

Memorial Service for Gordon Cosby  
April 6, 2013



N. GORDON COSBY

JULY 3, 1917 - MARCH 20, 2013

CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF N. GORDON COSBY

JULY 3, 1917 - MARCH 20, 2013

FOUNDRY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WASHINGTON, D.C.

APRIL 6, 2013

PRELUDE

WELCOME

Larry Watson

OPENING PRAYER

Ann Dean

*Leader:* When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.

*Community:* For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

*Leader:* Let us pray . . .

HYMN

*Christ, the Lord, Is Risen Today*

THE WORD

*Psalm 46*

*Matthew 5*

*Romans 8*

Cami Campbell Seward

Carolyn Parr

Wes Granburg-Michaelson

MUSIC

*O God, Our Help in Ages Past*

Rhonda Buckley

SHARING FROM THE COMMUNITY

Terry Flood

C.W. Harris

Jim Wallis

Jim Knight

Jim Dickerson

Michael Murphy

Killian Noe

MUSIC	Kairos Choir, directed by Bill Hepler
MEDITATION	Rebecca Stelle
COMMENDATION	Kayla McClurg
HYMN	<i>The Bread of Life</i>
BENEDICTION	Sydney Johnson
<i>Leader:</i>	I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband.
<i>Community:</i>	I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with humankind! God will live with them and they shall be God's people. God will be with them, and will be their God, wiping away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."
<i>Leader:</i>	Then the one who sits on the throne said:
<i>Community:</i>	"And now I make all things new."
<i>Leader:</i>	Receive this blessing . . .

POSTLUDE

Please join us at a reception on the second floor following the service. For further sharing and reminiscing, The Potter's House, at 1658 Columbia Road, is open until 4:00 this afternoon and extends a welcome to all.

# Christ, the Lord, is Risen Today

CHARLES WESLEY

FROM "LYRA DAVIDICA"



1. Christ, the Lord, is risen to - day,  
2. Lives a - gain our glo - rious King: Al - le - lu - ia!  
3. Love's re - deem - ing work is done,  
4. Soar we now, where Christ has led,



Sons of men and an - gels say:  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Al - le - lu - ia!  
Fought the fight, the bat - tle won;  
Fol - lowing our ex - alt - ed Head;



Raise your joys and tri - umphs high,  
Dy - ing once, He all doth save: Al - le - lu - ia!  
Death in vain for - bids Him rise;  
Made like Him, like Him we rise;



Sing, ye heavens, and earth, re - ply,  
Where thy vic - to - ry, O grave?  
Christ has o - pened Par - a - dise. Al - le - lu - ia!  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies;

## **The Bread of Life**

I am the bread of life,  
He who comes to Me shall not hunger,  
He who believes in Me shall not thirst,  
No one can come to Me unless the Father draw him.

And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up on the last day.

The bread that I will give  
Is My flesh for the life of the world.  
And he who eats of this bread  
He shall live forever, he shall live forever.

And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up on the last day.

I am the resurrection  
I am the life  
He who believes in me,  
Even if he die, he shall live forever.

And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up on the last day.

*Sister M. Suzanne Toolan*



**Larry Watson** is a co-founder and co-pastor of the Church of Christ, Right Now, where Gordon was a member since 2009. Larry worked at Samaritan Inns and is currently an addictions counselor at Christ House.

**Ann Dean** is a member of the Dayspring Retreat Mission Group, was co-founder and pastor of Church of the Servant Jesus. She taught and worked with Gordon on many initiatives at the Servant Leadership School.

**Margaret (Cami) Campbell Seward** is the daughter of Mary Cosby's brother, Charles and his wife, Ellen. Cami currently lives in Delaware and has been a supportive spirit to Mary and Gordon for many years.

**Carolyn Parr** was ordained by Gordon in 1989 and has been active in many capacities. She helped found and was co-pastor of the Festival Church. She serves faithfully on the Festival Center Board.

**Rhonda Buckley**, founder of the Sitar Arts Center is a gifted saxophonist and friend of Gordon. She currently lives in East Lansing, Michigan where she directs two thriving music centers under the auspices of Michigan State University.

**Wes Granburg-Michaelson** was part of the Church of the Saviour from 1969 to 1975, and helped with the transition to the New Land. Wes is General Secretary Emeritus and Ecumenical Officer of the Reformed Church in America.

**Terry Flood** has been part of the Church of the Saviour community since 1960. She is the founder and director of Jubilee Jobs and partnered with Gordon on many initiatives over the years.

