Door: Essays by readers

We gave our readers a one-word writing prompt: “door.”

Readers Write in the March 28, 2018 issue

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In response to our request for essays on doors, we received many compelling reflections. Below is a selection. The next topic for reader submissions is **bridge**—*read more*.

My mother didn’t allow closed doors. She needed light and air, and she expected tidiness in the rooms the doors opened into. I needed space of my own (and to make a bit of a mess). Naturally I went the opposite way with my own daughters: feel free to close your doors; I’d rather not see your mess. I love looking at the doors themselves anyway—old wood, wonderfully worn from much use.

When I travel, some portion of my photos will always be of the beautiful doors I find. Cathedral doors so big you can’t believe they were ever built, hovel doors with little paint left, island doors that are barely there at all. Most fun is a door cracked open to

offer a peek inside—a stolen look at the soul of the place, maybe even the thrill of a full view of an inner courtyard.

On occasion my girls' doors are cracked open and I get that same sort of soul peek. I am sometimes even invited in to view the full-on mess. I'm glad they don't clean it up for me. I'm so happy to know them as they are.

I try to leave my own life's door at least cracked for friends and family. It's not my natural inclination, but I rarely regret it. It's like throwing the party you don't want to bother with at first, always such fun when the guests arrive.

Is it the same for God? Is God tapping on my closed, cracked, or wide-open door, pleased to be let in and to listen, not minding my mess? I hope so. I hope as time goes on the door gains a patina from much use, with an inviting courtyard inside and a party underway for any who want to attend, come as you are.

Marianna Kilbride
New Canaan, Connecticut

I volunteer at a shelter in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. I make rounds with other health-care volunteers, charting symptoms and passing out over-the-counter pills.

I hand an elderly woman some multivitamin pills. One seat over, a slouching young man, hoodie shadowing most of his strong face, taps me on the shoulder and asks if he can have some vitamins, too. As I hand them to him he casually reveals that his father did terrible things to him when he was a boy. He is gay and in turmoil about it. His stories are heavy. So another volunteer, Sara, and I ask if he would like to talk in a private room.

We leave the door ajar. In the close confines of a 10 x 20 office, he talks about the unbearable and the unspeakable. His voice is solemn, and he is downcast.

He tells us he lives on the streets and showers at the gym. He wants to be normal, healthy, and happy. He wants the past to simply wash away, the way the soot is swept off the feet other volunteers are washing in the next room.

We talk with him for more than an hour. Sara talks about God a lot. Her words are fluid and beautiful, fostered by a lifetime of church. I'm a strong believer but hesitant to talk about God, especially with someone who has endured as much as this kid has. I don't know how to describe God's presence. My convoluted words are carried by my sideways adventures with Merton, my trucking around with Whitman, my digging around with the Qur'an and Upanishads and Tao.

The young man asks the big question: Do I believe in God? I say yes. I know many believers who were born and raised in the faith, who are practiced and relentless, well-spoken and shiny. I am none of these things. Yet he turns to me more often than I feel at ease with, asking what I think. Maybe because we are more akin than we know, both just 35 years old, both spiritually disheveled and canvassed with a lot of pain and a lot of truth.

He asks me how I could step into a church that condemns gays, and I explain that I don't: I go to a church that is willing to sacrifice attendance and funding for its pro-gay beliefs. I also tell him that the church may be imperfect, but God is not. God is bigger than our small theologies. And this wounded young man is much grander than his experiences with his awful father.

In that moment a shift seems to occur, though to what effect or what extent I'll never know. Sara asks if she can pray for him. Nine times out of ten, people say no—but he agrees. So she does, in her perfect God prayer. All I can offer is my honest messiness, and it seems to be enough for this child of God, and for me.

When he stands, he stands taller than before. He takes off his hoodie, and for the first time he makes eye contact with me. Walking away, he turns back and says gently, "Thank you for leaving that door open." I guess that is all we can do.

Cairn Grace Wu
San Francisco, California

There was a door on the back wall of our storage closet. We were not to play there or to tell any of our friends about it.

It was 1944 in a small village in the Netherlands. The German occupation required all young men to serve in Germany producing weapons. Those who refused were

called *onderduikers*: they went underground.

