

THE Round Table

Fall
1994

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." -- Peter Maurin



WHY THIS ISSUE?

As I sat down at my desk to devise some introduction to this issue I happened to glance up at a photograph of the Karen House community of some six years ago. There are nine people in that photo, yet only two, Teka and myself, are still in the community today. This startled me. We have always been known as an intentional community, noted for its stability and the longevity of its members. And it would be unfair to characterize the last several years as a period of exceptional change or unsettledness. The reality is that old members are always in the process of moving on and new members always seem to appear, almost providentially, to replace them.

This is not a failing of community life in the Catholic Worker. For most people there comes a moment when there is a growing sense that it is time to move on. The callings that draw us elsewhere vary, from raising a family to pursuing a career, or perhaps simply the discernment that the next assignment that God has intended for us lies elsewhere. Yet I cannot conceive of how anyone whose sojourn has brought them to community life in the Catholic Worker could escape without being profoundly affected, if not transformed. I believe that one cannot help but incorporate in one's life to some degree the values that emanate from Dorothy Day's Gospel vision long after ceasing to be an active member of the community. In that sense, the Catholic Worker movement is planting seeds, leavening the bread of society around us, as disciples whose faith has been enlivened and transformed by their experience in a Catholic Worker community move on to play their humble role in evangelizing the world around them.

This issue gives testament to that truth. Mitch McGee, currently a mainstay at Karen House but formerly of Cass House, joins Annjie Schiefelbein of Karen House, in writing a preface to the series that follows by describing a "typical" day at the house. There follows a rich series of candid reflections from former members Sue Lauritsen, Ann Rick, Harriette Lane Baggett, Zack Davisson, Tom Hooymann, Pat Coy, Joe Angert, Mary Dutcher, Janet Gray McKennis, and Chris Butler. Each shares how the Catholic Worker movement is more than a powerful strand connecting their former lives to the present, but a catalyst which wrought changes in them for which each displays profound gratitude. Their collective testimony further persuades me that the Catholic Worker movement is a remarkable gift that God gave to this country through the lives of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

The issue continues with a powerful depiction of El Salvador through the experiences of Teresa Jorgen. The house articles then point to the conclusion of the issue with Teka Childress' essay in the Round Table Talk column. I thought it particularly fitting in an issue devoted to the impact of the Catholic Worker on its own members that Teka then draws it to a close by challenging herself and all Catholic Workers to be faithful to Dorothy Day's vision by seeking new ways to confront our society's ills through a radical pursuit of the Gospel.

May God continue to raise up prophets like Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin who will show us how to live out the Gospel in response to the troubled world in which we live.



- Mark Scheu

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by Jeff Finnegan

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ONE DAY AT THE WORKER

by Mitch McGee and Annjie Schiefelbein

Our task is to describe a "typical" day at the Worker. Typical--in a place where we say "there's never a dull moment because no two days are the same." How can you describe that?

As we debated just how to do that, we considered following a day in the life of a community member. But again, what would be typical? Each of us has a different perspective. Our outside jobs and commitments vary and our individual personalities color our experiences; nothing typical there.

So what is it we do have in common? Now there's an approach to find "typical" of some sort. No two days may be the same, but there is a pattern or rhythm to our days that pulses through our house and our lives, constantly changing and ever present.

Events like the doorbell ringing at 2:00 a.m. cause the rhythm of peaceful sleep to change to a hurried pace as we wake with a start. One of us gropes our way down to the door, not knowing what we'll encounter. It varies from someone desperate to get off the streets, to a guest

returning late, to a neighborhood alcoholic seeking a sandwich or some conversation. Late at night also seems

to be the usual time for the emergency run to the hospital. (Why is it that no baby runs a fever at 2:00 p.m. instead of 2:00 a.m.?)

The daily chores of the house have a familiar, regular rhythm to them. Our favorite joke of Tim's is his definition of a soupline: "the trail of goop that leaks out of a garbage bag enroute to the dumpster". Actually the "peak" experience is to have a bag burst with wondrous contents spilling everywhere. That's one of those instances where we understand what Dorothy Day meant when she spoke of "doing penance through the nose".

There are times when our various personalities and rhythms come together. Times common to community members include weekly meetings, ordinary time and liturgy--important beats in the life rhythm. Weekly meetings deal with the

more "business" aspects of the house and community. The process of consensus decision making is not always



Mitch McGee and Annjie Schiefelbein, are still speaking to each other after their first collaboration.

an easy feat, but one we find worth the effort. Ordinary time is when the rhythm slows a bit—taking time for the “ordinary” yet sacred time to be with one another and friends.

Liturgy is on Tuesdays—a chance to pray together and with friends. Without the daily pause to pray and reflect, the rest of the work loses its purpose and meaning. This is a difficult task at times, considering the hurried pace of our lives—but the “works of mercy” in our world lose their meaning unless we get to the Source of Mercy.

Time spent with the volunteers who pass through our doors energizes us. The house would not function without them. The time spent chatting with them as they fill the many duties such as housetaking, cooking, and maintenance is always special to us. The volunteers help keep the pulse of the house beating fresh and upbeat.

Moments of pain and frustration are also common. The joyless task of often telling people “no.” The pain of telling particularly disruptive guests that they will

need to find other accommodations. The despair as we watch someone’s recovery from addiction come apart as they return to using. This slow agonizing rhythm can fortunately have a parallel, joyful beat. The joy of witnessing the transformation of someone’s life in recovery. Seeing the changes in a mentally unbalanced person’s life as they find stability. The smile of a child as they come to you for a hug. That last one can usually take away our blues on the worst days.

We also find hope and energy in the peace movement. The enthusiasm and hope from a rally gathering for what seems to be an impossible task. The hope for a world in which “peace” is possible. The rhythm of beating swords into plowshares is a hopeful one.

Maybe the most “typical” aspect of our lives is the unpredictableness of it all. But then, where is life predictable? For now anyway, We’ll follow the rhythmic pulse of our days and pray for the grace to enter into the moment.



Mev Pulco

SUE LAURITSEN: STARTING UP

It is significant to me that I was asked to contribute to this Round Table in the year 1994, a mere 20 years after my first involvement with the Catholic Worker. In 1974, I was searching for an involvement that would help give my life some meaning out of the realm of "me, myself and I." Low and behold, I ran across a Catholic skid row parish which ministered to the down-trodden of our society in a hands-on, loving way. Those I celebrated the Eucharist with were members of a group called Catholic Workers.

I started to get interested in the concept of the Works of Mercy in a visible way. I walked down to St. Teresa's House to help serve the soup line to those men who lived on skid row. I was pretty nervous as I approached the front door. I walked in, saw a room of poor men and turned around and walked out. I started to leave, and I said to myself, "You can do it, approach them like you would anyone in your life." My love for the Catholic Worker was born.

I spent nearly every night down at St. Teresa's House and the scary faces of the poor men disappeared; all I saw now were men I thought of as friends. It was three weeks, and I was living there in the Catholic Worker community. I continued my job as a lineperson for the phone company until I was injured. While I was laid-up with my injury, I had a lot of time to plan and dream.