**Clyde W. Harris** is the founding pastor of Newborn Community of Faith in the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore. He has given leadership to the formation of several ministries as a result of a deep friendship with Gordon.

**Jim Wallis**, CEO of Sojourners, is an author, public theologian and commentator on ethics and public life. He is a friend and admirer of Gordon's call to essential church.

**Jim Knight** is a member of Bread of Life Church and director of Jubilee Housing. He has served on the staff of Samaritan Inns and together with Gordon, was a member of Friends of Jesus Church.

**Jim Dickerson** is the pastor of New Community Church in the Shaw neighborhood of D.C. and directs Manna, Inc. He has been a prophetic voice to our city officials on behalf of the poor for many years.

**Michael Murphy** is the foster son of Gordon and Mary Cosby, and lived with them from the ages of 9 to 15. There were deep bonds. Michael currently resides in Largo, Maryland with his wife, Phyllis, and their two sons.

**Killian Noe** was part of the Church of the Saviour for many years until moving to Seattle in 1999. She is co-founder of Samaritan Inns and Lazarus Church. Killian is now pastor of New Creation Community and the director of Recovery Café.

**The Kairos Choir** has been singing God's praises for nearly a dozen years. Currently directed and accompanied by Bill Hepler, the choir sings at the weekly Christ House service that Gordon and Mary have attended regularly.

**Rebecca Stelle** is co-founder and co-pastor of the Church of Christ, Right Now. She directs Becoming Church, Inc. and, along with others, had been a comfort to Gordon in his last days.

**Kayla McClurg** is the staff person for the Church of the Saviour and served as Gordon's associate and co-conspirer. She gives direction to Tell the Word and Inward/Outward. She has been a member of the Potter's House Church for many years.

**Sydney Johnson** served in several capacities for 45 years, managing the Potter's House book service. She is the former pastor of Friends of Jesus Church, where Gordon was a member. She served as chair of the Festival Center Board.

We are enormously grateful to **Rev. Dean Snyder** and the clergy and staff of Foundry United Methodist Church who have gone to every length for the sake of our worship today. We especially acknowledge Foundry's musician, **Stanley Thurston**, today's organist and pianist. In the same spirit of generosity and grace, **Diana Chambers** provided and arranged the altar flowers, **Martin Holdrich** prepared and provided the bulletins, and **Barbara Campbell** and the Campbell family have coordinated the reception. Our thanks to them and to ushers and reception helpers and so many others, named and unnamed, who have contributed to the rightness of the occasion today.



## **Gordon Cosby**

Rev. N. Gordon Cosby, beloved founder and minister of The Church of the Saviour, and bold catalyst for many non-profit ministry organizations in the District of Columbia, died on March 20, 2013, at the age of 95. Particularly noted for 65 years of prophetic preaching and teaching, calling people of faith to greater dedication and fuller embodiment of God's vision for the world, Gordon was a man of courage, humility and wisdom, who lived a simple yet profound life dedicated to the active pursuit of God's realm "on earth as it is in heaven."

As a chaplain in the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division in World War II, Gordon participated in the D-Day invasion at Utah Beach in 1944. He earned a Silver Star for bravery in assisting wounded men in the face of heavy fire. Serving alongside soldiers whom he found to be poorly equipped spiritually to face imminent death, he became convinced of the futility of war and the need for the church to better prepare people for life's greatest challenges. During the war he sensed that he was being called as a minister to interpret and practice a more radical expression of the gospel, and to help create structures for people to be on both a journey inward with God and others and a journey outward into the life of the world.

Together he and his wife, Mary Campbell Cosby, dreamed of forming an ecumenical church of highly committed people who would be empowered to become reconciling agents in the world. Beginning informally in 1946, nine people made a first statement of formal commitment in 1947, and the church was legally incorporated in 1953.

The Church of the Saviour became one of the first churches in the District of Columbia to welcome an interracial membership. In 1953, Catherine Marshall, author and spouse of Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall, wrote about the church in the Reader's Digest. This article, along with books authored by church member Elizabeth O'Connor, thrust Gordon and his small congregation into the spotlight. The church soon became a pilgrimage site for people of faith who were seeking to be more authentically engaged in society and who longed for the renewal of church life.

In 1953, the church purchased a farm in Germantown, Maryland, and in 1956 built a retreat lodge there, inviting people into periods of silence on the land. "The one journey that ultimately matters," Gordon wrote, "is the journey into the place of stillness deep within one's self. To reach that place is to be at home; to fail to reach it is to be forever restless. In contemplation we catch a vision of not only what is, but what can be. Contrary to what we have thought, contemplatives are the great doers."



