

# MANNA

in the  
wilderness

Spring 1996

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 10, Number 2

## A Ripple in the Sea of Suffering which Surrounds Us

"You found them in a desert land,  
in the howling waste of the wilderness;  
encircling them and caring for them,  
guarding them as the apple of your eye."  
-Deut. 32

by Julia Occhiogrosso

His humility and charm have endeared him to a number of our volunteers. His approach to life is optimistic and kind. It saddened many of us to see him brutally victimized by an ambush of youth who attacked him while he slept in his little spot by the freeway. The morning after, when he made his way to the coffee line, his gait was slow and painful. His eyes were swollen and bloody.

Life on the street is brutal and reckless. The wounded gentle and fragile try to survive with the wounded bitter and tough. Stripped of all the material camouflage the world can offer, the poor hang on their cross with their wounds naked and exposed.

Like each of us they need a safe place to bring their wounded souls. A place where they will not be judged, ridiculed or condescended to, a place where they are listened to, where their particular story can be heard and received in a loving manner; a place where they are called by name. This particular task demands the qualities of time and presence. It is often less taxing to ladle out 400 bowls of soup than it is to stand for ten minutes with someone who needs to speak his mind.

Ten years ago, when we first came out to Las Vegas, Rickey Chun (a Catholic Worker community member) and myself wanted in some small way to serve the needs of the poor in Las Vegas. So we hit the streets in August with some refreshing ice water. From our conversations with people on the street we were directed to begin serving coffee to the early morning laborers on "D" street. Over the years the project grew to where we were serving close to 400 meals each morning.

As we tried to respond to this growth we came to realize that the Catholic Worker personalist approach had much in conflict with the demands of operating a large and continually growing soup line. Like many large operations attention to human needs gets lost and compromised for a safe and efficient operation. We realized that we were moving away from our original intention to be simply a caring presence. We were spending more energy

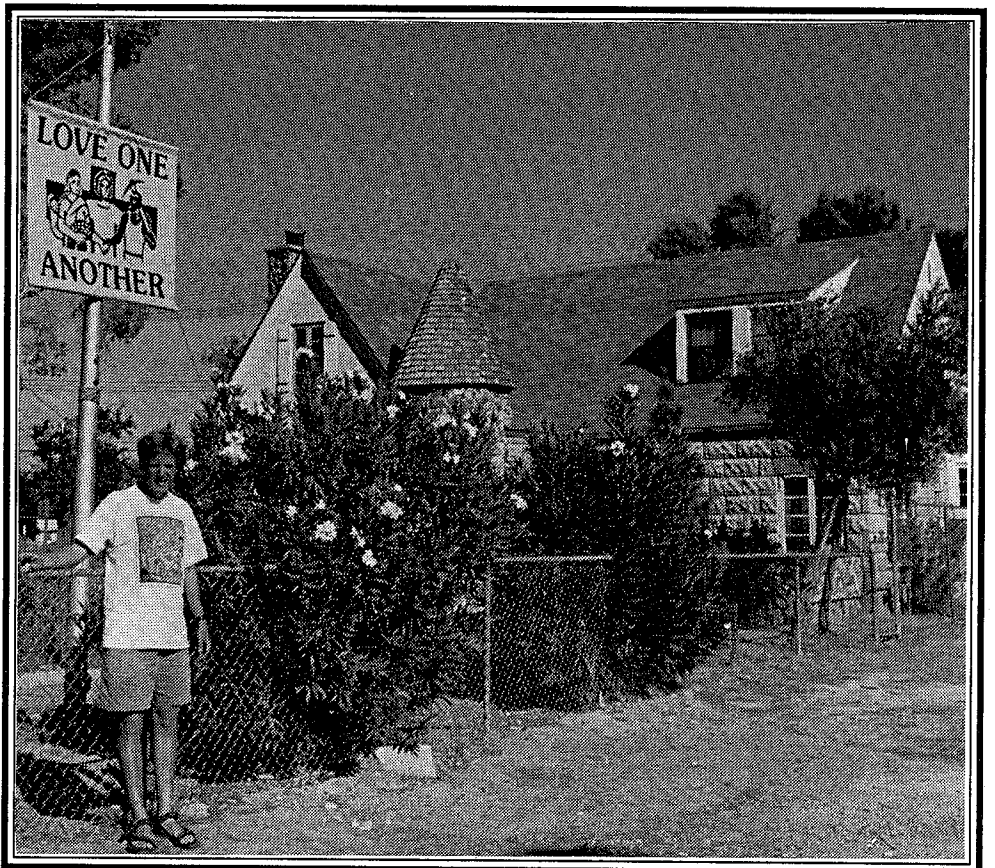
managing the numbers of people that came to us.