Prior to 1974, I had spent time in St. Louis and fell in love not only with great friends but also with the city itself. I knew there was a force drawing me back to St. Louis. I started writing a small group of people whose names were given to me by people I respected in

the social justice arena. Some of the people I contacted to see if the ground was fertile for Catholic Worker growth were Ann Manganaro, Al Sprehe, Luanne Schinzel, Anne and Bolin Carter, John Lightle and John Kavanaugh. As you can see from this core group, God definitely wanted a Catholic Worker house/community in St. Louis.

The interest and enthusiasm continued to snowball and by December of 1976 I had relocated to St. Louis with the tremendous help of John Lightle. There was no doubt in my mind or heart that this was one time I felt like an instrument of God. The process of turning a dream into reality became a spiritual experience.

Meetings were held on a regular basis and the interest grew in leaps and bounds. The School Sisters of Notre Dame helped to support me financially for six months. I believe it was by March of 1977 that three other women emerged as wanting to commit to living as members of the Catholic Worker community. Those people were Virginia Druhe, Kathy Derby and Luanne Schinzel. So now we had our core group and a large community of supporters.

The next few months were physically grueling because after finding a physical site and negotiating with the Archdiocese, we needed to solicit and pick up donations to outfit our new home. People poured forth with their goodness. We said we needed a truck; someone donated a 1949 International pickup with an outdated license and missing one front fender. Every time we'd pick up a load, we (all the women who picked up all the donations, large and small) had to push the truck in order to jump start it. Now there was another

Sue Lauritsen, as you can tell by her article, got The St. Louis Catholic Worker going.



woman in our community, Marilyn Roberson. Our numbers grew, our determination saw only the future, and our vision came closer to reality.

We needed seed money to get started and we never doubted for a minute it would be there. One day Luanne gave a talk to a group of students, and the teacher came up afterwards and gave her a check to help us get started. Luanne didn't look at the check until later -- it was our seed money -- \$10,000. Luanne couldn't believe it nor could any of the rest of us. We knew we couldn't keep it all because of the true spirit of the Catholic Worker: it is by sharing our wealth that God continues to provide that which is needed.

By our opening in September 1977, our community had grown to seven women with Ann Manganaro and Mary Ann McGivern on board. God is good. The rest is history.

I thought it was important to go briefly into the history to give some of you a little of the feel for where Karen House started. After Karen House was in full swing, there wasn't a guest who entered those doors who didn't have a profound effect on our lives. I will never be able to look past the eyes of a street person. People's dignity shall be a sacred trust. One of the most important directives of the Catholic Worker I try to incorporate in my life is keeping a Christ Room in my home. So far, I've been pretty successful in keeping one or two rooms filled with some pretty needy kids who just didn't want to fall through the cracks.

People who touched and changed my life in a profound way are those that shared our beginnings as a community, especially Luanne Schinzel and Ann Manganaro. Karen Catholic Worker House continues today because of the never-ending love and dedication of so many people of which I can claim only a small part.



HERE IS THE BEGINNING AND END OF LIFE;

FAITH IS THE BEGINNING,

THE END IS LOVE.

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

ANN RICK: ENDLESS DISCUSSION

How has the Catholic Worker affected my life? Here I am in a comfortable home and I'm not connected to the area shelters and soup kitchens. Was my time at Karen House an experience that I've sort of boxed up and stored away on a closet shelf (along with my high school yearbooks and other memorabilia)? I'll have to think about this one.

My life today is, to borrow a phrase from Virginia Druhe, one of "chronic, constant, overstimulation." My husband, John, and I have three small children; and one full day of taking care of them wears me out. On some of my weary days I experience *deja-vu*: visions of making fruit salad out of case loads of damaged fruit that arrived to the food pantry at Karen House. (I haven't had time to analyze this one yet).

I remember the day I was driving to Karen House to move in: I had delayed my arrival by two hours, then five hours... and as I was finally on Jefferson Avenue heading toward Cass Avenue, I so vividly remember saying, "If I hadn't told so many people that I was going to do this, I would turn around right now and go back." I was afraid of what I had gotten myself in to. Little did I know then what a profound and life-giving experience I was embarking on. I thought that I was getting into something I couldn't handle, but instead I was given new eyes with which to view the world around me, and new friends/community members to reflect with and be challenged by for years to come.

Shortly after my arrival was the first of many "All Day Meetings." It seemed endless: discussion after discussion. I didn't totally understand the topics and the

issues. Why didn't they just vote on it and go on to the next thing? It was my first introduction to consensus decision-making, and I remember coming home that day with a splitting headache. Over time, the discussion-related headaches diminished, and the appreciation of that group process increased. I just realized that this is what goes on with a small group of women that I meet with regularly to work on Special Education issues for our children, and it's one of the few ways that I feel connected to others in the community since we moved here four years ago.

I remember my first Christmas at Karen House. I had been there only six months, and I still felt like a novice. I wasn't prepared for the enormity of plans and events that stretched out over a three week period. The house was inundated with food, toys, clothing, gifts, volunteers, and money. Most former guests were contacted and invited to house events, and children were taken to parties while their parents were selecting toys on the "Toy Give-Away Days." By Christmas Day we were all exhausted but we had room for one more surprise. We each received a wrapped gift from Mary Ann McGivern: our own individually selected library book! We had two weeks to enjoy it and return it to the City Library. It was wonderful and thoughtful--and I was touched by the generosity and simplicity of that gift.

That same year I was struggling in a relationship that finally ended. On Monday morning I stoically went to work as usual, though I was really hurting inside. I got a surprise call from Mary Ann Gleason around ten a.m. asking if we could have lunch together, if I wanted to

Ann Rick, former member of the Karen House community, lives in Massachusetts with her husband, John, and children, Katie, and the twins Maureen and Timothy.

talk. I wanted to cry; I felt so cared for and cared about at that moment.

I can't say that my life is one of actively pursuing Catholic Worker values and philosophy, but neither is it unaffected by the five-plus years I lived at Karen House. Besides these few "little" memories, I have many more unarticulated experiences that are forever etched in

my mind and really do affect how I grocery shop, play with my kids, look for a job, have "ordinary time" with my husband, and look for a community to worship with. And despite the tension sometimes associated with all these things, I do have to thank you for the gift that it really is!



CHRIS BUTLER: LOVELINESS AMIDST CHAOS

I worked at Karen House in the late seventies, but my first contact with the Catholic Worker happened many years before that, when I read Dorothy Day's The Long Loneliness as an impressionable Jesuit novice of 20. The book, I remember, had been donated to the novitiate library by one of my older classmates, who had read and taken it very much to heart. He arrived at the novitiate with all of his earthly possessions, including the book, in a gym bag.

