

## THANKS

listen  
with the night falling we are saying thank you  
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings  
we are running out of the glass rooms  
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky  
and say thank you  
we are standing by the water thanking it  
standing by the windows looking out  
in our directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging  
after funerals we are saying thank you  
after the news of the dead  
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you  
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators  
remembering wars and the police at the door  
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you  
in the banks we are saying thank you  
in the faces of the officials and the rich  
and of all who will never change  
we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us  
taking our feelings we are saying thank you  
with the forests falling faster than the minutes  
of our lives we are saying thank you  
with the words going out like cells of a brain  
with the cities growing over us  
we are saying thank you faster and faster  
with nobody listening we are saying thank you  
thank you we are saying and waving  
dark though it is

BY W. S. MERWIN



*Our "Women for Women" event on September 19, 2015 was a huge success, raising over \$15,000 in funds between the event itself and donations that followed. As a result we were able to fully fund our Associates program. We want to offer a special thank you to Maria and Robert Krzeski, event hostess and host as well as the MUSE choir who provided fabulous entertainment for the evening. The following is the talk offered at the event.*

## RESURRECTION IN ORDINARY TIME

My name is Meridith Owensby and I am the cofounder and a live in community member at Lydia's House. I greet you on this, the third annual Women for Women celebration. We've been providing hospitality for just about 17 months, and I'm glad for the opportunity to share with you a bit about that experience.

When someone asks off-handedly, "What's life at Lydia's House like?" I've got a description ready. If I'm speaking to friends who aren't people of faith I say "The worst sometimes comes to pass, but it doesn't stay." With those assembled tonight, who are believers in Christ, I can tell you this: "We get to be present for resurrection Sunday, but not without living through Friday and Saturday."

To explain what I mean, let's begin with a reading from the Gospel of Luke, starting at the end of chapter 23:

*Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to the crucifixion. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.*

*The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*

The word of the Lord.

When you spend life alongside some of the poorest of God's children, scriptures come alive in a particular way. The story of Joseph and the women at the tomb has stood out to us lately. One could say guests come to us after Friday crucifixion, and although Sunday joy does come, there's no rushing it. The Saturdays in between can feel long and uncertain indeed.

Women arrive at Lydia's House having experienced the worst forms of suffering. The stories we hear in interviews often leave me weeping in my car afterward. There is no place in this city for them to be. The eviction has happened. The suicide was attempted. The domestic violence transpired. The job was lost, the sickness laid them low, the depression was debilitating, the family cast them out. For our guests, Friday has happened. Crucifixion has taken its toll.

Like Joseph of Arimathea, the associates immediately care for these broken bodies. To begin, we offer meals: good, wholesome meals paid for with the donations received

this time last year at this very event. We buy appropriate clothes and good quality shoes for each new guest. We arrange transportation to doctor's appointments, pick up prescriptions, and make 2am emergency room trips when necessary. Twice I've accompanied a guest through labor, holding the hands of these young women while they cried out for their own mothers and the absent

fathers-to-be. We've been through cancer scares, surgeries, and inpatient psychiatric stays. This was so much of our ministry that God saw fit to provide an associate who's a doctor by training, who gives guidance and cares for our guests gently and well. We know what to do with broken bodies.

I say we know, but there's sometimes debate. Recently two guests shared their concerns about my regular running practice, noting correctly that it could be bad for my joints. I replied that it was a good way to manage stress and I didn't know what I'd do instead if I quit. One

I NEED YOU TO BE  
HONEST WITH ME,  
FRIEND TO FRIEND, MAYBE  
COUSIN TO COUSIN,  
SISTER TO SISTER,  
MOTHER TO DAUGHTER,  
WOMAN TO WOMAN.



Meridith and Maria Krzeski



of them suggested, only half in jest, “You could take up smoking.”

But smoking aside, even if we could bind up every wound resurrection isn’t inevitable or immediate. There’s always a Saturday that follows the Friday, where the worst has happened but the shape of future hopes is anything but clear. As one guest lamented during the hardest, loneliest point of her labor, “This isn’t how I thought it would be!” In this ambiguous Saturday waiting we are tempted toward preparing for the worst, toward acting like what happened on Friday is the last word.

I imagine that the women following Jesus felt the same, that the worst had happened and the only thing to do was to have a proper burial. Yet, scripture highlights a pause in the action that I find both illuminating and delightful. The women stopped getting ready for the funeral because of the timing of the Sabbath, falling the day after Jesus’ death.

I find this pause remarkable. These were devout women who worshipped God and they believed Jesus was the Son of God. This Jesus they’d given their lives to had just been killed, so essentially the God of their understanding was dead.

And yet, they kept God’s commands regarding the Sabbath. They stopped what they were doing for the day, following the letter of the law regarding when work should be done and when it should cease. This strikes me as akin to carefully locking the door when the house is already on fire.