In our case a young man hid above ground. Our house and our neighbor's house formed a duplex, sharing a full-length wall. It happened that our closet lined up with a similar one on their side. A carpenter created a door to allow the onderduiker to pass from one closet to the other. This door was cleverly hidden, so that it seemed to be part of the wall. My mother then hung all kinds of stuff in front of the wall to hide any sign of the door, even from the family.

My older brother, however, overheard a quiet discussion between our parents and, in great secrecy, passed it on to me. He also knew we shared an *onderduiker* with the neighbors. We never wanted the German police to enter our home, of course. Yet a small voice in our imagination whispered, *Wouldn't it be great if those stupid Germans searched our house and never found the escape route?*

Our secret spread around the neighborhood. A friend of a neighbor liked to impress people with secrets, or perhaps he was a German sympathizer. Anyway, the word got out.

One day a loud knock on the outside door came at the same time that the door was forcefully opened. Three German soldiers burst in, accompanied by a neighbor for translation (or maybe he was a traitor). They yelled, "Show us where you're hiding that damned *onderduiker*!"

Mother pulled herself up to her full five feet and, quivering only slightly, protested: "Who do you think you are, barging in without permission?"

The intruders laughed and ignored her. They began opening and slamming doors, searching closets and rooms, cussing in two languages. Mother leaned unobtrusively over the sink and gave a gentle tug on the thin, strong cord that had been run to the closet as an alert system. Our guest was already ready to act, having heard the racket downstairs. He carefully did what he had practiced many times: he adjusted the wall, opened the door, went through, and closed it noiselessly. He was now in the neighbor's house, and they had rehearsed how to transfer him immediately to a temporary hideout.

Meanwhile, the soldiers were searching the house one more time. They came again to the closet, and this time they knocked on the walls and doors—and got suspicious of the things the *onderduiker*, in his haste, had left behind. They drilled my mother

for answers.

“Look at that closet,” she replied. “I had it all clean and neat a few weeks ago. Isn’t it terrible the way our children come up with these crazy ideas and contraptions without so much as mentioning it to their parents?” Turning to us, she yelled—something she rarely did—”And you boys just wait till your Dad comes home. And clean up that mess. That inside door also looks crooked. Straighten it up!”

Leading the unhappy soldiers out, she quietly shut the closet’s entrance door, so that it looked again like a typical closet in our neighborhood.

Harry Boonstra
Grand Rapids, Michigan

It was hot the day I visited the prison. A guard in a tower watched me like the sun. Arriving wasn’t easy. I passed through multiple doors, went through security, waited to be buzzed through multiple gates. Finally I got to the lobby, where I gathered with others. We were all from the outside, and we’d come to pray with those inside as part of a prison ministry weekend event. We chatted nervously until finally a guard came to escort us to the prison gym. We lined up and passed through another door, into a holding chamber.

It was crowded. Guards up above gazed down on us through two-way mirrors. We tried not to bump into each other too much.

“Ohhhh,” said a woman in front of me, “I don’t like that door closing.” It gave a careless bang as it shut. I studied this woman. She was blonde, tall, wearing a pink-and-green paisley dress and heels.

Her friend patted her shoulder. “It’ll open again.”

I almost laughed. This blonde girl was complaining during a one-hour visit to prison? In one swift moment, she came to represent all that I resent about my own people, hypocritical Christians. Rich, spoiled, white, American, privileged—I wanted to spit these words at her. We could see through glass windows to the visiting room, where inmates and their family members stared back at us, such a huge mass of visitors all at once. How could she complain while looking directly into the eyes of women for

whom that door would not open, not soon and maybe not ever? I swallowed and shook my head.

Eventually a guard led us through the next room, past the visitors at tables, down hallways with narrow windows too smudged and steamy to look through even if they had been wide enough. In the auditorium, we were told to sit on the outsiders' side and not to interact with the residents across the aisle. Most people ignored this warning. They held out hands and grinned and laughed, recognizing inmates they knew from previous visits. I stayed silent and took my seat.

After the songs, the testimonies, the applause for each and every graduate of the program, the leader announced that among us there was a woman from the outside who'd been through the program—when she herself was in prison. The blonde woman in the pink-and-green paisley skirt stood, and the roar of the crowd was deafening.

She turned slowly to take in the sight of all those inmates in uniforms, sitting on bleachers, surrounding us. She wept, her hand over her mouth, as she looked around at all the women she'd left behind. The applause kept going and going.