The Worker vision of the world gave me an

ideology to hang my heart on. Although Dorothy claimed—rightly—to be an orthodox Catholic, what she said about Christian discipleship had a lot more conviction and coherence to it than the Christianity I had learned in my Irish Catholic upbringing. The more conventional Catholicism of my youth had much of worth to offer, but confused the Gospel with a certain passion for respectability that has often hobbled the American Catholic Church.

The Worker ideal gave me a way to connect my

Chris Butler enhances the seismic stability of California by avoiding jogging.

religious beliefs with the passionate social consciousness of the "youth" movement of the late sixties. If my appropriation of the Worker's vision as my own was informed with the romanticism of the naive, it was also tempered by the timidity of the fearful. It took me another ten years to actually roll up my sleeves and get involved in a house of hospitality. It proved a curative experience for what was left of the romantic in me.

I had done social work for a living for a number of years before coming to Karen House, but agency social work is structured to provide a cushion of privacy and safety for social workers. I could have a set amount of time during which clients could tell me their troubles, collect my pay and go home at the end of the day. It isn't easy work, but there are clear limits to the demands it makes. You can hide behind them.

At Karen House, these limits weren't very effective. The pandemonium (and the charm) of enormous numbers of children with a variety of ways of getting my attention was inescapable. Being in the midst of what was home to our guests meant that both the strength and the chaos of their everyday lives was in my face and there wasn't any escape from it. This was true even though I kept my own home and didn't move into Karen House. It has, I suppose, more to do with social boundaries than geographical ones, and says a lot about the social structures of the traditional social work that I had been used to.

This lack of boundaries meant that I could learn more from our guests than I ever would have expected. I learned from some of them about anger; their anger over the oppression they experienced in their daily lives; their anger with me when I offended them or made demands on them that they did not like; my anger with them when I thought it must be clear that I was right.

I learned from some of them about psychosis and control and discerning loveliness in the midst of chaos. We had a number of guests living with us then who were quite disturbed, although usually not destructive. This was a new experience for me then, and I found, happily, that I could work well with these people. I couldn't cure them, of course, perhaps I seldom even helped them, but I liked them; I could gather bits of sense in their often incoherent conversations, and recog-

nize a person in the midst of mental jumbles.

Occasionally it happened that some of these women got their lives back in order, either because of medication or therapy or prayer or courage. Sometimes this was dramatic: assumed names were dropped, pieces of former lives were picked up, families contacted after long separations. Other times this healing was more apparent in the cessation of manic behavior, shrill voices calming, erratic behavior becoming more directed. But it all seemed to me to be a holy thing, evidence of the grace of God, who called light out of darkness.

From the Worker community members, I learned better to accept my own limitations, because they accepted them, even when it meant taking on work I could not do.

I took much of what I learned with me to San Francisco, where my experience helped me open up two new shelters and a meal program at my parish. Worker politics put me in an unaccustomed position working in Haight-Ashbury. Because I was associated with the church, I was immediately cast as conservative. This reputation was confirmed when I declined to join in the worship of Isis and Demeter on the summer solstice. (*We're not in Kansas, Toto!*)

I also learned that community support is essential in avoiding burn-out. All solo flights crash. Several

years ago, I realized that I needed more order in my life than I had managed so far. I took a regular middle class job and turned my attention to the worship life of my parish—a good thing, but there are lots of folks to do that kind of thing.

Last year, I found a happy *via media* to give expression to my social concerns without surrendering

my need for order. The Episcopal Diocese has a school here for training deacons (men & women) and I have been active in serving as one of its trustees. Deacons do what the church should do best, and I am happy to learn with them how much 'servant ministry' is what Dorothy had in mind for all Christians.



MARY DUTCHER: "RUINED FOR LIFE"

When I was first contacted to write about the Catholic Worker's influence on me, the spontaneous phrase that came to my mind was the same that is used to describe the effect of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps on its participants: "ruined for life." I remembered talking with another former Catholic Worker who had made the point that experiencing the Worker's group dynamics and manner of living together "made all other organizations seem outdated."

A great deal of this indelible influence, I believe, relates to the Worker's recognition and attempt to deal with poverty and suffering, aspects of reality that are threatening and that, often enough, we would like to deny. By taking seriously the Gospel vision that we are all sisters and brothers and by performing the Works of Mercy as a matter of justice rather than charity, the Worker touches into and partakes of an incredibly strong power—perhaps what Gandhi would call "the power of Truth."

As a result of my years of living at the Worker, I find myself unable to "compute" reality without taking into account the vast majority of folks on this planet for whom each day is a struggle for existence. Even more importantly, I now see them as equals—sisters and brothers, rather than "backward" or "undeveloped" or "lazy" or any of the other terms used to distance, rationalize or ignore their experience. I understand their poverty as a result of unjust systems; and I remember Dorothy once saying, "We've got to change this filthy, rotten system."

That leaves me with an inherent, visceral distrust of systems, which I believe is rooted in a deep, experiential sense of the roots of the Worker's Christian anarchy.

When I think of all the good people who created the Holocaust by "just following orders," I am grateful and appreciative that Peter and Dorothy were able to see, articulate and live their insight about Christian anarchy some decades before the Holocaust. I believe their prophetic pacificism flowed from this same insight about how people need to live together organically and be responsible on a personal level to each other. They understood that in artificially imposed systems, personal responsibility is all too frequently abandoned, resulting in indifference and often bloodshed, death, and great suffering.

Taking personal responsibility is difficult, however. The overwhelming suffering that exists in the world cannot be resolved by one person, and this realization can be paralyzing for me. So I am tempted to forget or deny. In addition, I know that sometimes my distrust of systems is really a product of my own weakness and projection onto the "other"—in this case, the organization—of perceptions and issues that I need to address on a more personal level. I think, for example, of Dorothy's absolute fidelity to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, despite all its foibles and problems.

Because of these factors, discernment is a grace I have come to appreciate more and more as I continue to live "under the influence" of Catholic Worker principles. At heart, I know that struggling with how and where to respond and (with more difficulty) not to respond, and (with even more difficulty) where my anger has more to do with my own issues than with an outer injustice—I know that this struggle is more vital and energizing than the truncated life I would live by attempting to deny the

Mary Dutcher has just returned to St. Louis; is back taking house and on the Round Table committee.

reality of suffering and injustice, whether outer or inner.

Another major influence is somewhat simpler--in fact, it is the principle of simple living, or voluntary poverty. It seems to me still profoundly true that we need to "live simply so that others may simply live." Actually, in the years that have passed since that adage adorned many a bumper sticker, the ecological situation on the planet seems to have become acute enough that a modification might be in order. "Live simply so that WE may simply live." Once again, I think of Peter's prophetic pro-



Mary ~ after a bath in Nicaragua.

posing of a Green Revolution over sixty years ago as the "cultivation" aspect of the the "cult, culture and cultivation" basic program of the Catholic Worker.

Peter wanted the Catholic Worker to propagate a vision and a way of life that would be there "after the empires fall," to quote one of his Easy Essays. In my own life, I have not encountered any other vision or way of life that has affected me as deeply as the Catholic Worker has.