I must tell you that life at Lydia’s House has taught me the wisdom of continuing to do the things that God has told us are good, most especially when Friday has come but Sunday’s not yet here. In the midst of sorrowful Saturdays we continue the practiced pauses, even when frantic funeral preparations feel more appropriate. When heartbreak comes, as it often does, we immediately gather and pray. We keep breaking bread together, and I’m proud to say we’ve never missed a scheduled dinner, despite the interruptions that come on a daily basis. We keep holding worship, keep praying as a group every morning, keep believing in a God that is

working for good in all things.

And during those pauses, in those spaces, God has entered time and time again. Sunday comes, and it turns out funeral preparations were not even needed.

Let me tell you about the Sundays we have known, about the resurrection we have witnessed. We’ve celebrated birthdays, four month job anniversaries, certification exam passage, sobriety anniversaries, and transitions into independent housing. Each goal achieved reminds us that resurrection is possible, that Sunday does come. And when these Sundays show up we celebrate every bit of resurrection. One of our gifts is celebrating well, and there are many parts involved in our homemade liturgy, including prayer, off-key singing, and handcrafted merit badges. Each accomplishment is entered into our golden book of merit, and between guests and volunteers I’m proud to say we’ve had twenty nine such celebrations. We exclaim over Sunday when it comes, cheering on new life in women who once thought their futures needed only funeral preparations.

The associates live with guests in a hard-to-define way, and sometimes we struggle to express how we fit together. One of the guests explained it well when she started a question to me this way:

“I need you to be honest with me, friend to friend, maybe cousin to cousin, sister to sister, mother to daughter, woman to woman.”



Only after I agreed did she ask what was heavy on her heart, “Did you watch the next episode of Empire without me?” I had waited, let me assure you, and we later watched it together as the sisters in Christ that we are. And in these ways and countless others our lives are intertwined.

I want to thank all of you gathered this evening for giving us the support we need to live this life. Because of you we are able to observe resurrection and resurrection-in-the-making, and I cannot tell you how transformative that has been to all of us. Be it Friday, Saturday or Sunday, there’s no place else we’d rather be. Thank you.



# CELEBRATIONS & MILESTONES

## BIRTHDAYS

### Rosalyn's and Christine's Birthdays

Two Lydia's House guests, Rosalyn and Christine, shared a joint birthday celebration, followed by a trip to see Labor Day fireworks. We had an elaborate back yard cookout, catered by our former guest Taffany, and shared hopes and affirmations for Rosalyn and Christine.



### Baby C Came Home

In June we were surprised when our guest Taren went into labor six weeks early. The community quickly set up an accompaniment schedule for her labor, and Meridith and Jill Stoxen were by her side as baby C made his way into world. Despite his early birthday, he was very healthy and came home within a week. We celebrated his homecoming with a dinner and time of affirmation for mom, with hopes for baby boy.

### Sam Eilerman Turned Three

Mary Ellen, Meridith, Ben, Annie and Sam traveled to the Wild Goose Festival in Hot Springs, NC in early July. The theme of this year's festival was "Blessed are the Peacemakers" and we heard some great speakers on organizing for justice, dismantling white privilege, and working for "costly" peace. To top it all off, Sam celebrated his third birthday and got sung to about 10 times!



### Larriana Turned One

In mid-October we welcomed back former guest Teena and her daughter Larriana for a joint birthday celebration, and we surprised former guest Taffany by adding her birthday to the festivities.



## DEPARTURES

### Sylvia and Enlara

Enlara and Sylvia, Lydia's House summer interns, finished a season as resident volunteers in mid-August. They both came to us in mid-May, on break from their studies at Xavier University. While at the house, they did a lot of child care, cooked some delicious African inspired meals and even participated in our monthly worship by offering the sermon. Upon her departure, Sylvia left us with these parting words: *"I am grateful to have spent my summer at Lydia's House. First I made friends who are like a family. They taught me, they strengthened me, they loved me, they corrected me. The lesson I learned could never have been taught in class because it is in my heart and not my mind. Once it has become home I will always consider it home because it is a caring, loving family."*



### Elizabeth and Rachel

The community hosted two sendoff celebrations for associate volunteers Rachel and Elizabeth, who completed a year of service at Lydia's House. Not surprisingly, Elizabeth requested Karaoke for her sending. We gathered in the back yard, sang together and remembered her year with us. She's now in Nashville working as the head of student life at a Catholic high school. Rachel's sending was a more standard dinner and merit badge ceremony, complete with several of her family members. Rachel is now at Loyola University of Chicago, pursuing a MA in Social Justice Ministry through the JVC Magis program. Both of these women are sorely missed!



