

MANNA *in The wilderness*

Winter 1987

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Vol. 1, No. 2

Christ Came To Liberate Us From Fear

by Julia Occhiogrosso

Just before the elections this past November, President Reagan dropped by Las Vegas to give a final campaign plug for his local party candidates. There was a public invitation for anyone who wished to come and greet the President. Many Las Vegans were excited about this opportunity. A couple of us here at the Catholic Worker, and some friends thought it would be an appropriate forum to voice our concerns about the escalating arms race.

When we arrived, a large crowd had already gathered. Walking into the huge open terminal, I was besieged by campaign vendors. Buttons, bumper stickers, hats, and flags were distributed to promote the contemporary conservative candidates. The band was on stage, entertaining the crowd with a few warm-up acts, while young and old scurried about finding their seats before the show began. The entire scene resembled a Ringling Brothers event.

I glanced at our peace banner folded underneath my arm. Our message was so serious and so completely contrary to what most people here would welcome. A surge of anxiety swept over me. If we unfurled the banner, we would not only disrupt the contentment of the crowd, but would also provoke hostile opposition.

I felt a strong urge to turn around and go home. Suddenly I understood how St. Peter must have felt at the time of Jesus' arrest. He huddled himself in the courtyard and tried to hide from the crowd, hoping no one would recognize him as one of the ones who knew Jesus. At this moment, I too felt like hiding, like veiling my eyes from what I knew to be true, almost wishing I did not hold this truth inside me.

I was sufficiently intimidated. As I glanced over at

my friends I could tell they felt the same way. Almost involuntarily the five of us joined hands and in the midst of all the commotion we attempted to pray.

A booming drum roll broke into our prayer. The President had arrived. The band was playing "Glory, glory, halleluia. His truth is marching on..." The crowd cheered and waved. My heart thumped in keen recognition of the irony and deception that consumed this moment. Our fears dispersed. We immediately opened the banner, holding it up high and strong.

My trembling hands were now clenched about a fistful of cloth. I pulled tightly making the letters visible: STOP TESTING NUCLEAR BOMBS. Then, as anticipated, came the stream of angry remarks. "Get a job...go home...get out of here!"

In Las Vegas, testing bombs is a highly sensitive issue. There are thousands of Las Vegans who depend on the employment at the Test Site for their livelihoods. It is understandable that confronting the issue publicly would bring out a negative reaction.

When Catholic Workers feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, we are easily recognized as following the teachings of Jesus. People are ready and willing to come and participate. But when we stand in vigils praying for an end to the arms race and calling for a stop to violence, our numbers thin, our supporters are scarce. Clearly, many Christians do not recognize the Scriptural significance of prophetic witness.

Here at the Catholic Worker, service to the poor and prophetic witness for peace are intimately connected. Both these ministries emerge from our understanding of the Works of Mercy. Both these ministries are motivated by our faith in the Incarnation. Christ is present in the hungry and the homeless, so we feed

Christ is present even in our enemies, so we refuse to help plan their deaths.



them and offer hospitality. Christ is also present in the Russians and the unborn, so minimally we refuse to plan their death or kill them.

Peter's love for Christ consumed his heart and soul. But even this great love was shaken when fear was allowed to enter and dominate his world view. This fear stifled his ability to speak the truth. Indeed it was this fear that caused Peter to deny Christ.

Whether we are a Test Site worker or a Catholic Worker, we, like Peter, are vulnerable to the deathly grip of fear. Christ came to liberate us from our fears. He gave us the gift of the resurrection so that we would be able to proclaim His message without hesitation, without doubt. Through an unflinching faith in the resurrection, we like Peter can grow to become vibrant, outspoken witnesses to the Gospel message.



THANK YOU

Thank you to all those who helped us with the Thanksgiving dinner. We served over 80 meals that day. It was quite a banquet. A special thanks to St. James parish for inviting us to use the hall on Thanksgiving and for extending this invitation for our Thursday evening meals.

We Need:

We especially need volunteers to live full-time at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. You will have interesting, challenging, rewarding work.

Other needs:

#10 cans of tomatoes
pinto beans, rice, pasta
sugar, creamer, coffee
men's sweaters, jackets, gloves, hats
blankets, sleeping bags

Nevada Desert Experience

Nevada Desert Experience invites you to join in the Lenten Desert Witness — a prayerful daily vigil at the Test Site during the 40 days of Lent. There will be Friday evening vigils at the Federal Building during Lent. For more information, call N.D.E. at (702) 646-4814.

OUR NEW SCHEDULE

Monday - Saturday, 6:30 - 8:00 a.m.

Serve coffee at D and Bonanza Streets.

Monday - Friday, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Stop Testing Vigil at the Federal Building
300 S. Las Vegas Blvd.

Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m.

Liturgical Celebration at St. John the Baptist House, 1309 Gold Avenue. Potluck dinner to follow.

Thursdays, 4:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Serve dinner meal at St. James the Apostle Church, 821 N. H Street

To volunteer for any of these activities, call (702) 647-0728.

SIGN ME UP!

Yes. I want to receive **MANNA**, the L.V.C.W. Newsletter.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone () _____

Send to: L.V.C.W., 1309 Gold Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106

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