In 1960, following Gordon's insight and guidance, the church founded the Potter's House, believed to be the country's first Christian coffeehouse, as a place of meeting between sacred and secular, rich and poor. When the church was being the church, Gordon believed, it would not remain in a cocoon of safety but would place itself on the front lines of society's battles, offering itself as a sacrificial gift to the world. In 1965, after answering the call to join the landmark Civil Rights March on Selma, Alabama, led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Gordon inspired church members toward increased solidarity with Dr. King by seeking justice for the disenfranchised of Washington, focusing on children, housing, health care and jobs.

Gordon's preaching and organizing, including acts of civil disobedience, inspired the church's 100 members to form small mission groups to tackle areas of need in the city. One of the first mission groups was integral to the struggle to close the degrading children's institution called Junior Village and find foster homes for the 900 children housed there. Out of this effort The Church of the Saviour started its first non-profit ministry in 1965—For Love of Children—dedicated to foster care and education, which eventually secured the closing of Junior Village in 1973.

In 1968, when Dr. King was assassinated and riots broke out along the 14th Street corridor, the Potter's House remained open and became a place to listen and strategize for the development of other non-profit ministries that would respond to the needs of a hurting city. Some of the ministry organizations that emerged from the inspiration of Gordon's preaching and action include: Jubilee Housing (1973), providing quality housing for more than 700 low-income persons, as well as youth and family services; Ministry of Money/now Faith and Money Network (1976), helping to transform people's relationship with money; the Family Place (1979)—and more recently, Jubilee JumpStart (2009)—both serving young children; Jubilee Jobs (1981), now having helped more than 22,000 people find entry-level work; Sarah's Circle (1983), offering comprehensive services for low-income seniors; Christ House (1985), a residential medical respite and community for homeless men and women; Samaritan Inns (1985), a housing and recovery community in eight residences; Academy of Hope (1985), educating adults for literacy and GED preparation; the Festival Center (1989), home to the Servant Leadership School; Sitar Arts Center (2000), arts immersion for under-served youth; and many others.

Gordon continued to work and strategize until his final days, primarily with Jubilee Jobs; Becoming Church, whose focus is on starting new churches; and Life Asset Financial Center, a financial learning center and credit union now in formation. He was an active founding member of the Church of Christ, Right Now, and its mission group called Strength to Love (after a well-known phrase of Dr. King's) which companions persons returning from incarceration.

While the church he built became well known to many in the country, it has remained a relatively small group of extraordinarily committed people. In 1995 the church scattered into small independent faith communities, nine of which today carry the moniker of The Church of the Saviour: Bread of Life, Dayspring, Eighth Day, Festival, Friends of Jesus, Jubilee, New Community, Potter's House and Seekers.

In 1983, Gordon was named Washingtonian of the Year by Washingtonian Magazine, but generally he declined invitations to receive honors, seeing himself simply as a servant of the gospel as he understood it. In a 2006 sermon, Gordon said, "The central question of my life is this: What did Jesus intend for his followers to be in the centuries following his earthly life? It is not ridiculous to expect God to use us now, in the 21st century, to eliminate global poverty, to cast out the demons of greed and fear, racism and militarism, to help us get on with the task of becoming human. When we are ready, God is more than ready."

Gordon believed, and modeled in his own life, that there is no "retirement" for workers in the kingdom of God, at least not until the vision of a world that works for everyone has been realized. Even with increasing physical diminishment, Gordon continued to serve the community—counseling and encouraging, bearing one another's pain, praying, learning to give and receive love.

Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, on July 3, 1917, to Peter Guerrant Cosby, Jr. and Kathleen Gordon Cosby, Gordon was the brother of P.G., Jack, Ida Gordon and Beverly. He is survived by his wife of more than 70 years, the community's dearly loved Mary Campbell Cosby, as well as his soon-to-be 100-year-old brother P.G., of Lynchburg, Virginia, his sister Ida Gordon Poole, of Sarasota, Florida, a foster son, Michael Murphy, a number of nieces and nephews and countless friends and spiritual offspring.

On March 20, 2013, Gordon Cosby died peacefully at home in the community of Christ House, where he and Mary were lovingly welcomed three years ago and where Mary continues to reside.

In a 1989 sermon Gordon said, "Faith is trusting the flow and reveling in the view and being carried beyond all existing boundaries. Faith is being excited about the final destination, even when the destination is mystery. When Jesus says, 'Believe in God, believe also in me,' he is saying, Get into the stream with us. It is a stream of pure grace and mercy. Go into its depths and find us there."

