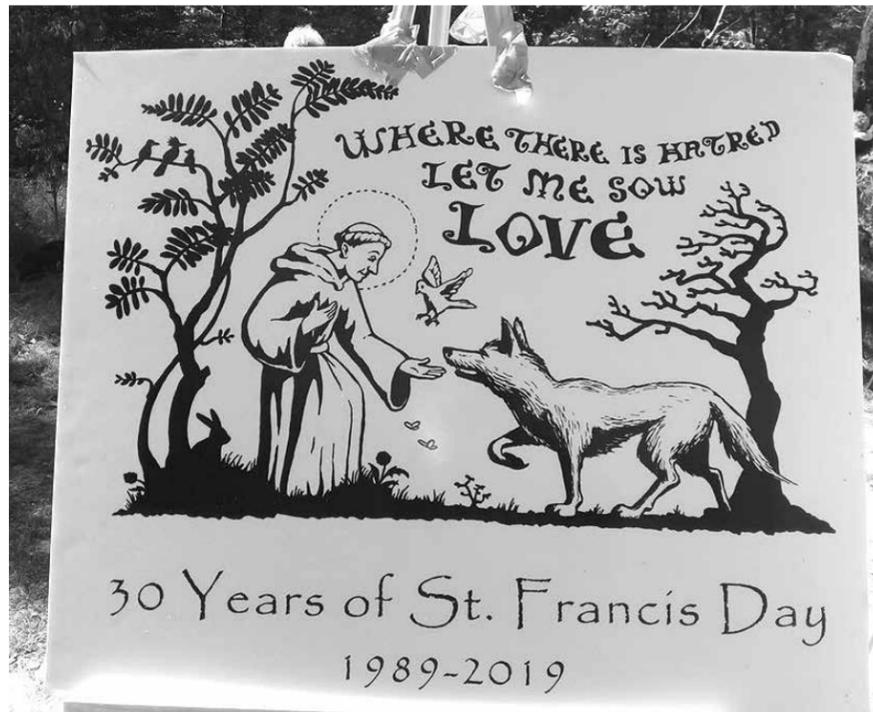
This is a most precious bridge because it is a bridge that has transported and sustained truth and love, authenticity and integrity. This bridge helps us to walk our talk of nonviolent love in this unconventional community called Agape-Haiti.

We come and stand in your presence

We come now and stand in your presence from the bleeding fields of Haiti. We come and stand in your presence from the suffering of so many in Haiti, from the injustice against so many in Haiti.

We are gathered around this tree of life that we and our children and the children of Haiti’s suffering and bleeding, may have life.

Steve and Nancy James are co-founders of The Agape Community and have been Baptist medical missionaries for over 35 years.



Poster and Francis Day shirt designed by Agape Intern Daniel Crowell

“Being Rooted”

by Frida Berrigan

I’m really happy to be here with all of you and particularly happy to be here with my, Mom, who was surprisingly released from prison after about 17 months of pre-trial detention less than a month ago. We drove up here today from Connecticut on what would have been my dad, Phil Berrigan’s 96th birthday. So today is about life and legacy and how alive the work that each of you is doing, particularly on this holy ground of Agape.

I offer my perspectives on rootedness, not as an old person and not as a young person either, as I am reconciling myself to middle-agedness. I live with my family, my husband Patrick and our children Seamus and Madeleine, on the Connecticut coastline in New London. I am finding rootedness in our little garden, our tiny patch of Earth, its fecundity in need of care and attention. Growing up, our yard was tall and utilitarian. My Dad would bring the axe down on wood we had collected from the neighborhood. His suspenders would snap as the axe burrowed into the dense wood from a woodpile of downed telephone poles and limbs of trees from parks around the neighborhood.

People came from all over to Jonah House where we lived in Baltimore to learn about nonviolent resistance, Christian simplicity and gospel witness with my parents and the rest of the community.

If we needed flowers for our house church altar, my Dad and I would go out into the neighborhood early on a Sunday morning, and he would bring his pocket-knife, and we would carve off blue blooms from the yards of greener, well-heeled neighbors. One man would yell and curse at us as my Dad would yell back that that the flowers weren’t property.

My parents honed their own needs to a narrow point and taught us to be as pared down and unsentimental as they were. I appreciate that lesson. My parents never voted and my father would say that if voting mattered, it would be illegal.

