

Who We Are

Lydia's House is a Christian community that provides transitional housing to women and children in crisis. Drawing from the Catholic Worker tradition, we endeavor to do small things with great love. We are a committed group of volunteers and staff who share regular meals, prayer, and a good portion of our lives together, following the model that Jesus set with his disciples. We look for the light shining in the darkness and Christ coming in the guise of the stranger at the door.

We strive to know one another well and offer needed help, rather than fall into set roles of "service provider" and "served." We believe that we are all children of God, and as such we provide family-style hospitality, with all its messiness and beauty. The core of this community lives together, mostly under one roof but all in one neighborhood. We are committed to seeking wholeness, recovering from addictions and providing accountability to one another.

We recognize women's equality as organizers and spiritual leaders. At the heart of our community are powerful women journeying together. Some are partnered, some are single; some have children, some are childfree; some are ordained, some are laywomen. We celebrate the many varieties of womanhood that gather under our roof and, as we share chores and gardening and meal preparations and child care, we also seek to redefine 'women's work.'

We welcome family in many forms, share the burdens and joys of childrearing and seek to be a place where folks from all walks of life can grow toward the life they were created to live.

We value beauty, honesty, justice, simplicity and personalism and hope those values shine through in our daily decisions. We seek to speak truth in love to ourselves, the women and children we host and volunteers.

We embrace homeless guests regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation.





VIRGINIA COFFEY PLACE NOTES: A FULL HOUSE

by Laura Menze, Occupational Therapist

“This is my community. It is composed of people just like me. It will be kind if I am kind. It will be forgiving if I forgive. It will patiently endure wrongs if I endure them. It will be a community of loyalty, love, faith and service if I who make it what it is am filled with these. Therefore, with God’s love, I dedicate myself to the task of being all these things I want for Lydia’s House and Virginia Coffey Place.”

-Lydia’s House Community Affirmation

When the weather was warming this spring, we blessed the opening of the Virginia Coffey Place with song and prayer and former Lydia’s House guests unlocked the buildings door. As the weather now cools, it is staggering to take note of all that has happened in these past months. Just over six months ago, apartments were being mopped repeatedly to clean the construction dust. Now the building is fully inhabited and mopping still is happening, but it is no longer construction dust, but the dirt of lives lived and homes made.

Since the building dedication in March, Virginia Coffey Place construction has been completed! A common room for tenant meetings and a laundry room were opened in June. Guests can now wash laundry on-site, preventing time-intensive and costly trips to a laundry mat. Azalea Montessori Preschool opened its doors in September to 12 students, including 4 Lydia’s House children and the wide windows display kids hard at the work of learning through play with beautiful wooden toys and manipulatives. Betty Hatchett Design took residence in our other store front with canvases of brightly colored birds and teacups. We would have been hard pressed to conjure more beautiful and perfect tenants for the space if we had tried. Just as with any move, it takes time to get settled. Likewise,

construction concluding made way for hanging family photos and the art from the building dedication on the walls, perfecting a system for cleaning the stair treads, and establishing a basket for socks who lost their match in the laundry.

Most notably since the dedication, families have moved, bringing the building to full occupancy! Over the course of 6 months, eight families, including 13 children (and another baby due in December) call Virginia Coffey Place home. Three families have moved directly from Lydia’s House, five families are former Lydia’s House guests that had previous landlords. Women have shared that they felt more safe, secure, happy, and at peace since moving into Virginia Coffey Place. Because they are in affordable and supportive housing, they have increased ability to consider goals such as returning to school and improving their mental and physical health. Individualized occupational therapy services are offered to meet their needs. While we anticipated that the move into affordable housing would reduce the stress of the women served, we have been thrilled and in awe watching how children have settled into a new place with less parental stress, the ability to safely play outside, and friends to play with only a few steps outside their front door. Children have flourished and



now offer hugs and excited greetings on the sidewalk.

Virginia Coffey Place was built on the knowledge that more affordable housing was needed in Cincinnati, but also the belief that our guests would benefit from continued access to engagement in the supportive community that Lydia's House uniquely provides. Tenants of Virginia Coffey Place have continued access to the Lydia's House community, such as joining for Episcopal Family Camp or the Back to School party. In addition, we are establishing a community of interdependence at the building. We have monthly tenant meetings and group activities – such as a personal finance workshop in partnership with the Brighton Center, a coping skill group, and body product making. We went to a playground together on a beautiful Saturday. We are engaging in healthy competition with a fall art contest to decorate the gallery wall in a shared space and an exercise contest between residents. We have also started a program in which tenants can lead a social activity for other tenants and receive a grant for the project. Therefore, we have had tenant led movie outings, a bake sale, and an ice cream social with each program building community and individual relationships and friendships. We have been thrilled to take note of tenants sharing meals together, watching one another's children, sitting on the porch outside, teaching one another skills, and borrowing phones and tools from one another. One tenant said, "Now that I live in a supportive community, I feel loved and I enjoy my life."

