

MANNAIN the wilderness

October 1999

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 14, Number 1

AFTER TEN YEARS AND 600,000 MEALS IN ETHEL PEARSON PARK:

Catholic Worker & Homeless in Exile

by Gary Cavalier

On Friday, September 17, at 6:45 a.m., Marshals pulled up to Ethel Pearson park and told us we could no longer serve our simple breakfast meal.

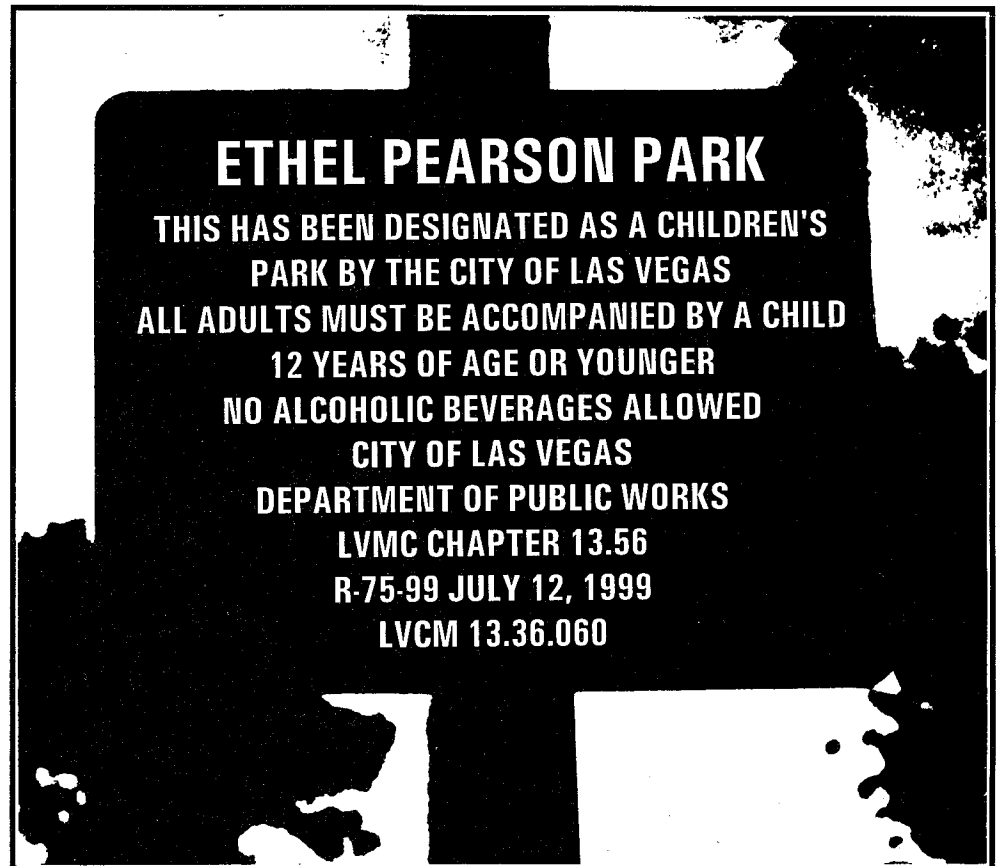
We have served our morning meal for over ten years (around 600,000 meals served in Ethel Pearson park) and yet we were given no notice to find another location, we were to stop immediately. In front of Sr. Karen and Fr. Fred and the UNLV Catholic students who get up early each Friday morning, I was told by the Marshals that I "was undoing their good work" of trying to get rid of everyone from the park during the day.

It was the Marshals who came to ask us to leave, because Metro (the Las Vegas Police) have refused to enforce this new law which bans adults not accompanying children under 12 years old from 3 parks in this poor neighborhood, each a few blocks from the Catholic Worker hospitality house. No other parks in the city have this new law.

The new law was passed on July 12 of this year due to complaints from neighbors about "considerable drug activity and the amount of homeless individuals living in the parks". We have talked to the few neighbors bordering the park and none of them have concerns, in fact a few come to our morning meal. Ten minutes after we finish serving our morning meal, most of the 100 or so guests are gone.

The Southern Nevada Homeless Coalition (made up of many groups including Catholic Community Services and the Salvation Army) has been working with the city officials to compromise. The Homeless Coalition proposes making the areas of the park where the swings and slides are located an area for adults with children under 12, and opening the rest of the park to the public.

The Marshals admitted to me there are few children living near these parks. The law is just an attempt to



WE ARE NOW SERVING IN THE CHURCH PARKING LOT OF ST. JAMES AFTER BEING EXILED FROM PEARSON PARK

kick the homeless out of the one fairly beautiful and safe area left when you have nothing; the public parks.

Ethel Pearson Park is large, almost two square blocks, and when I have driven by during the past few years there are usually only a sprinkling of folks using it, homeless men resting, and on weekends teenagers playing basketball. Now there are no basketball games on weekends because the new regulation requires teenagers 12-18 to be taken to Clark County Juvenile Hall unless they are accompanying and responsible for a child 12 years old or younger. This is terrible because teenagers in the neighborhood have nowhere else to play.