# THANK YOU TO OUR FAITHFUL DONORS (OCTOBER 1, 2014 - OCTOBER 1, 2015)

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Jodi and Rick Wrublewski-Bohl  
Xavier University  
Zion United Church of Christ  
Paul & Marianne Zook

## The Opening of the Jean Donovan House

In late May the community gathered for the opening and house dedication of the newly renovated Jean Donovan house, and Sandra Kelley was recognized for her long suffering dedication to our ministry by serving as the volunteer project manager on the house renovation. By early June Meridith had moved in, and now she and Anne live in the property. Our office and meeting space is there, and we've had a very well-loved guest room that's seen family members, Catholic Workers from other communities, friends, and homeless guests.





# REFLECTIONS ON BEING WITH: FRIENDSHIP AT THE HEALTHCARE MARGINS

Anne Housholder, MD

This season at Lydia's House we're reading *Friendship at the Margins* by Chris Heuertz and Christine Pohl. As we're reading it, we're asking ourselves questions about what it really means to be friends, particularly friends with those whose lives have often been marked by frequent losses of friendships and frayed family structures. Serving women transitioning out of homelessness means that Lydia's house often leads us both intentionally and unintentionally into friendships we don't expect. How is friendship a unique model of being with those at the margins? For me, as a physician, I've found I can offer friendship through medical advocacy and accompaniment

Within a very short time of welcoming guests, the leadership of Lydia's House began to notice the frequency with which trips to the hospital occurred. These often late night visits to emergency rooms were exhausting for everyone, but regardless of how short staffed the house was, volunteers committed to going with and staying with guests throughout a hospital visit. Our volunteers have also accompanied mothers and witnessed the birth of two children born to guests in the last year. We have all taken the extra duties involved in covering both house duties and regular hospital shifts. When a baby was born prematurely in June, we filled the NICU log book for the week of his stay.

These trips took a lot out of us, but as I reflect on them, I'm asking myself "Instead of as obligation or sacrifice, how can we look at these experiences through the lens of friendship?" To start this discussion, I'll share three important points I've learned as I've accompanied women, as their friend, through medical crisis:

1. There is no substitute for time in developing friendships
2. Emotional involvement is a necessary sign of friendship
3. Friendship offers us the possibility of persevering towards our goals of wholeness

One of the first things any of us learned about friendship as a child is that time spent together matters—and making friends was basically our job. As adults, the demands of our lives squeeze our friendships in to smaller and smaller timeframes. We let our pre-established friendships coast as best we can on the limited time we have and hope we've built up enough goodwill to get by with an infrequent note or call. Developing friendships, though, still requires a substantial time investment. Fortunately, in hospitals we end up having a seemingly infinite time to wait. Waiting with a guest for a medical procedure, I worked on re-twisting a strand of her hair, for which I earned the epithet,

OG (original gangster) for the first time from her, which I consider a mark of our deepening friendship. The trips back and forth to the NICU with another guest allowed for many conversations about dreams and hopes she had for her life and the lives of her children. By accompanying women through medical encounters, the very slowness of hospitals that we all hate (doctors more than anyone) has offered us the freedom of time to entertain ourselves in ways that lead uniquely to adult friendship.

In describing my work in medical advocacy as friendship, I cannot simply report that I've developed simple and mutual relationships. To be honest about this journey, I must also talk about the emotional weight, specifically for me as a physician, of being with marginalized women as they are further degraded by the very system that supports my livelihood. The encounter that started with light conversation and hairstyling in the waiting room was followed by a shocking confrontation with racism. I sat in the room in stunned silence as our guest's anesthesiologist poorly explained her upcoming sedation. When she responded with appropriate confusion, he became irate and went on a tirade of how inappropriate it was for a patient to have any say in their care. He said he would not listen to anyone who didn't have an MD. After he left I listened as our guest questioned what was wrong with her that she had such a bad encounter with a doctor. In my medical ethics classes I had learned that internalized racism is when mistreated individuals take on the beliefs of the oppressor and begin to assume they themselves must really be the problem. Years of education and analysis told me how to interpret this degrading event; but it was friendship that made my heart break when I heard this self-doubt coming from our guest.



When we become friends with others, the hurts they experience no longer occur at arm's distance from us. After this experience, I wrote a letter to the anesthesiologist outlining what I experienced sitting as both a physician and a friend to the woman he was mistreating. I believe, even if I never get a response from him, that the emotional involvement that friendship requires enabled me to see

and name the systems of oppression that exist in medicine. I hope this will help me be a better doctor and a better friend to our guest, reassuring her that I was a witness and she did nothing wrong.