So, when we’re teaching rootedness our own active, distractible children, I think of the way we talk about land. It’s the way we talk about community. It’s the way we help pick up trash along our streets.

Dan Berrigan always said “know where you stand and stand there”, and it took me awhile to hear that advice, but I finally listened.



Frida and Liz

Photo credit: Dave Legg

Coming Full Circle with Liz

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

Liz McAlister, the homilist at our wedding in 1980, has had profound influence on my life. Jonah House, co-founded by Liz and Phil, was the flagship community of The Atlantic Life Community in Baltimore of which Brayton and I and others in Ailanthus: A Nonviolent Witness for Peace, were members.

As Liz walked up the driveway with Frida I was full of emotion, realizing the years between our first meeting in 1979 and this moment in 2019, the trips to DC for arrests and Civil Disobedience, 40 years’ worth of treasures. Liz leaned into me and said, softly: “This land is so beautiful.” Frida was nearby in a colorful hat. I introduced Liz, with words from Daniel Berrigan comparing peacemakers “to goats” who hang on horizontally, “rope hangers, who dangle and sweat and fuss and even make it to the next ledge.” I turned to Liz, and quoted her brother-in-law: “Given the world, can I wish you and us, the next ledge.”



Christian Pacifist Bruderhof Members Singing for Peace

Photo credit: Peter Wuelfing

“Just Pack It Up”

by Liz McAlister

First, I would like to think of Steve Kelly SJ, a Jesuit priest, a member of the Kingsbay Plowshare 7, still in jail because he won’t cooperate with any conditions of release.

I was released a few weeks ago, a total surprise after 20 months, no reason given...just “pack it all up.” I promised nothing although I was told to call once a week to let them know where I am. So we will see how it goes.



People Gathered around the Sacred Fire

Photo credit: Skip Schiel

S OF ST. FRANCIS DAY



Photo credit: Skip Schiel
A Prayer Blessing Around the planting of a Wisteria tree dedicated to Climate Change Activists



Photo credit: Dave Legg
Musicians - Matt Carriker and Harry Duchesne animate the day.



Photo credit: Dave Legg
Nancy and Steve James Medical Missionaries from Haiti, co-founders of Agape



Photo credit: Skip Schiel
Peace Pagoda friends Chanting to Open Saint Francis Day



Photo credit: Skip Schiel
Ann Rader, Edgar Hayes speaking on Freedom Farm Community



Photo credit: Skip Schiel
Gentle Hawk Blesses Sacred Fire

Contemplative Surrender and Prophetic Resistance

by Jim Robinson

We gather at Agape today as a community enmeshed in an eco-crisis that is simultaneously a social crisis and a spiritual crisis. The essence of the crisis is broken relationships. We find ourselves in ruptured relationality with the divine, the human community, and the more-than-human world. Our solidarity is shattered and in need of deep healing.

The roots of our ruptured relationality exist both within and without. They exist within the structures of human consciousness and in the systems that structure our world. They exist in the intimate interiority of each of us and in the broader patterns of being that have made injustice and unsustainability our default reality. In order to constructively respond to the crisis that we face, we must attend to and respond to its roots in both the interior landscape and in the human-made systems that structure our *status quo*.

In my dissertation, I analyze the eco-social-spiritual crisis as a crisis of both the “false self,” a concept developed by Thomas Merton, and “systems of domination,” a concept developed by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether and Merton exchanged letters in the late 60’s, and their exchange serves as a launching pad for putting their broader bodies of work into conversation. Through my analysis of their work, I attempt to illuminate the interior and external roots of the crisis we



Photo credit: Skip Schiel
Jim Robinson, Left, and Stellen Vinthagen, Right

find ourselves in, and develop a constructive response to it.

Inspired by the insights of Merton and Ruether, I propose that as we navigate this crisis we need to weave together the contemplative tradition with the prophetic tradition. We need to actively surrender the false self to the Divine while we actively resist the systems of domination. And we need to do this

together, in communities committed to deep conversion.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls for an “ecological conversion.” He emphasizes that this green *metanoia* is necessarily both a personal and a community conversion. Such a conversion requires a personal shift in how we perceive and relate to reality, as well as a collective commitment to shifting our pat-

terns of being. Such a conversion is stimulated by a sensitivity to what Francis, riffing on Leonardo Boff, identifies as “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

In order to pair a personal conversion with a collective conversion, we require community. If our crisis can be boiled down to broken relationships, we cannot possibly respond to it alone and in isolation. Our sense of separation is what needs to be transformed. We need communities in order to activate this transformation, and we specifically need communities that blend the contemplative and the prophetic. We need communities that enable us to address the interior and exterior roots of our crisis together.