It took us two years to make the changes needed to scale the numbers down. It was a difficult decision which we struggled with for a long while. We have scaled down by serving simpler meals. Still, five or six volunteers are attempting to be present to over a hundred individuals.

One good thing about the changes is that it forced us to come back to ourselves, and to admit our limits and rediscover new ways to show personal care and connection to those in need. We remembered that it was never our goal at the Catholic Worker to become a social service agency or mega soup line. It was always our intention to offer an alternative way of being in relationship to our world and to one another based on the radical gospel message of unconditional love. This is much easier said than done. And we

know that we have stumbled in this effort over and over again. Yet to hold on to such an aspiration is what gives our time on this earth purpose and integrity.

With the changes we have also had more time and energy to offer to the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN). This new project in Las Vegas involves a variety of faith communities responding personally to the growing number of homeless families. They will offer hospitality to these families in the evenings in their church facilities on a rotating basis. The Catholic Worker will offer the use of our house as a day center for the families in the network. We feel particularly supportive of this program because of its personalist approach. By personalist, first I am referring to the nature of the service effort. With IHN only one social worker is hired to assist the families and coordinate volunteers. But all the hospitality is accomplished by people of (CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE)



## OUR TENTH YEAR IN LAS VEGAS

Above is the Las Vegas Catholic Worker house, built in 1933 by the Christensen family; one of the oldest homes in Las Vegas. Gary Cavalier stands under our new banner. We want to thank contractor Tim Caves for donating his time, talent and materials remodeling the house as we get ready to do hospitality for homeless families. He is building a beautiful children's play area, and he has been getting other contractors and suppliers to donate materials as well. His wife Laurie is a long-time volunteer at our coffee line Friday mornings.



Every week Sister Ginny Corley (left, handing a box to Gary Cavalier) brings boxes of frozen leftovers from St. Rose Dominican Hospital to be used in making soup for our morning breakfast line.

## BEST IN TOWN

by Peter Ediger

**On Saturday morning  
we are in the dark in the park.  
They come cold, calling our coffee  
the best in town which builds tall towers for  
its tourists and small hearts for its homeless.  
Still warmed by last night's wine, they break  
the bread as the light dawns on us all.  
I look more deeply into Joseph's eyes  
and see my brothers all around.  
While the inside of me cries  
the outside is still cool  
as I wonder whose hunger  
is being fed here.**

*Peter Ediger is a poet and long time coffee line volunteer. He comes every Saturday at 5 a.m. and turns on the stove and loads the pickup truck so that we can "sleep in" until 6 a.m.*

(CONTINUED FROM OTHER SIDE)

faith taking personal responsibility for the care of the poor in our midst. This includes individuals volunteering their time to prepare food and sleep at the host site with the homeless families. In this way the work of caring for the poor is initiated by people of faith rather than delegated to an agency or institution. Secondly, a personalist approach carries with it an assumption about the value and sacredness of the person. IHN philosophy resonates strongly with this and emphasizes the need for compassionate care for the families who come to us in their brokenness.

Homelessness or having no place in this world, is a pain-filled existence. Looking at the current policies of our nation it does not look like things will get much better. We can no longer look to governments or institutions to solve this problem. Neither can we as individuals find our way into the bushes to protect street people from the brutality of this existence.

We can only respond to what is set before us in human and usually small ways. Accepting these limitations we are forced to confront our own powerlessness while entering the challenge to place our faith in the true Source of power, unconditional love manifested in human relationship. This will never occur in a grand scale. Only in the small ways we open ourselves to experiencing the suffering of those in our midst. In this way, people who have no place in this world might find a home in our hearts. In the faith that our simple loving presence might send out a healing ripple into the sea of pain which surrounds us.

### FINANCES

Last Christmas our appeal collected \$6,552 (or \$546 for each month of 1996). Added to our regular monthly donations of \$775 this gives us \$1,321 per month to feed one hundred folks 17 mornings each month at our coffeeline and offer hospitality (showers, etc.) to five homeless families seven days a week in our home, plus pay us our weekly "salary" of \$10 each. Getting our house in nice shape for the Interfaith Hospitality Network homeless families has been expensive and we **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.**

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### PLEASE JOIN US:

**Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.**

Morning Prayer at the house.

**Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.**

Serve breakfast at Ethel Pearson Park (E and Washington St.) to the homeless.

**Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.**

Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker House, potluck following.

**Seven Days a Week**

Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, we need volunteers.

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