

MANNA *in the wilderness*

Fall 1996

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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EMPTY, BUT FOR A FEW CRUMBS

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I was not present at the line to witness the incident. But it was told that a man attempted to make way with all the margarine from the tables. Gary and a couple of guys caught up with him and asked that he give back the margarine. He threw it on the ground and stormed away.

Later in the morning when most people had dispersed, he returned with an onslaught of insults and threats to deliver to Gary. Gary stood and listened attentively to the man's complaints. He went on for a few minutes, finally terminating his aggressive display by spitting in Gary's face and walking away.

It was at least a week before we saw him on our line. Gary was ladling out the last servings of soup. I watched as he ladled out a healthy serving to his aggressor. From a few yards away I could see a slightly different man than whom I'd heard about a week ago. His demeanor had softened, his eyes kept their glance to the ground. Like an embarrassed child he ate his food in silence.

Later Gary informed us that he had apologized and that he admitted to struggling with a drug addiction. We learned his name was Bill (not his real name to protect his privacy).

While I believe his apology was authentic, within a few days Bill was back to stealing bottles of ketchup off the tables. This time the guys themselves took care of it. They retrieved the ketchup and let him know that this was not an acceptable code of behavior.

Our attempts to enter into these destructive patterns and break them are often futile. Even when we believe that we have reason to celebrate at some small sign of healing a new development arises to remind us once again that there is no easy solution to the brokenness we face.

Our responses to those in need vary. Yet there seems to be some basic stages of growth that occur from the start of our decision to respond to our brothers and sisters in need. The first stage is when we experience the poor with a romantic idealism. In the beginning they are seen as almost saints; they can do no wrong. The second stage is an ability to at least see them as having problems but still as victims

to be empathetic towards. Finally, as we become more and more familiar with the dynamics and situations it is easy to become disillusioned and develop what some have called "compassion fatigue".

Our disillusionment sets in when we are exposed to the depth of brokenness that seems to accompany many who are on the street. We find it difficult to understand why people continue to perpetuate their situations by staying stuck in unhealthy patterns. Why do they blow their

our very being and puts into question not only our naive perceptions of the poor but our understanding of ourselves in relationship to the messiness of the suffering reality in this world. There is nothing left inside to give.

Jesus is present in that core place where the discomfort and pain of disillusionment dwell. Jesus is present in his words "You have heard it said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you: love your enemy and pray for your persecutors". Or more, "If you love those who love



ENGRAVING BY DAVID KLEIN

monthly disability checks on drugs? Why are they unable to get a regular job and keep it? Why do they keep exploiting my generosity? Why can't they appreciate my help? By now their lives should be fixed!

We become confused, angry and cynical. We are disillusioned when the perceptions we held start to deteriorate. We no longer have a reason to continue our efforts. We experience a death that cuts to the core of

you what merit is there in that, even the tax collectors do this". Jesus is present inviting us to grow in our capacity to love.

The mystery is that, when we are even slightly open to the depth of this teaching, we are often graced with personal transformation and healing through these very encounters.

Our faith is what will sustain us and enable us to return in some
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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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Las Vegas Catholic Worker
(702) 647-0728
500 West Van Buren Avenue
Las Vegas, NV 89106

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way to the painful encounters we often want to avoid. And even if our steps are small and unsteady, once we begin this journey there is no turning back. We will die to ego needs which time and time again seem to dominate our actions. Yet like a loaf of bread prepared for a common meal, our hearts will have more potential for transformation in its broken disillusioned state than the loaf of bread untouched; never shared.

Even as the plate returns to sit in front of us empty but for a few crumbs, we will be able to embrace this emptiness and know its richness.

We learn over and over again that our emptiness, our brokenness has something in common with Bill. It is an emptiness, a brokenness that can only be healed by an encounter and unyielding relationship with Divine love.

Julia Occhiogrosso has been at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker ten years.

Following are our finances for the first 6 months of the year, we work to be faithful stewards with your donations. We depend on your support to feed around 140 folks 4 mornings each week and to be able to offer our home during the day to homeless families seven days a week. Besides financial contributions this year we received donations of food, clothing, construction labor and materials, printing, tables, veterinary and dental services and a car.
Bless you for your support!

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
DONATIONS	\$2,999	735	1,588	2,280	1,137	1,343	10,082
EXPENSES							
Coffeeline	\$ 673	463	533	233	482	202	2,587
Truck Gas	51	58	80	60	40	57	347
Truck Insur, regist.	40	0	0	0	0	383	423
Truck Repairs	461	3	0	72	51	81	668
Help to Others	2	0	0	320	85	121	528
House Utilities	237	209	248	143	191	386	1,415
House Improvements	227	360	218	4	0	100	908
House Maintenance	56	9	77	78	0	130	350
Hospitality House costs	15	0	0	37	0	0	52
Yard and Garden	55	23	77	12	6	5	178
Dogs, Cat, Chickens	99	23	46	68	20	41	297
Potluck Tues. Night	19	0	12	0	0	5	36
Newsletter	0	0	252	0	0	6	258
Volunteer Support	0	0	0	0	23	61	84
Food for House	64	49	0	9	74	65	261
Postage & Supplies	54	35	4	25	34	0	152
Travel Expenses	0	0	8	22	0	0	30
Weekly Salary (\$15)	86	86	86	129	169	129	685
Shortage/Overage	56	-68	-16	27	118	0	116
TOTAL EXPENSES	2,195	1,252	1,623	1,422	1,111	1,770	9,374

OUR JOB IS TO LOVE OTHERS WITHOUT STOPPING TO INQUIRE WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE WORTHY.

-THOMAS MERTON

BETTER & BETTER OFF

by Peter Maurin

The world would be better off

if people tried to become better.

And people would become better

if they stopped trying to become better

off.

For when everybody tries to become better off, nobody is better off.

But when everybody tries to become better,

everybody is better off.

We need volunteers to help with our morning coffeeline, call 647-0728

We will be serving our annual Thanksgiving morning meal on Thursday, Nov. 28. We need cooked, deboned Turkeys and other Thanksgiving ingredients by Wednesday, Nov. 27. We will have our Ham & Egg Christmas Meal this year, more details in next newsletter.