Agape is one such community. It is weaving and woven into a wider web of communities committed to pairing contemplative surrender to the divine with prophetic resistance against the systems of domination. This is our tradition, our living lineage. All of us here are woven into this web even as we are weaving it. And as we weave, the living God is breaking through our brokenness and bringing about wholeness. This is the “Good News,” and at Agape it is being concretely embodied.

Jim, an Agape Mission Council member, is finishing his PhD in Theology at Fordham University

Wrapped in Hope: College of the Holy Cross at Agape

by Samantha Leuschner

College students in America face unprecedented challenges these days. From increasing tuition costs, mounting student debt, elevated levels of depression and anxiety, endless war, political instability, and of course devastating climate change, young people in college face an unparalleled reality. How does a 20-year-old grasp these realities? Where do they seek respite and reprieve, hope and help in times like these?

Enter the rural immersion at the Agape Community. A community tradition for nearly 30 years, Agape has opened pathways not only of healing within these bleak realities, but also a way through them. Specifically, Agape has sought connection with local universities and colleges to build solutions to these realities together.

One college, Holy Cross, has been gracing Agape for nearly ten years, in a symbiotic relationship between Agape and the students in which evolving lineages of nonviolence and sustainability are experienced for the first time by students, while being anchored in Agape history.

Indeed, throughout this connection to Holy Cross, as I have experienced it as a staff member with Agape, each time students arrive, they bring with them perseverance, hope, and spiritedness. The latest immersion with five Holy Cross women in October 2019 is no exception.

Hope was in action during this immersion, evident in the relationship building which took place throughout the week. Despite many students not knowing each other personally,



Holy Cross Students Eliza and Charlotte Splitting Wood at the Hermitage

they came together and gradually built each other up. I observed that on occasion, even jokes had a certain degree of reservation.

While chopping wood old school, axe and all, these

women did not shy from the challenge. Whether it was a hit or a miss, they found opportunities to encourage each other, encapsulating what it means to have hope in the struggle.

Perseverance was another theme that flowed throughout the week. Shortly into the immersion the women learned the tragic reality that Agape does not have cell service or wifi. For the next few days they would be in the present and the real. Instead of scanning facebook, they spent the time scanning the wilderness around them, and instead of listening to the latest news, they listened to one another in a deep sense. Friendships blossomed with this level of connection and presence to one another. Laughter and conversation filled the time doing tasks like stacking wood and sifting compost.

Wrapped up in the hope and perseverance was this level of spiritedness. Every woman brought spiritedness in her own unique way. Whether challenged with a provocative question about climate change or assigned a task of collecting kindling, these women evoked a spirit within that reverberated throughout the work that they did.

The work these students did for the land carries on, and the land in which they worked, carries on in them. Through opening themselves up to new, challenging experiences they opened themselves up to new ways of being. By working the land, they infused the landscape with hope, perseverance, and spiritedness. In return the land sustains them in their minds, bodies, and souls.

Samantha is a member of Agape's Mission Council and a staff member at many college retreats.

The Memorial Tree Pilgrimage: A Walking Tour of the Agape Story

by Dave Perkins

Over the past 20 years, members of the Agape Community have planted thirteen trees at the edge of the woods or in the circle in front of St. Francis House. Each tree memorializes a particularly poignant moment in the life of the community. During the early stages of planning for the 30th Annual Francis Day, a walking tour of the trees surfaced as a way to experience the Agape story. We created a plaque and mapped the location of each tree. Like magicians waving wands, suddenly, we un-

veiled a tapestry woven from a rich history.

On October 5th, we provided maps for St. Francis Day participants to contemplate the significance of each living memorial—the suffering of people of color, the evils of Islamophobia, the oppression of the Palestinian people, living and deceased members of Veterans for Peace. Each dedication has shaped the landscape of a community devoted to the care of the Earth and all of her creatures.