Though there is much to rejoice in and celebrate, the past months have equally been sobering. While

housing stability is critical, housing stability does not stabilize all things. We have watched and supported every tenant continue to financially struggle even as their housing is considered affordable, and we regularly offer no-interest loans and financial assistance. I have sat with women in mental health crisis and woman facing mounting physical health concerns. The life-preserving bureaucracies in place are often anything but humane with red tape and threats of cancelling service support frequent. Before we opened, I drafted a meticulously formatted flowchart of the steps from application to move-in. However, we have learned that it has been our organizational agility that has allowed people to actually move in; no move-ins have proceeded according to the chart.

As we look to the coming season, we pray for a healthy baby birth, for families to settle into homes, growing ever in love and respect for one another. We pray for home to be felt more deeply, for more photos and art hung on the wall, for routines of housecleaning with children underfoot, for home to be known. We pray for new jobs with consistent hours, focus and success in school, clarity regarding future goals. We pray for children to learn much at school, to laugh and play often, and feel safe. We pray for interdependent friendships, the courage to share life and navigate the conflicts that are inherent in living in close proximity. We pray for relationships with neighbors with other tenants, but also in the wider Norwood neighborhood. We pray for the nature playscape and mural to proceed smoothly. We rejoice and give thanks for the gifts that have been and the gifts that will be.

"May the blessing of God, the eternal goodwill of God, the peace of God, and the wildness and the warmth of God, be among us and within us, now and always."



A DAY IN THE LIFE AT LYDIA'S HOUSE

by Bailey Miller



I joined the Lydia's House community as an intern in August of 2019. I learned quickly that every day at Lydia's House is one of a kind, but I was struck with the beauty of one particular day in early September.

After coming home from our long days of work, running errands, school, and daycare, we gathered to share our nightly community dinner. We set the table with napkin rings that displayed the names of each guest. The dinner bell rang loudly to let everyone in the house know it was time to eat. We lifted up one another's petitions and thanksgivings in prayer. The kids yelled, "KIDS FIRST!" and ran to get to the front of the food line in the busy kitchen. We feasted.

This dinner was a celebration meal for a previous guest, Deadra, who was leaving Lydia's House for her new apartment. We rang bells as the Church has traditionally done for centuries at celebration upon celebration. Meridith, our resident liturgy expert, led us in a special prayer for goodbyes. We laughed, cried, and shared memories of warm times with Deadra in thanksgiving for the time shared and the coming transition.

After dinner, the adults lingered at the table to chat. The kids, feeling exceptionally energized, laughed, ran around the couch, and screamed at the top of their lungs. Eventually, a small group peacefully read a children's book together. The Eilerman kid crew of 3

proposed their favorite post-dinner event, "Dance your Pants off." Fortunately, all pants stayed on, but two teams quickly formed and began practicing routines. It was the Eilerman kids vs. the Robinson kids. Soon judges were picked and the dance-off began in the living room. Much to their chagrin, the competitive Eilerman's weren't the winners—the Robinsons were! The dancing then continued with all kids and adults joining in.

This eventful evening was made more full by an unexpected fire truck visit. We noticed red flashing lights outside our window and scurried to the porch to observe what might be happening. We looked down the street to find a sparking telephone wire! We watched with great concentration as the firemen deescalated the situation and assured us that the coast was clear. Fortunately it was no real fire, but something fun to look at. The kids, unfazed by the neighborhood conundrum, gathered at the fence to receive some super cute plastic fire hats handed out by a kind fireman.

As the evening came to a close and the kids departed or went to bed, adults hung around the front porch, laughing deeply with one another. It felt easy in our hearts, on this one day, to give thanks for the life we live together.



WORK WITH US!

We are currently looking for a part time administrative assistant/ bookkeeper to work 24-32 hours a month.