The Lydia's House commitment to being there for medical encounters brings me to my final thought: medical accompaniment is a friendship that allows for perseverance. The guest who had such terrible experience with medical systems failing to offer compassionate care, is nevertheless persevering in seeking the best medical care for herself with great encouragement from me and our community. After we talked, she had her operation even though she was nervous about her care and shaken by her doctor's verbal abuse. Friendship showed me the truth of that encounter; it also empowered her to continue forward toward greater health, despite great discouragement. The volunteers of Lydia's House provide encouragement to each of our guests as they seek wholeness in body, mind and spirit—telling them to seek this elusive treasure which many have told them will never be theirs. It's common at our table to talk about care of body and spirit, and together we've taken on many challenges: seeking a primary care home after only getting care in the ER, diet change, breaking addictions, running a ½ marathon, getting tested for illnesses we fear, continuing to seek medical care even if the system has failed us again and again. We all- but especially the guests— are persevering in seeking good things for ourselves because we have the support and encouragement of our friends.

Medical accompaniment is just one of the many ways that we are exploring friendship as a model for seeking wholeness. Over the last year, we at Lydia's House have not only learned how to do this accompaniment better in terms of our own self-care but also become increasingly aware of why we are willing to make such sacrifices for it. In medical ethics there's actually a term "the un-befriended patient," that describes patients that cannot make choices for themselves and have no one around them to help make decisions for them. Although this term does not properly apply to where our guests might be without us, it matters that they are unquestioningly befriended every time we are at the hospital with them. Watching a woman labor in pain in the middle of the night as no family arrives isn't easy for us. Listening to a talented, motivated, responsible woman be demeaned by those who are supposed to care for her is even harder. We do these things because our friendships with the marginalized brings us to places, including hospitals, where we see exactly what that marginalization looks like. When our friendships extend before and after these trips we can all persevere in loving and supporting each other. Persevering friendship offers a life beyond marginalization, where every community member's health needs, like all pieces of their whole, are cared and prayed for by us all.

## THANK YOU TO OUR REGULAR VOLUNTEERS!

Many, many hands make Lydia's House work, but we'd especially like to thank those that make a regular commitment to being with us for house duty, food preparation, grocery shopping, administrative assistance, yard and garden work or maintenance.

- Laura Bigelow
- Dennis & Georgia Bishop
- Mary Jo Blankemeyer
- Emily Bond
- Rick Boydston
- Taffany Duggins
- Sally Evans
- Carren Herring
- Susan Johnson
- Erin Lockridge
- Grace Marshall
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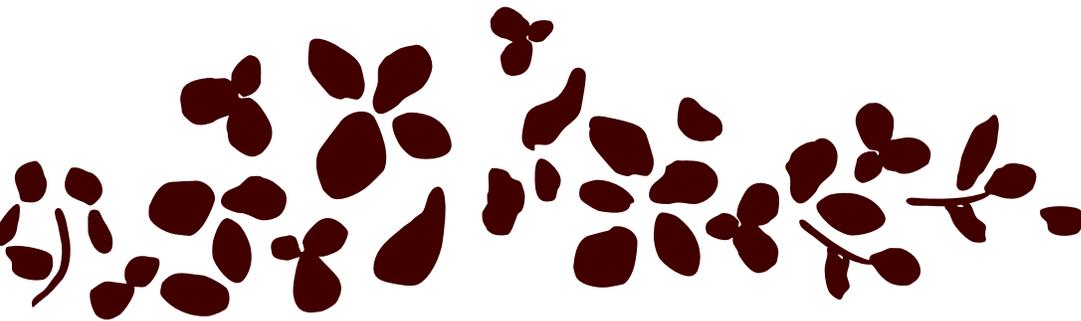
Lydia's House is in need of canned vegetables, beans, rice and pasta for the winter. If your group would like to do a drive for us contact [kristi@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:kristi@stlydiashouse.org).

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**November 14, 5pm: St. Martins Day Lantern Parade.** Join the Lydia's House community, West Norwood neighbors and friends from Redeemer Episcopal Church and Vineyard Central as we walk the neighborhood, celebrating God's light in our streets even as the days grow shorter. Meet at Vineyard Central Church, 1757 Mills Ave. Snacks and a light meal provided.

**December Worship:** We will not have a formal worship service in December because of in house celebrations of Advent and Christmas. If you'd like to bring joy to our house during this month by leading a seasonal activity or sponsoring an outing (last year we went to the Festival of Lights, The Museum Center train exhibit and the Krohn Conservatory!) please contact Stephanie at [Stephanie@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:Stephanie@stlydiashouse.org)

**January-March Worship:** On the 3rd Sunday of each month join the core community and guests in the living room of 2024 Mills Ave for prayer, sharing, and song. 5pm. Potluck supper to follow. Please bring a dish to share.

**Spring service of prayer and planting: April 17.** 4pm. Meet in the side yard of Lydia's House for prayers, songs and garden work. Please wear clothes you can get dirty. Children are welcome. Light snacks provided.

