

Please return to
Majorie Armstrong
April 24, 1957

Easter Sunday afternoon was a beautiful day for driving in the country. Many people, their curiosity aroused, drove slowly by our farm. From one car a piece of paper fluttered. One of our children picked it up. It seemed to be a piece torn from the bottom of an Easter church bulletin. Mimeographed on one side, but scratched through with a pencil, were the words: "...Blessed is the man whose words and deeds are day by day and every day a witness to the living and loving Lord." On the other side, pencilled in large letters, was written: "GET OUT YOU MONGRELS." Could this little scrap of paper, with its writing on both sides, be a symbol of the soul of the South during these critical days? While that which is ugly and mean is at times altogether too evident, there is present also that which is lovely and beautiful and good. Though pencilled over for the moment by fear and terrorism, God's eternal truths are bound to emerge and find noble expression in this part of the nation.

Since our last newsletter a few weeks ago we have had experiences which have filled us with both despair and hope. The violence has continued unabated. Last night Chris Drescher was on watch - unarmed, of course - when a car drew opposite him and opened fire with a pistol or rifle. One bullet put a large hole in the right front fender. A heavy cake of red Georgia clay on the under side of the fender kept the bullet from entering the front seat where Chris was sitting.

On another occasion, John Gabor had the late watch and went to investigate a suspicious car which had stopped near our hog lot and where the fences had been repeatedly cut. As he approached, the car drove rapidly away. John turned around and headed back, and noticed that the other car had also turned around and was approaching him from the rear. Soon shots rang out, and he heard bullets whizzing past him and plowing into the shoulder of the road. Again, no hits.

While Eleanor Jordan, a junior at the U. of Ga., was home for spring holidays, she went to her bedroom about 10:30 one night, pulled down the shade and then turned on the light. Immediately four or five shots rang out, and one of them plowed through the outer wall, went across the room within inches of her, smashed the mirror over her dresser, went on through the wall and into the living room. Still traveling fast, it crossed at head height the chair where Clarence had been reading moments earlier, passed through the living room door and finally came to rest in the closet of the children's room, after having gone through a box of tinker toys and jig-saw puzzles. We are sure it wasn't a BB gun. The sheriff thinks it was a 32-20 deer rifle.

Only three days earlier a load of buck-shot was fired into the house where the Top Wilsons, an elderly Negro couple, lived. Previously, a cross had been burned in front of the house. The Wilsons were not members of Koinonia, but we had provided employment and a rent-free house for them. After the cross-burning and shooting, they felt they could no longer stay.

April 24: At 1:45 this morning--the exact time as the night before when Chris Drescher was fired upon--six slow, deliberate shots rang out. A few moments later, as the car passed the house vacated by Top Wilson, there were two more shots. The blasts, apparently from an exceedingly high-powered rifle, were the loudest yet and awakened the whole community. One bullet went all the way through the Wilson house and out the back. Sheriff Chappell responded to our call with great speed in an effort to catch the car before it got away, but he was unsuccessful.

All of this violence, as well as the previous shootings, bombings, burnings, etc., has been perpetrated by Koinonia itself, according to recent presentments by a Sumter County Grand Jury, to create sympathy. The jury came to this conclusion after weeks of "exhaustive investigation." Their 20-page presentments also charged

that Koinonia may be a front for the Communist party. They failed to mention who they thought was responsible for the strangling economic boycott and the legal harassments. The Jury also publicly accused us of lying, perjury, circulating false propaganda (our newsletters) and keeping Negroes in a state of "brain-washed peonage." Yet it brought no indictment against us. Their sole motive, so far as we could ascertain, was to discredit us in the eyes of the public.

Because these fantastic charges might be taken seriously by some people simply because they were made by an official body, we have prepared a detailed reply to the Grand Jury's presentments. We submit it for your consideration. You no doubt have already received a copy of the Americus TIMES-RECORDER carrying the full text of the Jury's charges. Since this was sent out by some unknown Americus person to people on our mailing list, we cannot be sure that all of you got a copy. We hope you did. Incidentally, during the "investigation", our mailing list was taken away from Clarence Jordan, over his protest, and photostated on the Citizens Bank check machine. The financial records were likewise seized. Georgia's Attorney General Eugene Cook now says that he is making an investigation of all those persons making gifts to Koinonia.

