

Preface

In writing this book I have not worked alone. Along the way I have received invaluable editorial advice from a number of persons from a wide variety of backgrounds: African and Euro-Americans, middle class and homeless, PhD's and GED's. As I finished each chapter it was sent around to these readers who made suggestions and corrections as needed. It was a long and sometimes frustrating process, but I found it opened new perspectives on the Open Door, its place in the church and in American society.

Some of these readers I know quite well, since they are partners in the Open Door Community: C.M. Sherman, Elizabeth Dede, Ed Loring, and Murphy Davis. They provided needed encouragement to keep going and helped keep facts about the community in order. Others I have only met briefly or know only through their editorial comments. From Ed Loring I have learned that their knowledge of the life and work of the Open Door comes from quite different, though long-term relationships, with the community. Ron Spahn is the pastor of the Church of the Messiah in Detroit, Michigan and is a long-time friend of the Open Door. Sandra Barnhill is the Director of Aid to Imprisoned Mothers. She also works for an end to the death penalty. For several years she was also one of the early-rising Butler Street Breakfast cooks. Jack Alderman has been a friend of the community for more than a decade. He lives on death row in Georgia. He is also a poet whose work frequently appears in the community's newspaper, *Hospitality*. Don Beisswenger is a theology professor at Vanderbilt University. During a sabbatical year he lived and worked at the Open Door for several months. He continues to work with the homeless in Nashville, Tennessee. Erskine Clark is a professor of American Christianity at Columbia Presbyterian Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Eunice Wagner, of Warren Wilson College, added her editorial expertise to greatly improve the final text. I thank these readers for their time, their comments, and their editorial recommendations. I have incorporated their work as best I could. The shortcomings remain my own.

Along the way I also relied upon some "unofficial" readers. My youngest brother, Mike Gathje, arrived to live in Decatur with my wife and I just in time to be cajoled into reading finished chapters. Scott Thumma, a fellow graduate student at Emory University, has read selected chapters and tried to keep some sociology in the text. Finally, without the energy and inspiration of the entire Open Door Community renewing me each week I would never have finished. My thanks for welcoming me into your life. I hope that what I have written captures some of that life so others may also share in its humor and hope.