Later we were again packed into the holding chamber, where guards again looked down on us. We hung there, suspended. The door behind us had closed, while the one in front of us hadn't opened yet. Finally it did, and we went through the lobby, through the gates and through security, before finally being free. I watched that woman get in her car and drive into the hot sun.

Sarah L. Swandell
Pinehurst, North Carolina

"You know that line, 'I've fallen and I can't get up'?" my brother said. "It's not funny anymore." Diabetes had weakened Tim's legs so severely that falls were a constant danger. After ambulance crews broke his door open a few times to rescue him, he decided to leave it permanently unlocked. He told a few trusted friends about his new policy. One, a muscular neighbor named Deke, checked in on him daily.

Lots of people in Tim's apartment complex in Palm Springs looked out for one another. This was special housing for people living with HIV/AIDS. Deke and I

became long-distance caregiving partners. He would call me in New York to tell me Tim was unaccounted for. I'd call the local hospital—Tim was always there—and get the information only next of kin can get. Then I'd call Deke back, and we'd make a plan.

Tim broke his hip twice. After the second successful hip surgery, he seemed like that cat with nine lives. So I was caught up short when my other brother called to tell me Tim had had a heart attack in post-op rehab. He was in a coma, and his organs were shutting down. This was it. I dropped everything and flew across the country to hold Tim's hand while he died.

In the days between Tim's death and his memorial service, my brother and our parents and I emptied out his small apartment. Guys from a local AIDS charity thrift shop came and took the biggest items, but we didn't have time to pack everything else the way they needed. Mom suggested that we simply open the door, set stuff out on the porch, and see if neighbors would take it. This worked brilliantly. Bit by bit, Tim's worldly goods quietly made their way to new locations all over the complex. For two days, we kept the door open while we worked inside emptying cabinets, shelves, and closets. Through the opening, we could see Tim's neighbors as they respectfully contemplated and removed his things.

Occasionally someone would hesitantly stick their head through the doorway to introduce themselves and offer their condolences to us, grieving strangers. They shared stories about Tim that we never would have heard otherwise, and they thanked us for letting them take something to remember him by. As we remembered him together, it felt oddly sacramental. But there was an extra heaviness to their grief: death was how people left this little community, and Tim's brought them closer to their own.

One visitor handed me a piece of paper with a phone number and a name: David. "He has something important he wants to tell you," she said.

I called. David lived across town, a gay friend from an Episcopal church that Tim occasionally attended who was in the process of becoming a deacon. I told him I was also gay, also Episcopalian, and had once served on a deacon discernment committee. He told me that the night Tim fell for the last time, David was deep in prayer. Though he hadn't seen Tim in months, my brother popped into his mind—and the thought weighed on him so heavily that he felt compelled to go

directly to Tim's apartment. Tim didn't answer when David rang his bell, but David knew the door was unlocked.

He found Tim lying on the bathroom floor in excruciating pain. David called the ambulance. "It was a Holy Spirit thing," he said. "He'd have been on the floor all night if I hadn't listened and gone there and let myself in."

Thanks to this man, Tim didn't die alone. It was comforting to know that he had his angels and his unlocked door.

Deborah Jacoby-Twigg
Lexington, Massachusetts

Ten years ago, I stood in front of the door to a suburban house in Virginia Beach. Should I have brought food? Flowers? I didn't even have a prayer book.

I had been a priest for nine days, and it was my first day off. The rector had left the day before for a month in Scotland. The last time I saw him, on Sunday after coffee hour, I was coming out of the women's restroom with a plunger in my hand. He laughed and said, "You're ready! I won't have to worry about you."

The next day, as I stood at that front door, I was in charge of a parish of 700. The woman behind the door had just lost her husband of 59 years.

Before the phone call that led me to that door, I'd felt almost cocky. In a week as a priest I had experienced (with the rector) a wedding, a funeral, and four Sunday services. I had been the person to whom parishioners reported a clogged toilet. I thought I was ready for anything. I had not fully grasped that these 700 people were now stuck with me as their supposed spiritual leader. For a month.

When my phone rang I was on my way to change the address on my driver's license. I was wearing a pink shirt, capris, and sandals. "There's an ambulance taking his body away *right now*. It just happened! She won't want *you*," said the frantic woman who called. "She's a very private person." The caller wanted to contact an older male priest who didn't work at the church anymore.