ZACK DAVISSON: JOY OF GIVING

When Mitch McGee asked me to write about how the Catholic Worker has affected my life, I was hesitant at first but deep down I knew that Dorothy Day, the people of Cass House, and the whole Catholic Worker Movement had made an indelible mark on my soul.

Before I knew the Worker I was immune to the face of poverty; I was indifferent to those who were homeless because I made them invisible; I was ignorant of those who were refugees and I was terrified by those who were marginal and not wanted by our American society.

As I embraced the reality of poverty, I met such men as Cool Eddie, Freddie (aka King Solomon), Charles, and many more who were homeless. I came to know what it was like to not sleep in my own bed for 13 straight days; what it meant to be dependent on the generosity of others, not knowing if we were going to be able to pay the winter utility bills. I came to know why

some of our men spent their money on cigarettes and alcohol instead of saving it to get an apartment. Smoking and drinking dulled the daily pain of hunger in their stomachs and dulled the reality of their problems.

The Catholic Worker also taught me about the plight of refugees and the joy of political freedom--freedom from daily antagonism and danger. The Worker helped me to see the joy of giving my time, talent and energy to those in need. Many times it wasn't easy to be hospitable to angry men who were tired of living in the streets. Indeed I came to know what Dorothy Day meant by a "harsh and dreadful love."

Ways I was to be affected by living at the Catholic Worker which were intangible or would have even seemed foreign to me when I was living at Cass House, now in the present have become quite clear. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect my work at Cass house to help me gain employment as a sales manager of the Hardware Department at HQ. All of

Zack Davisson, former member of the Cass House community, works as a department manager at HQ Hardware.

THE AIMS AND MEANS OF THE

The aim of the Catholic Worker movement is to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ. Our sources are the Hebrew and Greek scriptures as handed down in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, with our inspiration coming from the lives of the saints, "men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses to Your unchanging love." (Eucharistic Prayer) This aim requires us to begin living in a different way. We recall the words of our founders, Dorothy Day who said, "God meant things to be much easier than we have made them," and Peter Maurin who wanted to build a society "where it is easier for people to be good."

When we examine our society, which is generally called capitalist (because of its methods of producing and controlling wealth) and is bourgeois (because of prevailing concern for acquisition and material interests, and its emphasis on respectability and mediocrity), we find it far from God's justice.

--In economics, private and state capitalism bring about an unjust distribution of wealth, for the profit motive guides decisions. Those in power live off the sweat of others' brows, while those without power are robbed of a just return for their work. Usury (the charging of interest above administrative costs) is a major contributor to the wrongdoing intrinsic to this system. We note especially how the world debt crisis leads poor countries into greater deprivation and a dependency from which there is no foreseeable escape. Here at home, the number of hungry and homeless and unemployed people rises in the midst of increasing affluence.

--In labor, human need is no longer the reason for human work. Instead, the unbridled expansion of technology, necessary to capitalism and viewed as "progress," holds sway. Jobs are concentrated in productivity and administration for a "high-tech," war-related, consumer society of disposable goods, so that laborers are trapped in work that does not contribute to human welfare. Furthermore, as jobs become more specialized, many people are excluded from meaningful work or are alienated from the products of their labor. Even in farming, agribusiness has replaced agriculture, and, in all areas, moral restraints are run over roughshod, and a disregard for the laws of nature now threatens the very planet.

--In politics, the state functions to control and regulate life. Its power has burgeoned hand in hand with growth in technology, so that military, scientific and corporate interests get the highest priority when concrete political policies are formulated. Because of the sheer size of institutions, we tend toward government by bureaucracy -- that is, government by nobody. Bureaucracy, in all areas of life, is not only impersonal, but also makes accountability, and, therefore, an effective political forum for redressing grievances, next to impossible.

--In morals, relations between people are corrupted by distorted images of the human person. Class, race and sex often determine personal worth and position in society, leading to structures that foster oppression. Capitalism further divides society by pitting owners against workers in perpetual conflict over wealth and its control. Those who do not "produce" are abandoned, and left, at best, to be "processed" through institutions. Spiritual destitution is rampant, manifested in isolation, madness, promiscuity and violence.

--The arms race stands as a clear sign of the direction and spirit of our age. It has extended the domain of destruction and the fear of annihilation, and denies the basic right to life. There is a direct connection between the arms race and destitution. "The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree." (Vatican II)

In contrast to what we see around us, as well as within ourselves, stands St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the Common Good, a vision of a society where the good of each member is bound to the good of the whole in the service of God.

To this end, we advocate:

--Personalism, a philosophy which regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of

CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT

all metaphysics and morals. In following such wisdom, we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal "charity." We pray for a Church renewed by this philosophy and for a time when all those who feel excluded from participation are welcomed with love, drawn by the gentle personalism Peter Maurin taught.

—A decentralized society in contrast to the present bigness of government, industry, education, health care and agriculture. We encourage efforts such as family farms, rural and urban land trusts, worker ownership and management of small factories, homesteading projects, food, housing and other cooperatives — any effort in which money can once more become merely a medium of exchange, and human beings are no longer commodities.

—A "green revolution," so that it is possible to rediscover the proper meaning of our labor and our true bonds with the land; a distributist communitarianism, self-sufficient through farming, crafting and appropriate technology; a radically new society where people will rely on the fruits of their own soil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts.

We believe this needed personal and social transformation should be pursued by the means Jesus revealed in His sacrificial love. With Christ as our exemplar, by prayer and communion with His Body and Blood, we strive for practices of:

—Nonviolence. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matt 5:9) Only through nonviolent action can a personalist revolution come about, one in which one evil will not be replaced simply by another. Thus, we oppose the deliberate taking of human life for any reason, and see every oppression as blasphemy. Jesus taught us to take suffering upon ourselves rather than inflict it upon others, and He calls us to fight against violence with the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting and noncooperation with evil. Refusal to pay taxes for war, to register for conscription, to comply with any unjust legislation; participation in nonviolent strikes and boycotts, protests or vigils; withdrawal of support for dominant systems, corporate funding or usurious practices are all excellent means to establish peace.

—The works of mercy (as found in Matt 25:1-46) are at the heart of the Gospel and they are clear mandates for our response to "the least of our brothers and sisters." Houses of hospitality are centers for learning to do the acts of love, so that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs; the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table. Anything beyond what we immediately need belongs to those who go without.

—Manual labor in a society that rejects it as undignified and inferior. "Besides inducing cooperation, besides overcoming barriers and establishing the spirit of sister- and brotherhood (besides just getting things done), manual labor enables us to use our body as well as our hands, our minds." (Dorothy Day) The Benedictine motto *Ora et Labora* reminds us that the work of human hands is a gift for the edification of the world and the glory of God.

—Voluntary poverty. "The mystery of poverty is that in sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." (Dorothy Day) By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's "preferential option for the poor."