Immediately after the 23-man Grand Jury made its report, 23 prominent Georgia ministers, representing a number of denominations, issued an open letter to other "Christian Ministers in Georgia." This is its text: "In regard to recent publicity concerning Koinonia Farm, Inc. near Americus, Ga., we, the undersigned, in light of our present understanding express our belief that: (1) Koinonia Farm is a Christian community. (2) Acts of violence have come from persons outside the Koinonia group. (3) No connection exists between Koinonia Farm and the Communist Party. We pray God's truth and Christ's redeeming love may be revealed in this present crisis in Sumter County." Those signing, from all parts of the state, were: Ray Brewster, Colin Campbell, Glenn Dorris, Peter Flemming, Truett Cannon, Earl Gilbreath, Paul Hanna, W. J. Hinson, Richard Hollinger, J. W. Howard, Charles Jackson, Emmett S. Johnson, Edwin D. Johnston, T. DeWitt Matthews, Harold McManus, Robert B. McNeill, B. G. Munro, D. B. Nicholson, F. R. Otto, Nathaniel Parker, W. W. Rogers, Francis Stewart and M. L. Waters.

Earlier this month, the Executive Committee of United Church Women of Georgia printed and circulated throughout the state a very attractive brochure entitled "DARE THEY WITNESS? The Story of Koinonia Farms". It very effectively answers four questions: 1. What is Koinonia? 2. What is involved? 3. What has been done? 4. What can you do? It concludes with these words: "We, as Georgians, already are bearing blame because this situation is allowed to continue. Will death to a fellow citizen be necessary to stir the forces of law and order, the forces of thoughtful and decent citizens, to see that Koinonia is protected from further unlawful acts? We share in the responsibility to create a public opinion that will make it possible for citizens and law enforcement officers to act to end the violence against Koinonia." Because the brochure clearly and courageously draws the lines on some basic American and Christian principles, we are trying to secure enough copies to send to all on our mailing list.

In a previous newsletter we reported that the intensity of the violence here had made it necessary to evacuate two families. Harry and Allene Atkinson and their 4 children, and Rufus and Sue Angry and their 7 children have been in New Jersey for a number of weeks. It has now been decided to begin another Koinonia there at the site of a previous community, Hidden Springs, near Flemington. It is a 120-acre farm with living units for three or four families. Others from here will probably be sent to join the Atkinsons and Angrys, but there is no intention of closing down here. In our next letter, we shall give you a full report on the New Jersey situation.

When it became clear a few weeks ago that we would be unable to get insurance anywhere in the world, we turned to our friends with the suggestion that they share with us the risk of witnessing to the Gospel by pledging to be responsible up to \$50, or portion thereof, in the event of loss here. Those willing to do so were asked to sign a pledge card. Already over 700 cards have come in and the number is rapidly increasing. Our goal is 2000. Please send signed cards, or address all communications relative to this plan, to: "Committee for Koinonia, c/o Mrs. H. D. Atkinson, Route 1, Ringoes, New Jersey."

An informal group called "Friends of Koinonia" has sprung up in Cincinnati and they have collected an assortment of informative material about Koinonia. For \$3 they'll send you a 48-minute disc recording, "The Koinonia Story as Told by Clarence Jordan", a leaflet outlining recent events, ten reprints each of Harold Fey's CHRISTIAN CENTURY article, "Creative Church in Georgia", and the New York Herald Tribune's news and picture story. Order from: Friends of Koinonia, 901 Findlay St., Cincinnati 14, Ohio. Clarence's talk is also available on tape.

It has become necessary to discontinue altogether our mail order business. With the destruction of our market, we lost all of our cold storage and meat curing equipment, and now the peanuts and pecans are all gone until the new crop this fall. We are deeply grateful for the wonderful response of so many of you who have ordered our products. We hope to rebuild and be ready to start filling orders again by fall.

It is an indescribable feeling when our little group gathers for the common meal at noon and listens to letters from all over the world being read. Laughter and tears mingle to produce a profound sense of fellowship with that great cloud of witnesses whom, though many we have never seen, we know to be true pilgrims of the Way. Your letters are to us God's pillar of cloud by day and God's pillar of fire by night, assuring us of the presence of the Eternal who dwells in your hearts.

We have been immeasurably helped by friends who have laid aside their own duties to come and stand by our side during this crisis. Elizabeth Morgan has efficiently organized our office and rendered invaluable secretarial help. Wally and Juanita Nelson have pulled a heavy load of field and office work. Eddie Johnson, a graduate student at Atlanta University, dropped out of school to be with us. Dorothy Day, whose spiritual glow brightens everyone who touches her, spent two memorable weeks with us. Five Goshen College students pitched in for a week of intensive labor. These and others too numerous to name, are a part of Koinonia's struggle for God's truth, justice and love.