"It's all right. I've got it," I told her, trying to turn the car around. I drove home to change into black pants and closed-toe shoes and a shirt with a clerical collar—day

ten of this new attire. I didn't try to call the rector in Scotland. I didn't know if his plane had even landed yet. I called a local mentor instead, who told me, *Go. Just go.*

I did go, but I called first. "I'm Elizabeth," I told her. "I'm the new—"

"Yes," she said. "Yes. Elizabeth. I am sorry that this happened while you are new." I winced at her apology. I asked if I could come see her. She said yes.

I prayed in front of the door before I rang the bell: *Please let me take care of her. Please don't make her take care of me.*

I rang the doorbell and tried to breathe. She opened the door and invited me inside.

Elizabeth Felicetti
Richmond, Virginia

> **From Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark*:**
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> **"Faith waits for the opening of a door, the sound of footsteps in the hall, that beloved voice delayed, delayed so long that there are times when you all but give up hope of ever hearing it. And when at moments you think you do hear it (if only faintly, from far away) the question is: Can it possibly be, impossibly be, that one voice of all voices?"**

By the time I ran out the front door, the bathroom door had long been fixed. Both events were connected to my father's anger.

When I was about 13, my dad got upset with me for some reason I no longer recall. I locked myself in the bathroom, and when I wouldn't unlock the door, he broke through it. I tried to shield myself by wedging my body between the toilet and the wall. I do not remember what happened after that, but I do remember my fear.

I opened the front door and ran through it when I was almost 19. I had dropped out of my first year of college and had plans to go to another school. In the meantime I had gone home, where my father was living alone, recently divorced. After two

weeks back, I challenged him, bluntly, about his alcoholism. He got up in a menacing way; I stood as well and kept talking. He went and got his hunting knife, and he chased me around the house. As I headed down the long hallway to the front door, he let the knife fly. It buried itself into the door jamb as I went out. I took shelter with a neighbor, who went back with me later to collect my things—including my shoes, as I had run out in my stocking feet.

That was the last time I lived with my father.

The door, though, was not locked between us. We wrote letters occasionally while I was in college, and I visited him a couple of times. The last time I visited, he wanted to “show me off” so he took me to the only person he had left: his bartender. The door to his local bar was the last door we walked through together before he died from alcoholism.

I still have not sealed the door between us. I remember him with a mix of sadness, love, and an awareness of the wounds which remain.

Thankfully, there have been other doors and other people in my life. After the blowup with my father, a family at church learned that I was couch surfing and invited me to live with them. I did, for three summers. Forty years after I passed through their doors, we are still like family.

Thomas Dodd
Eugene, Oregon

I pounded my fists on the door and yelled, “Let me out! Let me out!” Working at a maximum security psychiatric hospital, I was used to doors I couldn’t open. But this time I needed the door to open now, and I didn’t have a key.

I was in the intensive treatment unit and had just been assaulted by a patient. I was panicking and desperate, no longer in physical danger but still overwhelmed by adrenaline. I probably banged on the door for a minute or less before it opened, but it felt like an eternity. Later I learned how the officers were rushing to locate the key.

I never used to worry about the doors at the psychiatric ward, about the way they clang shut and lock behind you. Now, at my third psychiatric hospital, this one for people with criminal charges in addition to mental illness, I think more about the

doors—partly because there are more of them that I cannot control, and partly because of my experience being trapped behind one. I was alone and scared, with an urgent desire to escape.

But other patients had joined the officers in coming to my aid. One leaped from a wheelchair to help subdue my attacker. Another ran over while I stood there, pounding on the door. This patient, himself assaultive at times, ran to me, turned around to face the unit, and held his arms out to the sides, a human shield. I found out later he had been an emergency medical technician; staff members wondered if this was his EMT training surfacing. He saw me in distress, and he ran to help as I waited for the door to open.

Ali Van Kuiken
Trenton, New Jersey

Fifty years ago our small city was thriving and growing, and our church's front doors welcomed 500 people each Sunday. When I arrived 28 years ago, the city was in decline and people were leaving. The congregation had a solid, faithful core, but weekly attendance had diminished to about 70. Questions about the church's viability have persisted ever since.

At the same time something fascinating has been happening. It's now the rear door of the church that welcomes 500 people each week—to our large pantry. Adding to this total are dozens of volunteers from assorted walks of life, mixing in with our lay leaders.