We must be prepared to accept seeming failure with these aims, for sacrifice and suffering are part of the Christian life. Success, as the world determines it, is not the final criterion for judgement. The most important thing is the love of Jesus Christ and how to live His truth.



those maintenance jobs that I fumbled through to make Cass House habitable helped me to find a challenging job. The Worker movement also helped me to become closer to my late grandfather. It just blew my mind that at the age of eighty-four, my grandfather wanted to cook Thanksgiving dinner for the Cass House soup line. From 9:00 to 5:00 the day before Thanksgiving Gramps tenderly baked those turkeys to a delicious golden brown

glow. He gave of his talent to cook for others with such love that I have an image blazed in my mind of him sitting at that hot stove. Such fond memories of Gramps live in my heart because of the Catholic Worker.

To conclude this poorly worded essay, the Catholic Worker has challenged me to work justly, to give tenderly, and walk in the presence of God.



JOE ANGERT: OASIS OF REASON

The object of life is not to be on the side of the majority, but to escape finding oneself in the ranks of the insane.

—Marcus Aurelius

I moved into Karen House in the summer. I think it was 1980, but I'm not quite sure. I know I lived and worked at the house for six years until Clare and I decided to move out and start a family. Since then I've continued to work at the house once a week during the school year—I take the Sunday morning house shift.

On the surface now Karen House seems to be a small part of my life. A few hours once a week isn't much when you compare it with the time spent on a family and a full-time job. Still, Karen House is a focus point for me. It's one of the few stopping off places in my journey where I've met, and still meet, people whose understanding of this life we live is close to my own. Frequently while I'm in contact with society at large, I have these sort of surreal flashes—I'm momentarily stunned by the seemingly irrational, unnatural, or unbelievable behaviour of someone or some group. My wife, Clare, who I met at Karen House, often shares these moments with me as we look at each other in disbelief. I mean really; if you actually stop to consider that Bill Clinton is President of the United States,

Joycelyn Elders is Surgeon General, and Rush Limbaugh is the most popular radio personality of all time, you have to start questioning everyone's sanity and then eventually your own. Have you ever watched the evening news on TV? Is it within the scope of your experiences to believe that anyone could possibly be as doggedly stupid as TV news reporters? You say yes? Then I give you Geraldo. Karen House is an oasis of reason for me. The people I've met there, and still meet there, help me remain sane by realizing that I'm not alone.

Living at Karen House has also taught me some important lessons that will remain with me for the rest of my life. In my youth I wanted to change the world—typical idealistic youth stuff; now I understand that the Redemption takes place every day. Karen House altered my sense of time and scale. Love shared today redeems us today. Tomorrow we get another chance and challenge. Karen House also taught me not to worry. I know it sounds strange that in the midst of so much turmoil and uncertainty as is typically found at a homeless shelter that one could find serenity, but that's exactly what happens. There's a lot of reassurance that comes from being around the kind of people you typically meet at Karen House. Life, at least for a while, makes sense. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to get to the TV--OJ.



Joe Angert, sits at the computer for hours laying out the Round Table.

HARRIETTE BAGGETT: PASSING IT ON

Catholic Worker ideals have been with me for most of my life. They are still my sacred guide, almost an unconscious compass. Dorothy Day touched my life about sixty years ago! I was twelve or thirteen when she came and talked to us at the Visitation Convent then on Cabanne Avenue. She came with a local woman (also named Dorothy, I believe) and she moved me deeply. I devoured her book, From Union Square to Rome during a retreat in 1939 (my first year of college at old Maryville). A Viz classmate of mine, Mary Ellen Davis, I believe, donated money to the Worker and through the years I received and read the Catholic Worker publication, thanks I am sure to Mary Ellen. Often Dorothy Day, Deane Mowrer and the others were real sparks of hope to me as I struggled with the overwhelming sameness of caring for little kids (delightful as they were) in the confines of a city apartment. This was in the '50's.

In the 1960's and '70's I gradually discovered a deeper source of the depression that haunted me off and on. With the rest of the world I was discovering the historical injustice of society toward women, and my beloved church had not been guiltless in this. Dorothy Day's relentless pursuit of justice and the clarity of truth in defending laborers and in promoting nonviolence, even in defiance of most bishops, again saved my sanity. My own mother's influence had prepared me to accept Dorothy's statement that she and some war-accepting bishops and clerics connected with the Brooklyn Tablet would not find harmony until they all arrived at the "table of the Lord," meaning eternity. While my chief, and to my mind more basic, difference with the present hierarchy is different from Dorothy's with the hierarchy

of her day, Dorothy's principle is mine. Truth, justice and charity, the very stuff of God, must lead and inspire us. And simple, open, wordless prayer is the communication line.

A visit with Dorothy at the Catholic Worker farm, Tivoli in June of 1975 was a powerful focus for my life and ultimately led to my joining the St. Louis Worker community and to my halcyon decade, the 80's. Having raised my children, my marriage having bitterly bit the dust in 1976, it turned out that I was in the enviable position of having gotten over the hump before I was over the hump.

Today's Catholic hierarchy might refuse to recognize the implications of women's full humanity as they deny to women the New Testament promise of the freedom of the children of God in the matter of choosing a vocation: motherhood or ordination, both or neither. In Dorothy's day much of the hierarchy slighted the gospel promise of "Blessed are the peacemakers" and Dorothy held her ground. In the big issue of the 90's, women's equality, I take my cue from Dorothy Day. And in holding firmly to the primacy of moral freedom in all aspects of women's lives, in order logically to count them among fully adult humans, I see the influence of Dorothy Day's insistence (opaque to some) on the Christian value of anarchy as opposed to coercion.

And now in my 70's I find myself wanting to leave something of value to my grandchildren. They know better than to expect any money or anything material (except books—a Peter Maurin kinship). But I hope my lack of a car, my contentment with a degree of poverty and my commitment to justice (which surely my

Harriette Baggett, lives in Florida where she assists her daughter in caring for her grandchildren (that's Harriette's grandchildren, we're not trying to make her a great-grandmother, yet).

granddaughters recognize my feminism to be) will be a positive influence in their lives. Every day I am grateful for Dorothy's distinction between poverty and destitution, her approval of the former but not the latter. I do not want to be destitute, much as I identify with the

marginalized by being a woman and aware. But, who knows, maybe my grandchildren are just kind and really think I am a kook and they could be right. We all have to live with some ambiguity and we had better accept that.