Each tree has grown to take its place in the forest. Mission Council member Jim Robinson commented on the tree pil-

grimage: “It displays Agape’s rootedness in a wider web of people and communities committed to eco-social transformation.” The trees themselves call forth from “The great Cloud of Witnesses—Dave Dellinger, Wally and Juanita Nelson, the Berrigan brothers” and diverse ethnic and oppressed groups, that “continue to influence, inspire, and bear good fruit at Agape.”

The next time you visit Agape, ask for the self-guided Way of the Trees map. Then, appreciate the significance of each tree so that its living, breathing tree reality opens you to a truth the rising of Native

Americans as leaders in the environmental movement, our mutual responsibility for ending racism and war, and to be loving stewards of our ravaged earth.

Breathe in deeply a spirit of solidarity with all creation and be filled with hope and courage as we face the challenges of our present moment rooted in the earth.

Dave is a member of Agape's Mission Council, who brings to Agape his many gifts, and with them, his wife, Katie and children, Hannah and Grace.

Frances Crowe: In Memoriam

by Brayton Shanley and Suzanne Belote Shanley

We met Frances at an Ailanthus retreat in Boston in 1982 when Paul Hood, a key member of our peace and resistance group Ailanthus, invited her to give an afternoon talk on her peace activism. Paul said Frances was an amazing force for good, “a one person peace movement.” Indeed, her force field of activism was like no other we had seen or could even imagine. This first meeting led to a deep camaraderie that has lasted more than three decades.

We remember phrases of her talk: “Our protests should consist of the hard work of peacemaking which we must take as seriously as the war-makers take war.” Frances never relented in emphasizing the need for “structures and strategies” for engaging in the work of peace. She was consistently pragmatic and instructive: “We must have long term goals and short term goals to be effective.”

She always had an armful of leaflets, announcements and fliers about a myriad of peace actions and movies on social justice that she had established as an ongoing event in Northampton. Her life, in short, was a tireless barnstorming on social justice issues, going back to the early 60’s. As a Quaker, her “structure” was simple—work out of your home, so she established the American Friends Service Committee office, activist headquarters for the region in Western Massachusetts. Her home office was always humming with activity, phone calls, plans for actions, and the signs to take to them. She was a “work at home” 24/7 peacemaker, who never, in



From Left - Suzanne, Catriona Kennedy, Frances Crowe, and Sharon Daly at Westover Air Force Base. Catriona and Sharon both from Ireland, at their first protest.

all of the years we knew her, seemed tired or discouraged. She was all in for peace, hundreds of arrests and witnesses, with a smile.

She carried that smile with her to Agape for almost every annual Francis Day, and at many of them, she was a speaker or respondent—clear, crisp, and challenging. She loved the fact that we at Agape made hosting college students a priority, and sent donations regularly to further the cause. This commitment to youth, stemmed, no doubt from her memorable “strategies” in her anti-war recruitment of

college students as conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War.

She picked up hitch-hikers in Amherst and stared indoctrinating them the minute they entered her car, ...always on message: “The Vietnam War is unwinnable, a cruel injustice to the people of Vietnam. You must get draft counseling and become a CO. We need you in the movement. See you at the meeting tonight.”

Frances’ short-term goals were to resist and oppose every US foreign policy evil that crossed her path: US incursions in Central America, US backed invasions,

apartheid in South Africa, all nuclear weapons’ manufacturing, nuclear power, pipelines, the death penalty, prison abolition, climate change and University divestment from fossil fuels. Frances was arrested in her wheelchair in her elder years.

We met Frances on numerous occasions at Westover Air Base to encourage the workers there to consider the nature of their work, supplying the weapons of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. At times there were only two or three of us. No matter, “this is so important,” Frances would say, glowing when we brought two young interns from Ireland to their first protest with Frances at Westover.

A week before her death at age 100, we visited Frances and together, holding hands, we reminisced with her about her three children, and her marriage of 50 years, and her staggering accomplishments over 80 years. Frances and a companion of great wisdom and depth, Juanita Nelson, were both tax refusers, women of courage, who would leave the Agape homestead, arm in arm, walking down the driveway, memorable icons and friends.