Along with being the pastor of the church, I am now chaplain to this new, different kind of congregation. Communion is administered in a host of ways by those who sense they are doing something tender and deep. The word of faith is expressed in countless human connections—connections warm and kind, as well as complicated and confusing at times, as lines of difference are crossed again and again. To be in this space with the eyes of faith is to be in a kind of bright light that disorients and reorients, where the hum of many voices sounds like the constant murmur of prayer.

The door on the right side of the church, unused for many decades, has been upgraded and now receives 10,000 pounds of food each week. A hearty team of volunteers, some of whom have walked through the doors of prison and recovery

many times, roll heavily laden carts through this refurbished doorway.

The door on the left side, where many community groups enter the building, now also welcomes those trying to change the conditions that cause so much pain and struggle. Our countywide interfaith community organizing effort works together to find more resources for food, improve public transportation, deepen support for immigrants, and strengthen our faith communities.

Fifty years ago everybody seemed to understand what a church was, and most entered through the front doors. Today the risen Christ seems to be beckoning us to go outside, into the bright sunlight. Many of us stand in this new light trying to see more clearly what is in front of us, balancing a bit unsteadily between the old and new. The church I serve is leaning through a doorway, gradually dying to the past and, in hope, deepening its identity in Christ.

Joel F. Huntington
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

It all began with the green door. It was peeling and faded and needed paint, a simple job. And then the bickering started. Should we change the color? What about a red door? The Lutherans have a red door.

The first vestry meeting lasted three hours. That conversation was fairly civil. Civility broke down between meetings, when sides were drawn, positions staked out, allies adopted. By the second meeting there was a passionate confrontation between those who wanted change and those who were upholding the “tradition”—less than ten years old—of the green door. It was clear that there was a pretty equal division in the vestry and the congregation, so the door languished for another winter, as the leadership moved on to other issues.

Then, one Sunday in the spring, the congregation arrived for worship to find a freshly painted door wide open to welcome them to God’s house. A Wet Paint sign hung from a small tack. The door gleamed with a hard, high-gloss finish as scarlet as a ripe apple.

Indeed, the sneakiness of the act seemed a little like the serpent in the garden. It definitely produced a response. There was little attention that morning to God’s

word or to the bread and wine. Everyone was focused on the door that they had come through, and they could hardly wait for coffee hour to begin the critiques. (There were a few quick exchanges during the passing of the peace!)

When the coffee hour conversation finally began, a surprising thing happened. While some were outraged and sought a quick excommunication, many more thought the door looked quite good—much better than it had even when the green paint was new. The next week, everything returned to normal, the controversy ended. No one ever confessed to having done the work, although the skill and speed of the job left only a few suspects. The door has become a new tradition, now having lasted more than ten years.

Peter W. Wenner
Newton, Massachusetts

Normally the sound of the bodega's door slamming behind Lucia—its loud, decisive *Adios*!—would have made her jump like it did every other time she exited the shop. This time she was more startled by what she saw outside, on the stoop of the tenement next door: the foursome who weren't there when she came in.

I know because I would have seen them as well; I had slipped into Carmela's store right behind Lucia. The Young Bloods hadn't been around the block when we went in the door just a few minutes before, yet there they were: Carlos, Moncho, Toni, and Carenna, the core four of her gang in Spanish Harlem.

They had already set up shop in front of the glass door of the tenement. Moncho and the girls sat on the steps, intently rolling loose joints. Carlos, ever the boss, demander of loyalty and dispatcher of discipline, stood on the top step by the door, nodding in time to the music while keeping a lookout for cops and likely customers. (When I left the store right after Lucia, I was careful not to let the door make such a racket—so they were not aware of my ringside position near a parked car, an eight-year-old bystander taking it all in.)

Carlos spotted Lucia almost as quickly as she had seen them. Maybe he had heard the slamming door. "Hey, c'mon over here," he said. "Gonna ask you something."

Lucia slowly walked over to stand on the sidewalk in front of them. She stared up at Carlos. Moncho looked her up and down, smirked at her cheap sneakers. Toni and Carenna barely acknowledged her arrival, acting like licking rolling paper was the most important task ever. Carlos locked eyes with Lucia. “Where were you last night? We were supposed to hang out, get high and shit. None of us could find you. I sent Moncho up five flights. Your moms said you was out.”