PATRICK COY: TWENTY WAYS THE WORKER INFLUENCES MY LIFE

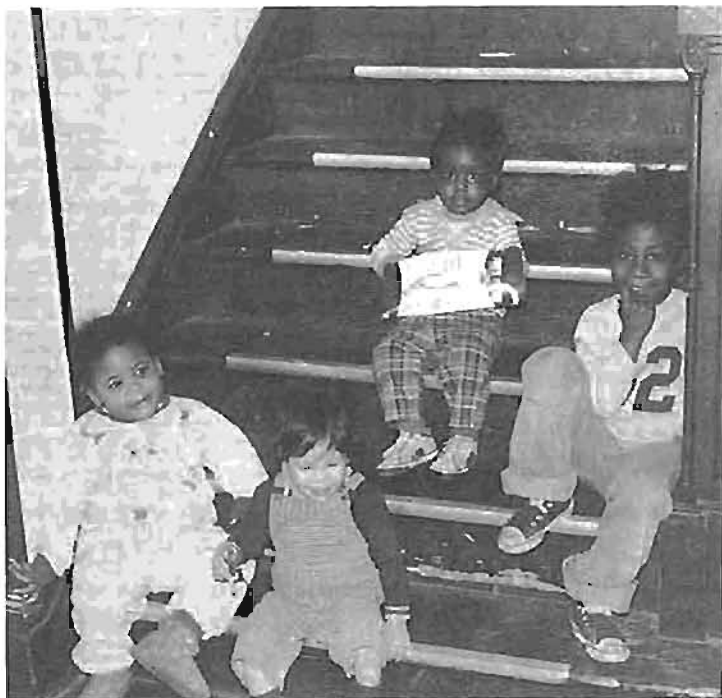
1. I purchase goods from economic cooperatives, farmers, crafts people, or small businesses whenever possible, and not from corporations.
2. I frequently let the phone ring without answering it, and I don't feel guilty about it.
3. I read the alternative press with passion, and the mainstream press with suspicion.
4. I remain a pacifist in principle, if not always in thought and deed.
5. I think that the many victims of war and capitalism know more about a just peace and sustainable economics than the few beneficiaries do.
6. I value community living, even after living in community at the CW.
7. I like to eat popcorn on Sunday nights, and I drink lots of coffee every morning.
8. I romanticize a sustainable life on the land, but I don't dare try to accomplish it myself.
9. I eat in locally-owned restaurants, and not in franchises.
10. I resent paying my federal income taxes, and am challenged by the Worker's tradition of resistance and nonpayment.
11. I assume that the unemployed are jobless because the system does not work for everyone, not because the unemployed aren't willing to work within the system.
12. I trust personalist solutions to social problems, while distrusting state solutions.
13. I try to celebrate the sacramental dimensions of everyday life, even if I don't take part in the sacraments of the church in everyday life.
14. I don't vote for any political office higher than the House of Representatives, no matter who the candidates are.
15. I can say no to people in need.
16. I tithe my income and my time to social change organizations.
17. I instinctively support workers and trade unionists in any labor dispute, walkout, lockout, or strike.
18. I eat leftovers, heat with wood, and love books and literature.
19. I am doing my dissertation on *Peace Brigades International*, a decentralized, nonhierarchical transnational social movement organization committed to nonviolence in action.
20. I still think that the life of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement that she and Peter Maurin co-founded, are about the most significant expressions of gospel values yet produced by U.S. Catholicism.



Pat Coy, recently returned from a trip with the Peace Brigades International to Sri Lanka.

TOM HOOYMAN: THE SEARCH CONTINUES

My introduction to the Karen House was through the Jesuits. I don't remember if it was through meeting people after liturgies at Markoe House or if it was by invitation from a few scholastics to assist them in their volunteer cooking. Either way, it was through one religious community which led me to another. Those years, the late 70's were a time in my life when I was searching for vocation, for meaning, for community. That search continues. But in those years, it led me to 1840 Hogan.



I really don't know what drew me to Karen House. I think it was the people. It must have been. The year I moved into Karen House there were six women in the Catholic Worker community, about 20 female guests and somewhere between 20 and 30 children, all under the age of five. The summer and fall weren't too bad because people could still get outside and get some relief from the cramped quarters, but once the winter began the

house seemed to grow smaller. That was also the winter when Don would occasionally sleep on one of the couches in the front parlor and when two teenage boys, too old to sleep on the second floor and too young to be separated from their family, slept in a first floor storage room converted to a bedroom. I was the first male to move into the third floor community of the house. Chris Butler was a member of the community, but he perhaps had more sense in deciding not to live at the house.

I remember when I told my parents that I was going to live at Karen House. It was the afternoon following my graduation from St. Louis U. I remember my parents walking up the steps to the third floor of Karen House. They were very quiet. Their silence was caused by disbelief. They had just left the pomp and circumstances of a college graduation and all that that promises to the graduates and now found themselves with their graduate not seeing those promises but seeing the poorest of the poor. I think they felt hurt and perhaps a bit betrayed. I remember Mary Ann Gleason, bright and energetic, greeting my mom and dad at the top of the steps. My mom asking how safe was the neighborhood and Mary Ann saying, "Don't worry, we will take care of Tom." And take care of me they did.

It has been fifteen years since I lived at Karen House. Much has happened in my life. I have married, become a father, finished school and begun a career. Through all these years, people and places, I am still drawn to the Worker. What draws me and frankly astonishes me is the ongoing witness of the house. The faces at Karen House have changed over the years but the message is the same. It is the gospel. This is what I think draws people to the Worker. It is at least what draws me. This is a group of people who takes the gospel at face value and lives it. It is a simple message but one which bears great personal and communal challenge. Karen House and those who live there have been a constant witness to me of the possibilities of the gospel.



Tom Hooyman, is a medical ethicist at St. John's Mercy Medical Center.

JANET GRAY-MCKENNIS: COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

I left Cass House for Chicago in 1985, weeping. Although I knew it was time to go, part of me wasn't ready to leave my community. This August as we made a second move from St. Louis to Chicago, it was much easier. Returning from a year in London via St. Louis, my mood was jubilant, despite the frenzied nature of the trip. I was returning to build a life rooted in community.

When I left the worker nine years ago, I was determined that my activism would not end. And I was peripherally involved with peace and justice work while I lived in Chicago: sanctuary support; demonstrations and sit-ins; interminable meetings; and weekly cooking for St. Catherine's, a Catholic Worker house which serves people who are HIV+. While some of these efforts were effective (as well as being meaningful to me personally), it's clear that political activism was not the most important aspect of my life at the Worker.

Cass House was an eclectically beautiful building, and I have fond memories of the physical space. Though there were more beautiful rooms, I think most often of the chapel and the kitchen. In the chapel we celebrated the Eucharist with Jim Krings, held weddings, prayed communally, and enjoyed solitude. During the summer the dust motes floated peacefully in the light from the tall windows, reminding us to be still. During the winter our hands were patriots, turning red, white, and blue in the cold and forcing us to abandon the chapel till spring. But the heart of Cass House was actually in

its kitchen. That cramped room was even more full of stories than of roaches. I think especially of Stanley holding court, and of our easy laughter.

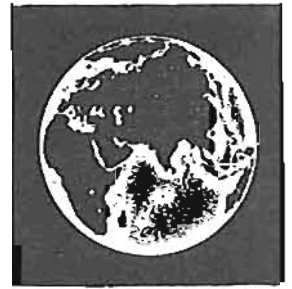
Sometimes I remember the worker years as a whirlwind of activity, unsurpassed till my current attempts to juggle my work as a curriculum-developing teacher with parenting. Despite the hectic schedule we kept at the house, I was constantly called by my community to center myself and focus my energies. Community is dynamic, a building constantly under construction. I still think often of the grace-filled moments of equilibrium we were sometimes able to achieve. And of the fragility and resilience of all human efforts, and the times we failed one another.

