

MANNA *in The wilderness*

Spring 1987

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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Vigiling At The Nuclear Test Site

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I am in the desert. Here, before me, stretching beyond what is visible, is the home of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. Each morning, as part of the Lenten Desert Experience, I vigil outside the Test Site. There are 10 of us today greeting the workers with our signs, songs and prayers. Afterwards, vigilers have a chance to be alone in the desert.

I haven't slept well these last two nights. I thought it might be due to the caffeinated sodas I've been sipping. Yet, the wiser part of me knows that something more than caffeine is affecting my sleeping patterns.

There is a dreadful darkness lurking in this place. The taunting voice of the wind follows me. I empathize with the brush, traveling aimlessly in a monotonous swirl. Today in the desert the ultimate evil—world annihilation—confronts me. For the first time, I can imagine what it was like for Jesus. He, too, was tormented and confronted in the desert. Yes, that great and final power, Death, sits in the pit of my stomach, gnawing at my spirit. The stark and grotesque power of this seemingly endless mass of testing ground is leading me into temptation.

I feel weak and vulnerable in the face of such evil. How close we are to our own extinction. I've read reports of our nuclear stockpiles. I've seen anti-nuclear films, and attended demonstrations. None of them has brought me to feel what I am feeling now. In the presence of the Test Site, all the information I've assimilated and stored takes on a new and tangible reality.

I'm disappointed in myself. I've allowed this new experience of reality to activate my most basic fear. I am tempted to despair, to give in, to submit to the power that appears to be winning. Confronted by a power that seems greater than all life, the power of the nuclear holocaust, I am trembling.

I scare myself when I even contemplate the notion of giving in to despair. Mysteriously, it is at these fragile spiritual moments that the grace of God often intercedes. I feel my spirit being raised and God's truth is revealed in new and more profound ways.

Much to my surprise I find the strength to reject despair. Perhaps because I recognize that despair—the absence of hope—stifles the power I have to reveal God's love in our world. Worse, collective despair breeds a moral paralysis and is intimately connected to all that is evil.

We cannot afford to allow despair to succeed. There is no time for cynical sighs, no room for rationalizing. All that exists and all that will continue to exist depends on the choices we make with our lives. For those who love life, who love justice and peace, those choices are clear.

Our lives are our ultimate resource. We cannot possibly give more than our lives. We must not choose to give less. At the same time, it is difficult to believe that our lives can liberate us from the nuclear threat. Yet we remember that the gift of our lives comes from a God that is Eternal. Jesus shows us that liberation is possible when one is willing to lay down one's life for a friend. We must be willing to sacrifice, to follow the way of Jesus. The radical implications of His message are desperately awaiting their realization in our world.

I long to be part of that realization. It is a blessing to be in a community that attempts to dedicate themselves to this purpose. I am challenged to make God's love a concrete reality, even as the bombs explode underneath this desert ground.

If we act in our world as though love is a real and transforming power, then indeed it is. The task is set before us. There are those who are hungry—we can feed them. The imprisoned long for companionship—we can visit them. The wounded await their healing—we can reach out and hold them.

Each morning before we begin our vigil, we gather a few large stones and prop up a simple cross. As I stand with my placard by the roadside, I throw an occasional glance over to see how our cross is holding up. With each glance, I find it more difficult to move my eyes back to the passing traffic. This symbol of God's suffering love offers a quiet comfort to the cold morning. It is an inspirational reminder that while despair gives strength to evil, selfless love finds hope as her reward.

Yes, it is possible to find hope in the desert. Life persists despite the obstacles. Green succulents break through the dry earth and stand firm in the wind. The silent strength of the Joshua Tree assures me of God's presence. Hills in the distance speak to me with enduring courage of life's power over death.



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CHALLENGE FOR PEACE: BAN NUCLEAR TESTING

"It is time to resist our participation in government policies that conflict with the Gospel. We must change public policy in accord with the clear teaching of the peace pastoral. On the fourth anniversary of the Challenge of Peace, I invite all of you to come to the Nevada desert to pray at the place where all U.S. nuclear weapons are tested."

—Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

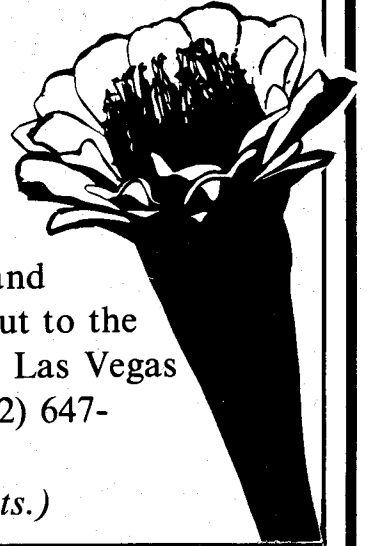
SCHEDULE:

Sunday, May 3rd St. Francis de Sales Church
1111 Michael Way
7:30-8:00 p.m. Registration
8:00-9:00 p.m. Prayer & Reflection

Monday, May 4th St. Francis de Sales Parish Hall
8:00-9:00 a.m. Registration/
Light Breakfast
9:00 a.m.-Noon Scriptural Reflection
Noon-1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00-5:00 p.m. Nonviolence training/
Scenario, legal, role play
5:00-6:00 p.m. Dinner
6:30-7:30 p.m. Ecumenical liturgy—
"Darkness to Light"

Tuesday, May 5th Nevada Test Site
5:15-6:30 a.m. Travel to NTS
6:30-9:30 a.m. Vigil & Eucharistic Liturgy
Celebrant—Bishop Thomas Gumbleton
9:30-10:00 a.m. Light meal
* 10:00-11:30 a.m. .. Nonviolent Civil Disobedience

On May 3 - 5, join Bishop Gumbleton, Pax Christi USA and the Nevada Desert Experience for prayer, reflection and nonviolent witness.



Catholic Workers and friends will carpool out to the site together. Call the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, (702) 647-0728.

(See schedule of events.)

Help Feed the Poor

In November we began to serve a weekly meal to an average of 40 persons each week. In the last two months this number has steadily increased. Last week we served 130 individual meals. We strongly expect this pattern of growth to continue.

We need your help if we are to continue to serve the Las Vegas poor. Your consistent support is essential.

LVCW Weekly 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 St.

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

We Need:

#10 cans of tomatoes
pinto beans, rice, pasta
sugar, creamer, coffee (instant)
volunteers, financial support

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St. John the Baptist House
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Las Vegas, NV 89106
Tel: (702) 647-0728

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