Responsibilities include:

- donor development assistance including data entry and overseeing coding of gifts in the Donor Perfect development software, creating thank you letters using mail merge
- bookkeeping assistance using Quickbooks and excel including tracking receipts, flex spending account tracking, bill payments, data entry of payments and deposits, preparing information for monthly reconciliation by outside accountant
- grant tracking
- insurance review and maintaining updated policies
- collection and tracking of tenant and rent receipts, distributing and tracking direct financial assistance to guests and preparing information for quarterly reconciliation of financial assistance to families in need

Compensation:

- competitive based on experience

To apply: Send references and resume to Mary Ellen Mitchell, Maryellen@stlydiashouse.org

MASTER PLAN

COMMUNITY PLAYSPACE at Virginia Coffey Place

The apartment units are completed and occupied but there's still more to come at 4502 Carter Avenue. In addition to the apartment building we actually bought two additional adjoining parcels of land: a parking lot and an empty lot. By the summer of 2020 we hope to create a nature playscape for Lydia's House families and the pre-school, and add a mural to the back wall. If you'd like to give to this campaign please contact Maryellen@stlydiashouse.org. We're excited to not just make beautiful apartments for our families but to contribute to the beautification of west Norwood. Here's a sneak peek of our playscape design as it currently stands.



LEGEND:

1. Central patio with seat walls
2. Entry; crushed gravel pathway
3. Certified play mulch
4. Astroturf: flat area and hill
5. Embankment slide
6. Log climb
7. Retaining wall
8. Play platform / "Bird's nest"
9. Willow tunnel
10. Loose parts play area
11. Log hop
12. Art and/or music panels
13. Infant swings
14. Existing large tree



A LYDIA'S HOUSE GUEST STORY

Below is the story of a former Lydia's House guest, as shared at this year's Women for Women event in September. Thank you, Lakeitia, for opening your heart so graciously to tell your story.

My name is Lakeitia, and this spring, living at Lydia's House helped me bring my family — and myself — back together.

My life shattered four years ago, February 23, 2015, when my mom passed. My whole life, it was just me and my mom, Pamela Rosemond. She was my best friend, my protector, my everything. She was a caretaker, the kind of woman whose door is always open to everyone in the neighborhood, especially the kids. And really, we leaned on each other. When she got breast cancer the first time, I was 8 and I took care of her through that. We found out her cancer had returned the same day my son, Jeremiah, was born. During my pregnancy, I had quit art school and moved back home, and so I became her caretaker again, a full-time, stay-at-home mom for her and my son. She was sick his whole life, but that didn't stop her from loving on him. That was her baby, and I'm so glad he has strong memories of her. He remembers everything. But eventually, she couldn't hold on against the cancer.

Losing my mom turned my world

cold. I had to take care of my son, just a toddler at the time, had to figure out how to get insurance policies moving and funeral arrangements made, had to figure out how to pay rent. But all I really wanted to do was sit and not move. Not knowing what was in store for me, not having her here beside me erased my sense of security. Everything just felt like it was falling apart. I was anxious. I was depressed. And then, I was pregnant.

My mom, in one of the last conversations I had with her, told me I was going to have another baby, a girl. She was right, and I'm so glad, because Ava, my daughter, she looks just like my mom, acts like her. It's good, hard but good. But during her pregnancy, I was still so depressed. My whole pregnancy we bounced around from house to house: down to Georgia to live with my dad, back up here to different family, back down to Georgia, back up here to live with friends. I think I was looking for the love and security I once had from my mom. I hadn't yet realized how to turn that around, to provide it for myself and

my own babies.

I'm diabetic, and the further I got into my pregnancy the more complications I had. My daughter was born 6 weeks early, just 3 lb 13 oz. I was so terrified that I couldn't take care of my children like my mother took care of me. I'd lost all hope and confidence in myself, in anyone. My little family was anything but stable. I was constantly in and out of the hospital for my diabetes, bouncing around still from house to house. Finally, I landed with a friend and was just starting to feel settled when — three days before Thanksgiving — a house fire caused us to lose everything. Clothes, toys — everything, including my job. Even my car had broken down. I thought losing my mom had been the lowest point, but I was wrong: This was my darkest moment. I couldn't buy Christmas presents for my baby, couldn't buy clothes, couldn't buy food. I just felt so terrible. I started to question God and my being the world. If it wasn't for my children I would have gave up! But I couldn't. I had to take care of my babies.