As we build life here in Chicago, Mike and I are glad to be reconnecting with Reba Place Fellowship, a Mennonite/Brethren-affiliated communally-based church. I am not able to live in the isolation of the nuclear family and hold my ground against the mass culture, much less work for the coming of the kingdom. And that is really what I want to do, and what life at the Worker confirmed in me. As I teach and parent (enough for the moment), I cannot bring about the coming of the kingdom alone. Unless I take time for prayer and live among others who call out my strengths and forgive my failures, my best efforts turn to dust, and all of my busyness is in vain. Thank God for the gift we can be to one another!

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Janet Gray-McKennis, and Mike McIntyre, with daughters Kate Rose and Annie Rose, are back in Chicago after a year in London.

FROM ABROAD



by Teresa Jorgen

Like most people I need regular reaffirmation of spirit. After seventeen years of teaching Spanish at Parkway North High School, I felt a desperate need for change. I needed a long retreat from the numbing habits and routines that sap our sense of meaning, that make us seek vicarious energy in public figures. When I took my semester sabbatical in early February, the media fed our hunger for exotic, extraordinary figures with Tonya Harding, Michael Jackson and Lorena Bobbitt. These humbled heroes made me ache for better answers.

I left for the University of Central America in San Salvador, El Salvador in search of real heroes. For years I had yearned to visit the land which claimed so many martyrs, the majority of whom remain unknown, buried in anonymous plots. In my first week there I spent virtually all my time making pilgrimages to the tombs of Salvador's most famous martyrs: Romero, Rutillio Grande, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, and the UCA martyrs (the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her sixteen year old daughter). I sought the sense of purpose and faith that stood true against materialism and political power.

However, I was more renewed by more simple folk; regular, steady people who also remain undaunted by the vast forces around them. Two in particular come to mind. The Liberation Theology course was held in the Pastoral Center where the six Jesuits had lived and taught. At 6:00 am on November 16, 1989, Don Obdulio, a groundsman for the UCA, discovered the bodies of the six murdered Jesuits. He then went to look for his wife Elba and daughter Celina who had stayed in a small room in the Center to be safe that night. He found their bloodied faceless bodies on the floor still embracing each other. Dried blood stains the ceiling of that holy room. I had the honor of befriending Don Obdulio while

visiting the rose garden he so beautifully planted in memory of the eight murdered. He calmly explained what had happened that November 16th morning; loneliness still plagued him. Small ball-sized hard tumors he called "pelotas" had appeared on his forehead, wrists, elbows and arms from the shock of viewing that horrible carnage. No government official nor police officer ever took the time to interview him. Don Obdulio asked me to take his photo in front of the beautiful red, pink and yellow roses. When I returned to give him the developed picture, Mayra, the secretary, informed me that he had admitted himself to San Rafael Hospital complaining of pain in his arm. A week later, on June 23, he died of tetanus. The photo Don Obdulio never saw was enlarged and hung on a bulletin board in front of the altar during his memorial mass at the UCA.

I sat in the second desk in the second row anxiously awaiting Professor Dean Brackley, S.J. to arrive. The class "Dios" was made up of mostly young religious. Suddenly there was applause and whistles. As I turned to see what the noise was all about, I saw Dean enter. It didn't take me long to realize why Dean was so warmly welcomed by his students. Dean, a native of California, volunteered to come to the UCA to help replace one of the Jesuits killed in '89. It was not an easy task to immerse oneself in a different country, a new university, and join a Jesuit community which had worked and struggled for peace and justice for the last twenty years, and had been robbed of six of their brothers in one act of brutality. So apparent to me was Dean's commitment to the gospel--his willingness to speak the truth about his country's policies. Dean's door was always open to his students which meant less time for himself. I'm afraid, unlike his students, most of his colleagues

Teresa Jorgen, a good friend of the community and house, has been supplying us with Great Harvest Bread.

don't appreciate the treasure they have in Dean.

My sabbatical invigorated me; I am more excited about teaching than I have been in seventeen years. I am not transformed as I thought I would be, however. I'll never be so poor as to need a mouthful of food, but I can have the strength of the poor. I can find in the anonymous majority a simple strength that blesses us with real heroic examples. Don Obdulio and Dean Brackley make no news splashes, but their touch lives and heals. Their faith and love burrow so deep into souls

that no injustice, no brutality, no consuming self-interest can shake their goodness free. Jesus must have preached to the meek and unsung masses because he knew in each of us is a miracle of utterly simple, straight and true goodness—a need for right and justice so strong that it can withstand even the most crushing and numbing experiences. We do well to walk past the popular figures and turn instead to the poor and all those whose labor rests on the power of selfless love.



FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Becky Hassler



Though I love the big, major breakthroughs and accomplishments in life that let me know there really is a God without a doubt, I usually need to settle for what I call "miracle moments." These are those moments that come completely unexpected but that give you just enough hope to keep you going. They tend to happen here at Karen House on a daily basis, it's just that they can very easily be overlooked because they may seem so ordinary. I'll give a few examples to let you know what I mean.

The other day several of us were sitting in the dining room talking after dinner. The ironing board is in the dining room and it gets used frequently by one guest or another. This particular evening when I glanced up to see who it was ironing, it was one of our guests who about four months ago, was so mentally ill that she wouldn't even change clothes, much less iron them. She has been taking medication consistently for the last several months and has just been a delight to get to know in a whole different way. She will very soon be moving into her own apartment. A miracle moment.

Taking house can be a very busy time with phones and doorbells and, well, you get the idea. I was taking house one morning last week, answering the door for the umpteenth time when I glanced into the living room on my way to the front door and saw Frances

breastfeeding her ten-month-old child. Frances, an eighteen-year-old mother, made the decision and commitment to breastfeed and is still doing it at ten months. A miracle moment.

To walk down the stairs in the morning for coffee, usually very sleepily, and have four-year-old Jasmine and her two-year-old sister, Toni, say "Good Morning, Becky" with their sweet little voices as they eat their cornflakes just kills me. That homeless children, the most vulnerable of our society, can evoke such love. A miracle moment.

At a recent community meeting, Mark was speaking to Annjie and Scott, our newest community members, about how the Gospel is at the heart of the Catholic Worker and how we live that out through non-violence, personalism, and voluntary poverty. My heart was moved and I knew once again, that this is where and what I want my life to be about. A miracle moment.

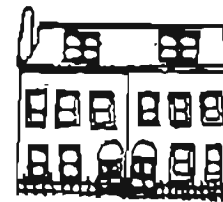
These are all very ordinary moments really. But if you look at them through the eyes of faith they are miraculous. It's these moments that sustain me. Those big, splashy, neon-light miracles don't happen very often in a lifetime—certainly not very often in the lives of us or our guests. It's the moments in between that seem to count the most.