Memorial gifts may be designated for any Church of the Saviour affiliated church or ministry and sent in care of The Church of the Saviour at 1640 Columbia Road NW, Washington, DC 20009. Written reflections about the impact of Gordon Cosby's life are welcomed and may be sent to the same address or to [churchofthesaviour.office@gmail.com](mailto:churchofthesaviour.office@gmail.com).



### **Church of Christ, Right Now**

Today we know what it means to be part of the Church universal. We whose lives have been touched by Gordon's are gathered from as far away as Florida and Seattle, Australia and Turkey. Rich and poor are here; many hues of skin color are here; many denominations and faith traditions are represented. Representatives of each of the nine Church of the Saviour faith communities have gathered, as well as those who have been inspired by the Church of the Saviour. We feel the presence today of saints who have gone before us and the presence of those who are with us in prayer. All of us worshiping in one Spirit, we are one expression today of the kind of gathering for which Gordon hungered.

While this whole gathering was and is true to Gordon's vision of Church, part of Gordon's genius was that he consistently and even stubbornly lived out his call to renew the Church in a very specific way—always through his own full participation in a small, unlikely group of highly committed faith-life companions. Even as his physical strength diminished, Gordon was true to this calling until the end of his life.

Of the many little faith communities Gordon helped to establish, the last one in which he held membership was the Church of Christ, Right Now (CCRN). CCRN is a socio-economically and racially diverse church of six members holding one another accountable to disciplines which shape the inward and outward journeys. Our outward mission, which we call Strength to Love, is to walk alongside those who have been incarcerated and to reform the nation's justice system. It was Gordon's idea that member/ministers of CCRN be known as Donkeys: beasts of burden, humble and hardworking, servants of the poor, bearing Jesus to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

About a year ago, Gordon asked Church of Christ, Right Now to give leadership to his memorial service when the time came. We were and are honored by his request. While we welcome today the many voices which represent a scope of life much broader than that of his final CCRN years, we are also led to identify ourselves to you in a particular way. When you see the six of us with our Donkey name tags, mingling among the hundreds, feel free to greet us with a hello or a "Hee Haw." Know how pleased we are that the whole of Gordon's church can be together in this way. And know that by identifying ourselves, we mean to give simple witness to Gordon's unwavering commitment to participate in an imperfect version of the kind of local church he longed for.

The Donkeys of Church of Christ, Right Now  
Kumi Alatishe, Ali Edston Kirnon, Barbara Moore, Rebecca Stelle,  
Hassan Turay and Larry Watson



When we hear the invitation to claim our membership in God's family, it's like we've stumbled onto a Grace Party. We can hardly believe our good fortune. The sights and sounds of it are pure delight. Abundance characterizes the whole shindig. The most delectable manna is falling everywhere, and wine flows as though from an Artesian well. Everyone is eating and drinking endlessly yet not being harmed because this food and wine are not of the world but New Life.

And get this: Everyone's invited! That's the really good news. No one has to crash this party, there's no limit to how many of my friends I can bring along with me. Or my enemies for that matter. It's such a blast that I want everyone to come—those with wealth or not a penny to their name, those who are down and out or who thought they had some power. I do notice, though, that the so-called nobodies seem to be having the most fun. It takes the others awhile to lay down everything they brought with them and start to play.

What are people doing at this party? That's the funny thing—We're not 'doing' much at all. We're just being. We're being our real selves, relaxed and eager to help out with whatever the host asks of us. Love is flowing all over the place. Whatever you need, we're ready.

Do you want someone to listen? We'll hear whatever you need to say.

Are you bleeding from the wounds of the past? We'll soothe and bandage your wounds.

Do you need to be held for awhile, just being quiet in a safe place? Not a problem. We have all the time in the world.

Looking for respect, even reverence? You'll get such a dose of it you'll wonder if you can take it all in.

In fact, there's so much peace and joy at this party that it can be hard to absorb. Some of us just aren't able to let in this much unimpeded Love and goodness. That's all right. The host isn't pushy. We can come and go as many times as we need to until we can handle this much joy.

This is simply the nature of a Grace Party. None of us is here because we deserve to be. We haven't earned any of it. And although some of us might keep turning down the invitation, the host will never stop inviting. And neither will we who have decided to stay. We'll be spreading the news of this unbelievable feast everywhere we go. Come to the party! It won't be the same if you're not there.

-Gordon Cosby