

Lessons of Love

by Julia Occhiogrosso

My first year in Las Vegas yielded a lesson which still to this day, thirty-seven years later, holds sway on my decisions as a Catholic Worker. After four years at the Catholic Worker in Los Angeles, I arrived in Las Vegas fresh from as strong a Catholic Worker formation experience as there had ever been in the movement. In the early eighties, while I was in community at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, the community went through a few years of turmoil where we could not arrive at consensus on even the simplest of issues. These troubled and uncertain times catapulted some of the community into a seemingly mad search for the Catholic Worker “truths.” We were certain that there was a right way to do voluntary poverty, community, nonviolence, Catholicism, personalism, works of mercy, etc. At 25 years old, I arrived in Las Vegas with all the correct dogma to uphold in my quest to create the perfect Catholic Worker community.

Then came Rose. She was a social worker from Los Angeles who was retiring and heard about my venture to Las Vegas and wanted to join in supporting the effort. When I spoke to her on the phone, I was sure to remind her to just bring her essential possessions, which certainly precluded her request to bring her crockpot. When she arrived at the front door, I was stumped by her appearance. She did not look like a Catholic Worker. She was wearing heels, outfitted in a dressy pantsuit and lipstick! She smiled broadly as she stepped over the threshold, while I tried hard to resolve the incongruence of the scene.

Rose was helpful and cared for our guests with kindness. She laughed a lot and filled our days with joy.

Then came the afternoon when she returned from a visit to Los Angeles with her crockpot. An argument ensued as I challenged her defiance of the Catholic Worker value of voluntary poverty. We escalated into a screaming match. She began to cry and I felt confused and conflicted.

I went into my room to pray and heard the words of scripture: “If I give away everything I have to feed the poor but do not have love, I have gained nothing”.

This insight which penetrated my heart in that moment was strong and formative. Even in my young confusion I sensed that arguing about the crockpot had nothing to

do with the Gospel call to love. In this case, it negated it. My youthful fervor to stay true to the radical Catholic Worker principles were a cover for my need to control and to be an “authentic and esteemed Catholic



The Corporal Works of Mercy, artwork by Sarah Fuller

Worker House”.

This experience has been a touchstone many times over the years. Even when I act out of the strongest ideals, I recognize that my perspective is limited by my unconscious needs and brokenness. It is in moments of conflict and division that I am vulnerable to fall into the trappings of my brokenness. At the Catholic Worker, living in community in hospitality houses and practicing the works of mercy creates a petri dish for these moments. I seem to have a multitude of opportunities, whether with my spouse, guests, or volunteers to ask the question, “What would be the most loving response in this moment?”

Here, I am not speaking of a sentimental, warm fuzzy, make everything okay love, but rather a love strong enough to forfeit my need to be admired, to be right, to be needed, or to be in control. Rather, it is a love that is strong enough to die a little in the exchange, and if necessary, a love that can say no to violence and injustice of

another while holding an internal stance of care at the same time.

Whenever I am graced to even move toward this type of love, I feel in a way that I am being healed. I am growing in my capacity to trust the emptiness of letting go of my ego needs if only for a few seconds and to allow myself, if briefly, to

be held in the embrace of divine love. I will never tire of the lessons of love, they are what entice and sustain me in the Catholic Worker adventure.

Donation Information:

Checks: Please make checks payable and send to:

Las Vegas Catholic Worker
500 W. Van Buren Ave.

Las Vegas, NV 89106-3039

PayPal Giving Fund:

<http://lvcw.org/giving>
(No fees taken out)

Credit / Debit Card:

<http://lvcw.org/donate>

Click the “Donate” button above the credit card icons, enter the amount, then click the bottom “Donate with a Debit or Credit Card” button.

Venmo:

@LasVegasCatholicWorker

Where Do The Passions Lie?

As five of us at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker near 70 years of age, this article by our friend Dennis gave us questions to ponder.

by Dennis Apel

Although I had a few years of previous exposure to the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, I did not “come to the Catholic Worker” until relatively late in life (age 45) and even then it was not to L.A. but to Oakland and then to Guadalupe, California. So I was neither formed nor informed to any extent by the Los Angeles community. That is to say that I had no expectation for how things needed to be. Only one thing attracted me to the Catholic Worker model: it was the first time, after years of yearning, that I had found a formula for my image of living as a disciple of Jesus as a lay person. And while there are many images of what discipleship looks like, to this day I have not found one that resonates more with me.