Becky Hassler is in the Family Nurse Practitioner Program at St. Louis University.



FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

This past summer, Agnes Wilcox, director of The New Theater, asked me to join a theater project at the Missouri state prison at Pacific. She had presented performances of some TNT productions there and the men wanted to produce their own play. Would I, Agnes asked, be willing to coach the writers?

I said yes with alacrity; then sat for five excruciatingly boring hours with another volunteer and Bud Deraps (bless his heart), who came along to round out our numbers. Bud and Agnes and I share a common birthdate; so presumably the prison officials were a little perplexed when they laid out all our visiting credentials. But in very short time I met with three writers.

They came to learn about playwriting. None of them had a plot in mind. They had some ideas, a male bonding theme, conversations at the tables in the dining hall, monologues to the parole board and the same guys telling other inmates a different version of events. They were excited about that and wrote some test monologues. We took them to the fourteen actors who were taking acting 101 from Agnes. When the actors read the lines, everyone had the same critique: DEPRESSING. They said an audience of convicts would all walk out of the show.

One of the actors suggested that we use a barbershop setting because the prison has extra barber's chairs in storage. Then another actor said to have a couple of guys come in to rob the place and end up getting haircuts. We went with that idea.

Three barbers, a father and two sons, and all the six customers are part of a running conversation about if and when the father should retire. A homeless man sweeps up and a gay man with a crush on one of the barbers, brings donuts. Then the robbers enter. The linchpin of the play occurs when the lead robber stands helpless watching his two henchmen eating donuts and getting their hair cut.

The conversations at all three chairs are intertwined with the homeless man running for Congress, the donuts, and the attempted robbery. It isn't great theatre—but it uses all the actors and the audience will know it isn't movies or television.

Right when the writers were finishing the script, Agnes's director for the first TNT play took sick and she stepped in. So for the first five Tuesdays of rehearsal I'm blocking our play. (The writers never thought to title it.) I know a lot about play writing but working with actors is a learning experience.

Of course, working with prisoners is also a learning experience. They are nice guys but I've come to know some of the nicest are murderers and gangsters. They have a presence about them and respect from the other inmates while some weaker, more unstable men are barely tolerated.

A couple of times, when we were writing, the writers got to talking about the violence inside, what the boundaries can do to an inmate's head, and how other, more experienced writers within the prison have helped them learn their craft. I'm the only formal writing instructor any of these men have ever had. But they read each other's stuff and critique it.

The other night we took a ten-minute break and I looked up from a conversation with a writer to see nine and a half minutes were up and all the actors were back in place on stage. I know some of them have low-impulse control and need external structure; but they are generous workers and for me, those three-hour sessions on Tuesday nights are satisfying. The men have helped me remember that we all must do more than eat bread and write political tracts to survive in this life.

The play is simple; the work is basic and transient; but it is good work and I'm having a good time. The performance is set for December 13, but alas, it is not open to the public.



Mary Ann McGivern, SL is drafting text on economic conversion for a UN conference.

by Teka Childress

Lately, I have been haunted by doubts about my life at Karen House. While I am overjoyed to be living with our guests, I am dissatisfied with my lack of response to the serious issues which affect their lives: violence, gangs, drug addiction, and disenfranchisement (the loss of a viable role in our society and an economic means of survival). While at Karen House we do not simply say, "Keep warm and well fed," what we say sometimes seems to amount to the same thing. "Be fed, but never have enough money to buy your own food. Be housed, but in a neighborhood where your children are not safe from drive-by shootings. Be clean and dry and sober, but never have a meaningful role in our community."

My lack of involvement in domestic justice issues began to bother me about three years ago with the death of Coco Terry. For those who did not know Coco, he was a young man, about 18, who had lived with us when he was a boy. He was likeable and bright. If there was a child who seemed likely to beat the odds placed against him by his background, it was Coco. Yet, one night while walking with his friends, he was shot and killed. Folks said he had nothing to do with the gang feud that brought about the shooting, but either way Coco is dead; his life is gone and I finally realized just how bad things were getting on our city streets. If Coco had not been killed I still would have soon discovered the depth of the problems we face. Right about that time we began to see an incredible increase in the number of people struggling with drug addiction. Anyone who read the recent Round Table issue on crack will understand just how devastating crack has been for our guests. Last year I really began to wonder what we were doing when we had so many women in the house who were using. Since then, we've begun to deal much better with that problem, by insisting that our guests who do struggle with addiction be in treatment and faithfully working on their recovery. And yet, as much as this is part of the solution, it does not begin to deal with the broader issues that make crack such a viable option for the poor. What makes so many low-income people choose to use and sell crack? It offers moments of euphoria for those who do not seem to have much going for them. And, it offers more opportunity for economic gain than most options available to uneducated youth in a day when part-time,

low-paying jobs are the norm.

In her *Aims and Purposes*, published in 1940, Dorothy Day wrote, "Together with the Works of Mercy, feeding, clothing, and sheltering our brothers [and sisters], we must indoctrinate...We cannot live alone. We cannot go to heaven alone. Otherwise, as Peguy said, God will say to us, 'Where are the others?' If we do not keep indoctrinating, we lose the vision. And if we lose the vision, we become merely philanthropists, doling out palliatives. The vision is this. We are working for 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein justice dwelleth.' We are trying to say with action, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

I've realized that to some degree I've lost the vision, or more accurately, I cannot see what road to take to bring about a new heaven and new earth wherein justice dwelleth. In her *Aims and Purposes*, Dorothy listed the elements of the Catholic Worker vision which would be part of bringing in the new social order. All of the things she mentioned are still critical today: the racial question, cooperatives, credit unions, crafts, houses of hospitality, and farming communes. All of these are ways of living and sharing resources that allow us to live, as Dorothy put it, "as though we believed indeed that we are all members one of another, knowing that when 'the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered.'" It seems to me one of the most critical questions before us, then, is how to continue to create economic opportunities for people, especially the poor, that allow them to use their skills and talents, make a viable living, create or produce things that enhance human life, and do this without destroying the environment. How to do this in a global market where these things are little valued is the real challenge. Yet, it is the challenge before us and the one that we must meet. Farming communes and cottage industries may be as important now if not more so than in Dorothy's time. Fighting racism is at least as necessary as it was in her time, especially considering the near genocide of young African-American males happening before our eyes. I look therefore, for ways to create this new world, one far better than our guests endure now, so that when they leave our house we can say, "Be warm and well fed" and not hide our faces in shame.



Teka Childress is looking forward to attending some conferences on Gangs and Violence.



Bob Fitch

House needs:

God is incarnate today in the poor, in the bread we break together. We know God and each other in the breaking of the bread.

—Dorothy Day

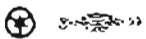
- ♦ Silverware
- ♦ Food
- ♦ House takers
- ♦ Beds and other furniture

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The Round Table

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