Frances gazed at us from her death bed with her reassuring smile, and then proceeded to list the reasons for a national strike against corporations and the preparations for war. She left us with her boots strapped very tight. Reviewing together our four decades of friendship and the sweep of it all, left us in a place of calm and resolve. We could have departed with a song on our lips: “We shall not give up the fight. We have only started.” We were content with the hands tightly held and the final thank you’s as we turned and left.

Voices

Dialog on Abortion

Your letter is truly written in the spirit of St. Francis. You laid to rest my concerns that Agape ignores the scourge of abortion on the unborn, women, and all of society. As you well know, violence has a ripple effect, diminishing the sanctity of all human life. I am so grateful that you raise the issue in your memoir.

Kathy Swegart

The Relevance of Nonviolence

Agape's uncompromising commitment to knowing, loving, and serving the risen Christ in the Spirit and Truth of Jesus' Gospel Nonviolent Love brings hope and light to a Church and world in need of renewal.

Cynics can no longer dismiss Gospel Nonviolence as "unrealistic" "impractical" and a mere "option" to choose. Agape's love reminds us all about the realistic, practical necessity of Gospel nonviolence in helping to build a 21st century world of peace, justice, harmony, and ecological well-being to ALL of God's children.

Dave Sepe

Witness to the Kingsbay Plowshare 7 Trial

I saw film of defendants in a "limited area" where they could be shot. As the bolt cutters snipped away, Liz unfurled a banner as the three began reciting the Hail Mary. The audience joined in, quietly but audibly, allowed to continue multiple times around. An atmosphere of prayer and communion across time and space sprang up amid the legal proceedings, almost surreptitiously.

by Eric Martin

Words from the Texas Border

I am a bit "wiped out" this evening, helping our guests to fill out the forms that proved that they had the necessary papers to travel. A bus load of guests from Mexico and Guatemala, followed by the second bus load of 46 guests from Brazil was quite challenging. One mother was here with three children with a 24 year old son allowed to come with her by ICE because he has the mental capacity of a young child.

From the El Paso blog of long-time friend and supporter, Fr. Joachim Lally, CSP who spent weeks with migrants let out of detention so that they can be with their families while they await an asylum hearing.

Postcard from Kingsbay Plowshare Defendant

We benefitted from your and others' prayerful support. Congratulations on 37th Anniversary. The jury took two hours, mostly filling out 28 sheets of Guilty on 4 charges. May God bless us in yourself.

Steve Kelly SJ: Steve remains in prison at the Glynn County Detention Center in Georgia as six other defendants have been released on bail or personal recognizance. Please google Kingsbay Plowshare jail correspondence to get specific information for writing cards to Steve as specific regulations must be followed.

Preparing Our Children for the Future

The visit with you and the Agape community on St. Francis Day was one of the most marvelous experiences of my life. I was subdued, inspired, humbled...and much more. You may recall that in my first moments of visiting Agape, in that magnificent circle of the faith-filled, I shared that I was at Agape to

learn and ponder and decide how to write about the critical importance of building community as the most important way we prepare our children for the future.

It was also clear from many things Steve and Nancy told me, and from the entire weekend where so much responsibility had been passed

on to the younger folks, that Agape is very conscious that some kind of community transformation was needed to prepare for the future.

Ken Whitt, friend of Steve and Nancy James, author, pastor and community member from Ohio.

Primal Mother

by Betsy Azarowski

The valley spirit never dies;
It is the woman, primal mother.
Her gateway is the root of heaven and earth.
It is like a veil barely seen.
Use it, it will never fail.

— Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching

On a cold, November night, we turned into the driveway of the Marian Center in Holyoke, and were met with a statue of Mary, tall and white, in the middle of a beautifully landscaped front lawn. Belonging to the Daughters of Mary order, the Marian Center is the home of DiCece Hall, where Suzanne and Brayton's book presentation would begin soon.

It was my second time tagging along to hear them talk about their book *Loving Life on the Margins: The Story of the Agape Community*. Part book reading, part storytelling, part reunion of old friends, each presentation is unique and based on a theme from the book. There are so many facets of their life and work: nonviolence, intentional community, sustainability and climate change, tax resistance, Catholic Worker and peace movements, and this evening's theme: feminism. One thing is true—you cannot listen to Suzanne and Brayton and maintain

the illusion that change cannot and will not start with us.