The summer of 1968 was a hot one; Lucia shivered anyway. I watched as she casually swung her right hand behind her to pat the pocket of her jeans, probably feeling for her switchblade. The pocket was empty. But this showdown was going to have to happen, so it might as well be right now, here next to Big Carmela’s, in the daylight on her block, the only street where she felt safe, because she knew everyone and they knew her.

My heart was pounding. I knew exactly where she had been when Carlos ordered Moncho to fetch her: with her preacher, my dad. Here came the truth, slow at first, then all in a rush.

“I was at the church,” she said, “the one with Hope written all over the wall by the front door. The church had a community meeting, ’bout how we’re going to rehab a tenement. See, we’re going to renovate a building, move low-income families, like my mom, back in. Fix up the block, too, one tenement at a time. I feel like the church is offering us a threshold, to make a difference.”

She was getting to it, like she could hear herself speak, talking with a voice that sounded new.

“So I can’t be in the Young Bloods anymore, Carlos. Carlos, I’m outta here. *Adios*.”

James L. Brewer-Calvert
Atlanta, Georgia

People don’t linger long between the doors in a hospital foyer, on the way in or out. But one late night I did. I had forgotten to go out before dark and move my car closer to the door as I usually did, so I was waiting for a security guard to escort me. The way into the hospital glowed dimly with light from the lobby. The way out was dark. I’d walked through that space night after night but had never stopped to notice

the imposing presence that caught my eye that night.

It was Jesus, sculpted life-sized in cold alabaster but glowing warmly from the lobby lights. I noticed first the robes draped gracefully around his body, then the hair falling to his shoulders, then the slight smile. I shuffled a little closer to see the hands, open. The scars were there, on each palm and on the sandaled feet as well.

Those weeks were hard. In April my father was diagnosed with advanced multiple myeloma. Several rounds of chemotherapy followed: one week of continuous infusion in the hospital, then two weeks at home, then back again for more chemo. My mother and I split the hospital duty. She sat with him during the day, and I relieved her at suppertime, staying until he fell asleep or sometimes till the midnight shift change. It was a brutal cancer and a brutal treatment, and the hospital doors became my daily entry into and escape from my sadness and helpless anger.

In June my father died, by his own hand. That day my mother left an eerie message on my office phone: “Daddy has hurt himself. You need to come.” When I pulled into the hospital driveway, a police officer blocked my way to the door. As gently as he could, he said, “You can’t go in right now, ma’am. I’m sorry to tell you your father is deceased.” He put his arm out to steady me. Then he walked me across the street to a neighbor’s home, where my mother sat in stunned silence. We waited there for the police and paramedics to finish their work. And through that door we received my pastor, who fell on his knees before me and took my hand. In his hands I saw the hands of Jesus in that hospital foyer, open and reaching to me.

Jennifer Ginn
Matthews, North Carolina

When I turned around, two people were standing in my house, smiling at me. I had left the front door open to let in fresh air and light as I unpacked and got my bearings in this wooden hut, my home for the next two years of Peace Corps service. I soon learned that in this village, an open door is a way of declaring, “Come on in. What’s mine is yours.”

Most of the doors in my new neighborhood stood open from early morning until sunset. When, with my neighbors’ urging, I walked through their open doors, they always seemed glad to see me. Often I was offered food. Always there was

conversation. *This feels right,* I thought. *I can live like this.* Most of the time I found the practice gratifying and freeing.

Sometimes, however, it was annoying. I had been raised in a culture with a different notion of privacy, and I made a more definite distinction between what's mine and what's yours.

Thursday mornings I visited the village baker and brought home a loaf of fresh bread to have with my coffee. Before I could set the bread down and start the coffee, neighbors would arrive. I tried to be as hospitable as they had been to me. But I couldn't help but be disappointed when Thursday after Thursday, both coffee and bread were consumed before I even got a taste.

Enough of this! One Thursday I left my house by the back door, leaving the front door closed. When I returned with the bread, I entered through the back. The solitude was blissful. I took the time to eat a piece of the bread and pour myself a cup of coffee. No neighbors invaded my privacy. Behind my closed door, I reflected on my cleverness.

But my pleasure didn't last long. The bread was becoming tasteless. In closing my door to my neighbors, had I violated something deeper than just a cultural oddity? Does sharing all that one has please God? Could there be a scene in Dante's *Inferno* where someone holds all the bread and has to eat it alone?

I couldn't remember. But I knew it was time to open the door.

Bill Heck
Swannanoa, North Carolina