So, even while I was wondering, "What did I do? What did I do to deserve this? How did I go wrong to end up here?," I started looking for shelters. Every place had a waiting list. Every place was full. But I filled out the application for Lydia's House, and within three days, I was here on the porch, moving in. I was afraid to step foot in this house. But once I walked through the front door there was a calming sense that came over me. This is where I needed to be.

I was really broken — by grief, by depression, by circumstance —



when I came into this house. I was just shattered when I came in, and Meridith and everyone were the glue to my puzzle. They were like, “OK, we have to glue this part, let’s get you to school. OK, now we’re helping you with your mental health. Hey, we’re helping you with your physical health, and now we have the kids, and boom!” They helped me gain my sense as a woman and a mother. After being broken, they put me back together.

Within a week, I was enrolled in a culinary work-study program at CityLink. They helped me find childcare for my babies, helped me get my physical health under control, helped me improve my mental health. I had been feeling like the world was against me since my mom died, but here, everything seemed to go smoothly. In my three months at Lydia’s House, they helped me get my family back together. They helped get a sense of how I wanted to raise my children, and how I needed to help them. It was hard balancing out me and my kids, and Lydia’s House helped me get an even, healthy balance on that. They helped me how to make myself and my babies feel safe and secure. Meridith helped me find a home for my little family — we moved in August 1, 2019. My kids are now enrolled in a school not even ten minutes away from our house, and I graduated from my culinary program in September. My dad, a chef in the Army, is so proud of me, so excited. For the first time, I think he really sees me.

If I were talking to someone coming to Lydia’s House today, someone like me, who was feeling lost and afraid, I would tell her: It’s OK to feel those things. You have to accept the fact that your world is breaking down, but know that coming to Lydia’s House is a way to build it back up. Use your resources. They will help you. Think about what you need. Don’t think about now. Think about the future, because Lydia’s House will get you to that future.

WHAT WE’RE READING: **WAKING UP WHITE, AND FINDING MYSELF IN THE STORY OF RACE**

BY DEBBY IRVING

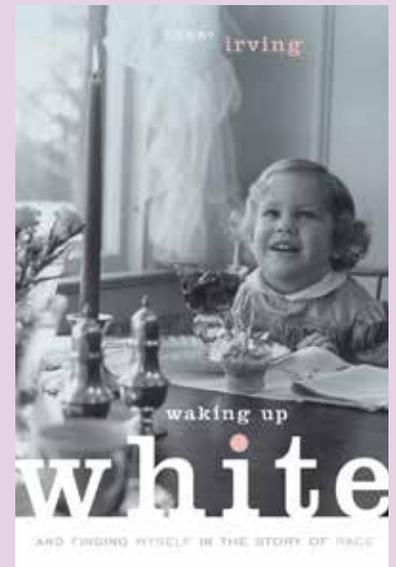
At Lydia’s House, we strive to be a conscious, inclusive community. We are a home where people from all walks of life and racial backgrounds can help one another grow towards wholeness. In our continual effort to acknowledge and stop the perpetuation of racism in our lives and culture, the staff at Lydia’s House has been reading Waking Up White, Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving.

The book is a re-telling of the author’s life, her various racial experiences, and a reflection on how she was either blind to or waking up to her white privilege. Her thorough examination of these experiences lead her to ask herself some big questions. She poses these questions to her readers at the end of each chapter, such as “Have you tried to form relationships across racial lines? If they didn’t get very far, how did you explain that to yourself?” These questions are prompts that have the ability to shine a light in places within ourselves we’ve never looked. In this way, Waking Up White is a great resource for anyone willing to delve within themselves and examine their subconscious, and maybe conscious, belief systems around race.

To belong and find comfort are among the greatest desires for all who enter the doors of Lydia’s House. Irving discusses this in the book when she reflects on a time when she intentionally invited people of color to a community event in an effort to bridge the racial gap her community was experiencing. When the event began she could immediately sense how uneasy the guests of color felt, how they felt like the “other” in a space not of his or her own creation. Only through examining her own racial story, unpacking both her privilege and the systematic structural racism experienced by others was she able to form real friendships, work relationships, and have authentic conversations with people of color.

If that is something you’re looking for, reading this book and actively participating in the the author’s prompts can help begin the process of understanding the realities of racism and the impact of white privilege in your life. It is introspective work that can bring up many emotions, but it also initiates growth in a very critical way. The author quotes American historian Daniel J. Boorstin, “Education is learning what you didn’t even know you didn’t even know.”