The DiCece Hall is a special place. It is a space open to everyone—a community space, where people meet, learn, pray and share. Watching over its guests is a painting by Janet McKenzie of a group of women of different cultures, in the center a mother and baby with dark skin, looking serene with their eyes closed. The mother appears to be a Black Madonna, but she is of the world, surrounded by ordinary women and a sister to them all. The painting was commissioned by the Daughters of Mary, who themselves were formed during the French Revolution. The calm of the women in the painting told us we were safe, under the protection of mothers.

Suzanne began the presentation by reading from the book, a passage which spoke of Sr. Joan Chittister's address to over a thousand Archdiocese of Boston educators, in which she encouraged them to protest America's war-making: "Jesus is calling to all of us, sitting on the sidelines, to stand up, take up your mat of docility, and walk." Suzanne says in the book, "I had never heard another woman speak so forcefully, nor link scripture to resistance at a mainstream Catholic gathering."

Joseph's Catholic Worker before moving on to Mary House, walking the short distance between houses with Cathy Breen, resident at Mary House with Jane Sammon, both friends of many years. We spoke that evening about our links with the NY Catholic Worker, going back to the 80's when Jane took us to Eileen Egan's apartment for tea and conversation on war and peace as Eileen was completing her book, *Peace Be With You: Justified Warfare or the Way of Nonviolence*.

I read from the *Loving Life on the Margins* about abortion: "The question of abortion became a key factor in my developing feminist consciousness: What does it mean to be nonviolent? What would Jesus have said about abortion? Could I be vocal in my protest of war, capital punishment, and nuclear weapons without protesting

She ended with a passage by Sr. Joan: "I am feminist because I am Catholic." So much of Agape's story is about reconciling Catholicism with their radical mission—that of love, of resistance, and of going against traditional mainstream ideas. In the book, Suzanne speaks of her struggle as a woman to find a place in the Church's patriarchal structure—not only to belong, but to be a strong, central force. She became this at Agape. Sr. Joan Chittister—like Suzanne and Brayton—find the answer with Jesus as expressed by Suzanne: "Jesus discussed theology with women and sought their companionship and valued their friendship." He discussed, sought them out and valued them. This is a powerful message for Catholic women, and all women.

Brayton began by talking about the state of the world today. "War, poverty, the destruction of the planet, etc.....where does all of it begin? The values of American society—greed, aggression, competition—are all male characteristics which have bought our planet to where it is today. Wealth has caused war, injustice, and climate crisis in America and the rest of the world. The answer, he says, lies in all of us—male and female—to accept our feminine side.

abortion?"

Grace Episcopal Church, Amherst, MA

In early November we returned to Grace Episcopal Church in Amherst, MA where we had been so warmly received with Brayton's first book, *The Many Sides of Peace: Christian Nonviolence, the Contemplative Life and Sustainable Living*. (Wipf and Stock)

At Grace, I shared the chapter on Omar, Sabah and Ali, an Iraqi family part of our lives for fourteen years, as they continue to heal from the attack on their car after the American invasion of Iraq, and the trauma, death and devastation that ensued.

Reading from the chapter entitled, The Children of War, I linked Omar to the Suffering Servant passages in Hebrew Scripture, writing: "I experienced Jesus stand-

ing before me in the innocent suffering of a child of war" who lost his mother in an American attack on their family car, and who himself was burned over 65% of his body.

With more venues scheduled into the spring, we continue to cast the seeds of community, as few and as insignificant as they might seem. As we return to the book pilgrimage road, we will be asking the question from the book's last chapter: "Who will take up the Agape mantle?"

As Denise Levertov wrote and we continue to experience, "the marvelous did happen in our lives, our stories are not drab. ..." but, only the unknown future will determine if we will or will not "expect now to return for more. ..."

Betsy Azarowski is the nurturing anchor in the Agape office, who brings us the universal feminine in her smile and in her presence.

MARVELOUS from page 1

Agape Mission Council member, in his last year of PhD work in the Theology Department at Fordham as well as with long-time friend, Thomas Massaro SJ whom we knew at Boston College and at Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley. We spoke in Tom's class as well as at a graduate school luncheon hosted by Professor Jeannine Hill Fletcher, whose searing book, *The Sin of White Supremacy* we had studied at the community.