Now that the Guadalupe Catholic Worker and its two remaining community members are aging (mostly the Worker and me, not so much Tensie) the question begins to arise, “Was this meant to be a straight line or a circle?” In other words, does this project have a beginning and an end, or is it a continuing effort that has potential for a longer life than ours?

At this point we have 27 years of history, stories, struggles, victories, failures, witness, and incredible relationships. We have had donors and supporters both humble and extravagant who have given their love and affirmation to this effort. Do we have any obligation to them and to those we serve to “die with our boots on” so to speak, or to spend our remaining energies trying to recruit “new blood?” I wonder if the timeless Alcoholics Anonymous adage, “attraction rather than promotion” applies here.

But assuming that the only hope for the viability and sustainability of the Catholic Worker (either ours or the movement itself) hinges on the passion of its community members, the question is, “Where do the passions lie?”

Clearly, Dorothy Day and the original members of the movement seemed to fall heavily on the side of the Beatitudes and the Catholic Church’s social doctrines, and the invitation to take up one’s cross and follow, as the driving principles for their work and lifestyles. Close to a century later, I still find my passion there.

But the world today is so much more complicated with the real-time awareness of all of the world’s grief and the myriad of responses vying for our time and energies if, in fact, we even care. While it

seems that more folks than ever are involved in one cause or another, it also seems, at least to me, that the gospels have become less and less relevant as the driving force in peoples’ activism. I wonder if the Catholic Worker as a model for living the gospel is not much like having a hitching post as a model for a good way to tie up your horse. It is not that a better model than a hitching post was found, it is just that almost no one ties up their horse any more.

To the extent that the radical gospel becomes irrelevant in our lives and especially in the lives of young seekers, the Catholic Worker will become irrelevant in the world. Religious communities and monasteries are experiencing the same drought when it comes to young community members. We are all, it seems, a hitching post without a horse.

That is not to say that there will not always be resistance to the dark side of human nature and its activity on the planet, it is just that the Catholic Worker has traditionally been so specific as a response to the way of the cross that it is hard to imagine it morphing into a chalice for all of the ills being addressed by so many activist organizations. Either it attracts seekers of a gospel life as did first century Christians, or it becomes something else.

Passions seem to be elsewhere these days and they need to be satiated on the landscapes that accommodate them. Those passions are important and their expressions are essential. But not many of them follow the traditional Catholic Worker model, nor do they need to.

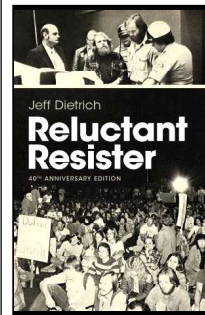
“I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was sick, I was in prison, welcome the stranger, love your enemy,” these are the concerns of the Catholic Worker, and it will attract those who have a passion for those same concerns. To recruit for anything else is promotion rather than attraction.

As Catholic Workers, that is where our decisions lie.

We Will be Closed

Aug. 3-12

Nov. 23-25



Our friend and mentor Jeff Dietrich of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker has just had the 40th anniversary edition of his book: *Reluctant Resister* published. Books are available from Marymount Institute Press.

On August 4th we celebrate
37 years in Las Vegas

PLEASE JOIN US

Volunteer Scheduling:

(702) 647-0728

or mail@lvcw.org

Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker

Thurs.-Sat., 6:15 a.m.

Over 300 “To-go” Meals served to poor & homeless people

(6:15 a.m.: meal assembly, 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.: meal distribution)

Friday, 8 a.m.-10 a.m.:

Clean the World Foundation shower trailer in our empty lot, up to 40 showers given. We provide clean clothing and hygiene supplies, Touro University students offer a monthly medical clinic, and Shear Determination offers haircuts every other week.

Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.:

50 lunches taken to the homeless

Second Sat. of the month:

Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast (In December, the Pancake Breakfast will be Sat., Dec. 23rd, none in Jan. 2024)



On May 12th, members of Shear Determination gave haircuts to 12 folks waiting to take showers in the Clean the World mobile shower trailer. They plan to offer haircuts every other week. Touro University students also set up a medical clinic outdoors once a month. We provide clean clothing and hygiene supplies each Friday to those who come to shower.