(Review by Lydia’s House maternal care advocate Helen Zoller)



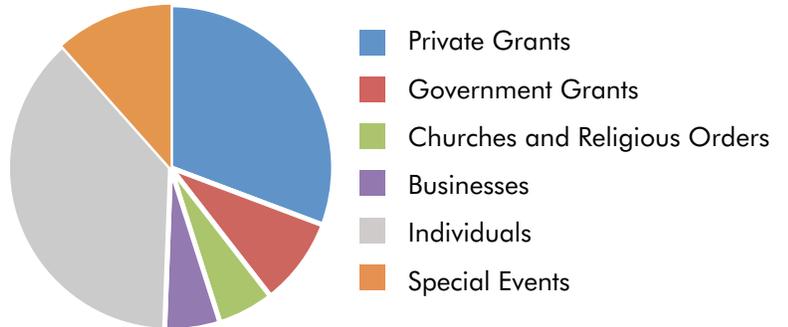


2018 ANNUAL REPORT FINANCES

INCOME 2018

Private Grants	199,512
Government Grants	56,857
Churches and Religious Orders	36,297
Businesses	35,706
Individuals	245,775
Special Events	75,000
TOTAL	649,147

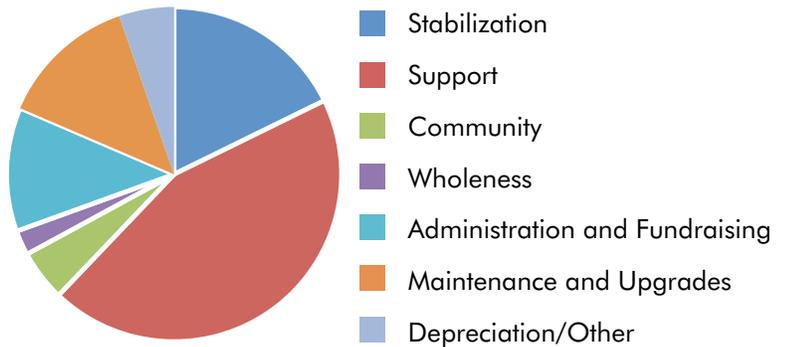
INCOME 2018



EXPENSE 2018

Stabilization <i>(includes maintenance, utilities, food, bus passes, insurance)</i>	37,844
Support <i>(includes expenses related to guest support personnel)</i>	94,708
Community <i>(includes worship, outings, support for other ministries, newsletter, community outings, aftercare)</i>	10,559
Wholeness <i>(includes YMCA, counseling, garden, medication support)</i>	5,128
Administration and Fundraising <i>(includes office expenses and supplies, software and hardware, accounting professional expenses, admin. professional expenses)</i>	25,567
Maintenance and Upgrades <i>(on existing properties) (includes yards, furniture, building maintenance and maintenance staffing)</i>	28,244
Depreciation/ other	11,311
TOTAL	213,361

EXPENSE 2018



**Total income includes capital campaign fundraising for 4502 Carter. The expenses for this project are not listed in expense but rather are booked as an asset in our accounting.*

SUPPORT OUR WORK:

In the enclosed envelope you'll find an opportunity to support us financially. Our year end goal is to raise \$20,000: vital funds that contribute to our basic operating expenses. We need your support to keep doing the work we've long been doing even as we expand into new horizons. If you would like to donate stock we are able to accept it. Please email maryellen@stlydiashouse.org.



