

MANNA *in The wilderness*

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The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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Catholic Worker in Las Vegas Five Years

THE FLAME OF HOPE IS STILL BURNING

by Julia Occhiogrosso

It was five years ago this month when we began our journey from Los Angeles to open a Catholic Worker house in Las Vegas. I recall with nostalgic fondness the departing scene. The pick-up was overloaded with donated furniture, rolls of carpet fastened precariously to the sides. We drove away slowly as the Los Angeles Catholic Worker friends and their farewell gestures disappeared from view.

The prospects of entering the strange land of Las Vegas kept me in emotional unrest. I vacillated between a fear of the unknown and an excitement in being part of a new creation. Steadiness only emerged from a depth of faith in the power of the Gospel message. Direction came from feeble but faithful attempts to respond to the Catholic Worker vision of service to the poor, resistance to violence and injustice and Christian community. Commitment to these values has brought me close to both the cross and the resurrection, the fullness of life itself. In touching and being touched by the suffering realities of poverty and injustice, my life has been deeply changed. I am renewed in Jesus' example of compassion, mercy and love as the true transforming model to follow and abide in.

The naive hope I had five years ago has at times been shattered but in the piecing together new angles and stronger experiences of hope have appeared. There is a light dwelling within me, that feels like a vigil candle in a procession. I carry it carefully, guarding against the winds of despair. Holding it always before me, in awe of the Grace that keeps it constantly burning; flickering much in the dark, but always there.

There have been many through the years who have passed through our doors and drawn from the light. Still, even more so we have been



blessed with the light of those who have added strength and color to the flame.

As we celebrate our fifth year in Las Vegas we renew our commitment to the life and work of the Catholic Worker. We invite you our friends and supporters to renew your own commitment to the radical gospel call, to stand with the poor and outcast. As we walk in the darkness of our interior journeys as well as the darkness of this stricken world our most essential task will be to illuminate the true light of the reign of God, in living lives of mercy, compassion and divine love.

A Volunteer Reflection

by Stevi Carroll

I heard that a young woman was going to join our community and open a hospitality house. Soon St. John the Baptist Catholic Worker opened. Since that time five years ago, many threads of Catholic Worker memories have been woven into my tapestry of justice and peace work.

For instance, how would I ever have had the opportunity to stand in front of the Federal Building holding a sign written to pique the interest, or conscience, of passersby and have

someone yell, "Get a job!" only to have Julia point to me and offer back, "She's got one. She's a teacher!"

There is also the morning when I got to see just how fast three women could pack up pitchers, sugar and cream containers and card tables as Wendy, Julia and I flung things in the coffee truck while a man yelled threatening racial aspersions at us. Julia loves to tell me how much improved and loving this fellow is now. I've seen him since, and he is.

Love is a marvelous medicine.

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A Volunteer Reflection, continued

And then there was Buddy. Somehow I'd managed to make it to my late thirties without ever being close to anyone who died. My own father had been sick for so many years prior to his death, and I'd been in Las Vegas, not with him, when he died, that while I knew I'd miss him, the actual involvement in his death had not been present. But Buddy was a different story.

Soon after Buddy arrived at the Worker, he charmed us with his tales of his old entertainment days. His mischievous eyes and waggish smiles punctuated every tale. Every time I stopped by the house, Buddy would take my hand like a gentleman doing a minuet and then slide into a hug.

One Christmas my mother visited, and we celebrated with the folks at the Worker house. Buddy saw my mother through the back window in the kitchen and glided into the room, taking her hand while crooning, "You must be Stevi's mother." Looking around at the unfamiliar faces, she laughed nervously, but went into the living room and sat down with Buddy at her side. Within a very few minutes, my mother was smiling comfortably and laughing while thoroughly engrossed in conversation about the "old days" with Buddy.

Then we found out Buddy was terminally ill. As his condition declined, Julia set up visiting times for many of us so that he would not be alone, and she could continue to complete the other tasks involved in serving hundreds of other people. I had the privilege of being present when Buddy died. Human dignity flooded the room as Julia held his hand, he sat forward and then reclined, and his life gently slipped away. Death for me became one of the many gifts we receive during our life cycle rather than something to be feared and to attempt to shun.

My involvement with the Worker also has allowed me to offer my students the opportunity to do 'service' work. This idea came to me one day as a student made a disparaging remark about 'bums'. Over the course of two years, I brought the kids, three at a time, to dinner served at St. James and got to hear them whisper as they got out of the car, "This is just like the Depression" or "Look at the little kids!"

There was a crippled elderly black man named Willie who would sit patiently inside and wait for dinner. One afternoon I had three thirteen-year-old white boys with me. As we set up, the boys sat and talked with Willie. Suddenly on one of my trips from the kitchen to the hall, I realized all of the adults were in the kitchen and there alone in the hall, Willie and the three boys visited. The boys were absorbed in Willie's tales of what life had been like for a young black man in Las Vegas in the 1940's.

On my next trip to the hall, the boys were filling Willie in on what it is like to be a teenager in 1990. The joy and interest flowed both directions.

My reflections on the Catholic worker in Las Vegas sparkle like fireflies on a warm southern summer night. The adage goes, "Time flies when you're having fun," and the years overlap leaving an even finer shine on my life than I had before. During the 1980's, some of us my age did everything we could to enrich our lives only through an acquisition of cash and the items cash obtains. But my life is far richer than it ever would have been if I had not had the opportunity to share in the St. John the Baptist Catholic Worker these past five years.

Stevi Carroll is a mother and school teacher who has been a volunteer with the Las Vegas Catholic Worker for five years.

L.V. Catholic Worker Schedule

Monday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m. - 7:30 a.m.

Serve breakfast at E and Washington St.

Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Prayer Vigil in front of downtown Federal Building

Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker house, 500 W. Van Buren, potluck following.

Wednesday, August 29, 5:30 p.m.

**Five Year Anniversary Celebration,
St. John the Baptist House**

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LAS VEGAS CATHOLIC WORKER

The Catholic Worker is a spiritually-based community convinced of the radical truths of the Gospel and inspired by the life of Christ. It was founded in New York in 1933 by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. Since then, over 100 Catholic Worker communities have formed in cities all over the United States.

We seek to heal a broken world through the simple yet powerful acts of justice and love involved in feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless.

In keeping with our faith in the Incarnation and the reverence for all life we oppose all war and acts of violence. We embrace non-violence in the tradition of Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day.

As Christians we believe we are called to transform the world by individually taking the call of the Gospel into our heart and reflecting it back into action in the world around us. This is most effectively done by our service to the poor.

We invite you to join our community by helping us with our projects, supplying us with our needs, participating in our vigils, and attending our liturgy. Together we can transform the world.

WE ARE NOT TAX EXEMPT

All gifts to the Catholic Worker go to a common fund which is used to meet the daily expenses of our work.

As a community, we have never sought tax-exempt status since we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience which come at a personal sacrifice, without governmental approval, regulation or reward. We believe it would be a misuse of our limited resources of time and personnel (as well as a violation of our understanding of the meaning of community) to create the paperwork necessary for obtaining tax-deductible status. Also, since much of what we do might be considered "political," in the sense that we strive to question, challenge and confront our present society and many of its structures and values, some would deem us technically ineligible for tax-deductible, charitable status.

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