We rested well at the Jesuit Residence and strengthened our Fordham bonds, remembering Daniel Berrigan SJ, who died among his Jesuit brothers at Fordham.

Mary House Catholic Worker, NY

We brought bags of Agape veggies from Hardwick and dropped them off at St.

News Notes



PERFECT CHRISTMAS PRESENT

LOVING LIFE ON THE MARGINS: THE STORY OF THE AGAPE COMMUNITY

We hope our readers will consider ordering the Agape retrospective on 40 years of community ongoing throughout the year. The book is a perfect gift for friends and family to introduce a lineage of a lay community's nonviolent peacemaking. Please order from Agape's website or by calling or emailing Agape.

Update: Kingsbay Plowshares 7

Since Liz spoke at Francis Day, October 5th, and on October 24th a jury found the seven Catholic activists guilty of conspiracy, destruction of government property, depredation and trespassing for their 2018 action

David Detmold, who is a leading voice in the effort to Change the Mass Flag and Seal:

We must gain Co-Sponsors! Bill numbers are HD.2968 and SD.1495 in the The Campaign to Change the Massachusetts State Flag and Seal changethemassflag.com.

The new version of the bill strengthens earlier language by adding more Massachusetts tribal people to the commission and by clearly stating the current symbol of the Commonwealth – a Native American man with a Colonial broadsword over his head – will change!



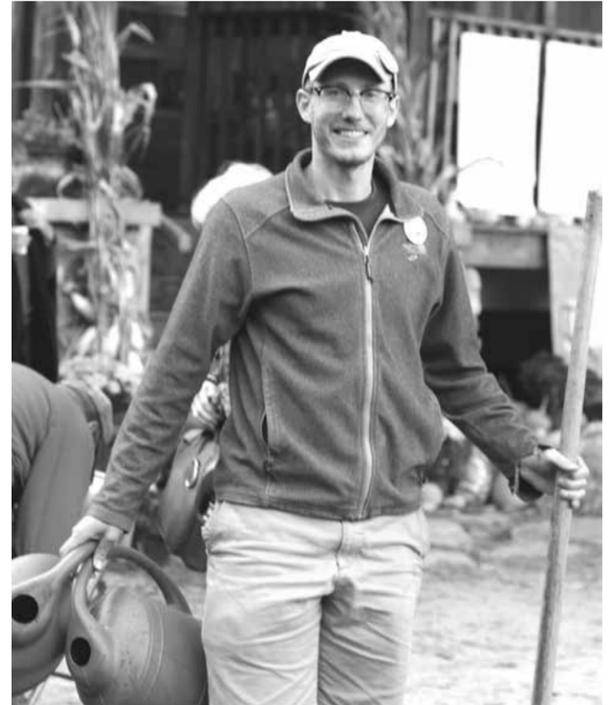
Brayton and Suzanne at Fordham Book Talk - From Left - Jim Robinson, Thomas Massaro SJ (Host), Suzanne, Jack Reynolds, Prof. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Brayton



Weekly Peace Vigil in Ware with Banner 'End Torture of Migrant Children'

Latest intern arrival

Nathan Kleban has recently returned to Agape. Nine years ago he first wandered into the community following Tolstoy leadings and has since moved around the world--in Mali with the Peace Corps, in Vermont at a therapeutic community, and in California at several Catholic Workers and Soto Zen Buddhist monasteries. Nathan has pursued the whole or holy life. He is most enthusiastic around facilitating intensive conflict transformation workshops in prison with the Alternatives to Violence Project. Present dreams are of a world where forests, rivers, oceans, and mountains are healthier because of humans living in their midst. We are excited about what Nathan brings to our community.



Nathan Kleban



Suzanne and Brayton at Spirit of Life Community with Newly Ordained Catholic Woman Bishop Jean Marchant (Third from Left)

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Calendar



December 7, 2019: 5:30 pm— Agape Advent Vigil. Begin the Advent Season of light in the darkness, beginning with a bon-fire. Bring a pot-luck dish.

December 20, 2019: Yearly Agape Caroling at Worcester Nursing Homes and the Worcester Mustard Seed Catholic Worker.

February 1, 2020: 5:30 pm—The Feast of St. Brigid. Join us in this mid-winter Celtic Feast of Poetry, Prayer and Song, celebrating St. Brigid of Kildare. Bring a pot-luck dish.