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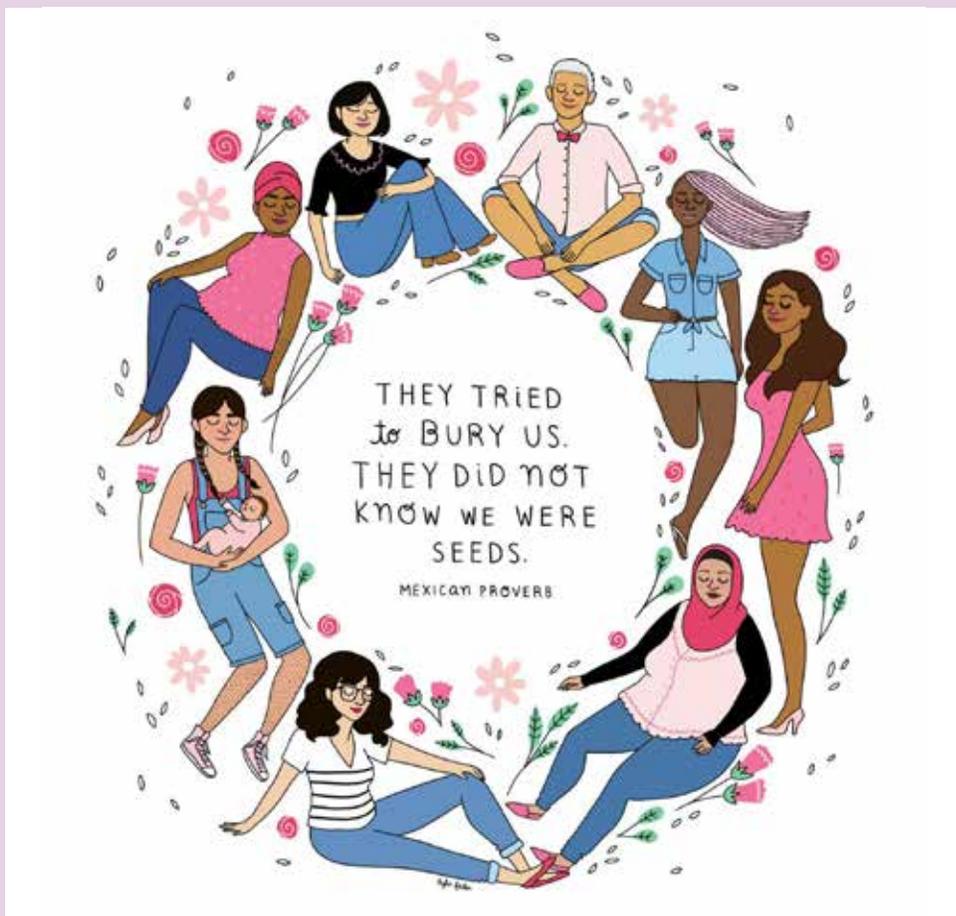


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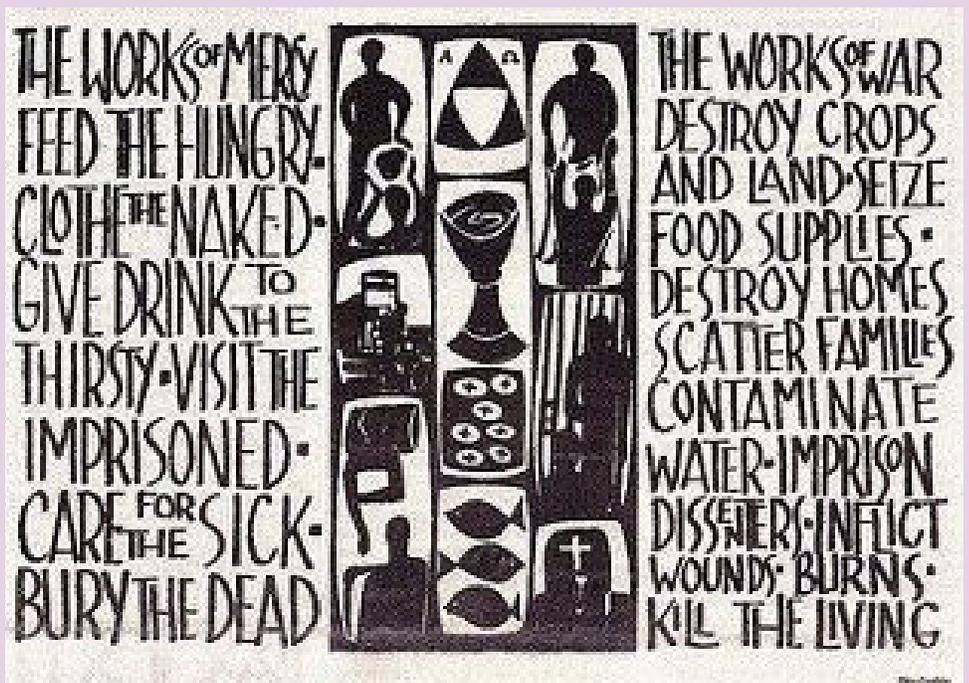
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LYDIA'S HOUSE

ON THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

BY DENISE LEVERTOV

It's when we face for a moment
the worst our kind can do, and shudder to know
the taint in our own selves, that awe
cracks the mind's shell and enters the heart:
not to a flower, not to a dolphin,
to no innocent form
but to this creature vainly sure
it and no other is god-like, God
(out of compassion for our ugly
failure to evolve) entrusts,
as guest, as brother,
the Word.