These days the park sits empty. It has a large beautiful tempting green lawn, lots of old trees offering shade, but those new signs keep us from trespassing onto our public park.

The former Mayor of Las Vegas (Jan Laverty-Jones) gave my wife Julia a certificate establishing "Julia Occhiogrosso Day" in Las Vegas for our work serving the homeless. Our

new mayor, Oscar Goodman "expressed concern about limiting access to the parks. Parks are for everybody", but then he proceeded to vote for the new resolution along with the rest of the City Council.

It is sad that in these prosperous times there is a climate of taking what little benefits the poor have away. Public Parks are the one beautiful and safe refuge the homeless and poor have. Ethel Pearson Park is a beautiful island of green grass placed in the middle of vacant lots full of broken glass, abandoned houses, and the scattered nicely kept old homes of the old-timers.

Thanks to the hospitality of Fr. Michael Blackburn of St. James the Apostle Catholic Church, we were able to serve our simple breakfast the next day in the Church parking lot, and continue to serve there. We only had to move 2 blocks away from our old serving spot, and it is going well. We serve in exile until the homeless may again come down from the railroad tracks and weeds and rest in the promised land of Ethel Pearson park.

AN ASSUMPTION OF THE CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT:

EVERY PERSON IS AN IMAGE OF GOD

by Larry Holben

Every person is an image of God. That is to say, *every* person --the least, the greatest; the most gifted, the most challenged; the most delightful, the most repellent-- is made in the likeness and image of the God who is passionate, self-emptying love, with all the terrible dignity that fact entails.

To regain something of the astonishing meaning of this assertion, we need to remember that, in the ancient world, an "image" was more than a mirror reflection or "little picture" (although it was those things as well); it was an icon that to some extent carried, communicated and participated in the power of the thing it represented-- which is one of the reasons the prohibition of graven images was so fundamental a part of the Hebrew religious ethos.

Applied to human persons, then, the affirmation that each of us has been created in the divine image does not mean simply that we are called to some sort of pious game of make-believe along the lines of "wouldn't the world be a better place if we all acted *as if* every person we met were God encountering us?" No! It means that, in actual fact, each person that crosses our path is a living icon of the God that made and sustains all that is. Thus, each person is both glorious in his or her essence and potential and, to some extent, tragic or terrifying in the distortion of such potential through the effects of that breach of God's intent for creation which we call sin.

Clearly, to allow this reality to seep into our consciousness immediately turns everything about the way we normally live with each other on

its head, smashing the implicit complacency of our lives.

Suddenly, everyone (and thus, everything) has overwhelming importance. Life and all its choices are discovered to be exploding with moral energy. There are no small issues, just as there are no small people. If God is self-emptying love and if each individual is both the object and a living icon of that love, then there is no one

EASY ESSAY by Peter Maurin

In the first centuries of Christianity the hungry were fed at a personal sacrifice, the naked were clothed at a personal sacrifice, the homeless were sheltered at a personal sacrifice. And because the poor were fed, clothed and sheltered at a personal sacrifice, the pagans used to say about the Christians "See how they love each other". In our own day the poor are no longer fed, clothed and sheltered at a personal sacrifice, but at the expense of the taxpayers. And because the poor are no longer fed, clothed and sheltered the pagans say about the Christians "See how they pass the buck". (Peter Maurin is co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement.)

Breakfast line has moved!
We are now serving our morning meal in St. James Church parking lot (G & McWilliams St.)

for whom anything less than a full realization of these realities is acceptable.

The above is an excerpt from Larry Holben's book All the Way to Heaven: A Theology of the Catholic Worker. Copies of his book may be purchased from the Los Angeles Catholic Worker for \$10. Call: (323) 267-8789 or write: 632 N. Britannia St., L.A., CA 90033.

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**
FOR OUR MORNING
BREAKFAST, CALL 647-0728



RELIGIOUS ACTION FOR DISARMAMENT

Dec. 30, 1999 - Jan. 2, 2000
Las Vegas, NV & the Nevada
(Nuclear Weapon) Test Site
Join a candlelit procession onto
the Test Site at midnight, Dec. 31
Join Bishop Tom Gumbleton, Dr.
Rosalie Bertell, Fr. Dan Berrigan,
Joyce Hollyday, Ched Myers, Fr.
John Dear, Sr. Rosemary Lynch

Nevada Desert Experience
(702) 646-4814
Box 46645, Las Vegas, NV 89114

PLEASE JOIN US:

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

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

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

Meal served at St. James Church parking lot (G & McWilliams St.) to the poor and homeless.

Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.:

Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker, potluck following.

Seven Days a Week:

Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, call 638-8806 to volunteer

Last Saturday each month; 9:00 a.m.:

Deliver food to homes in need, gather for reflection & prayer, call for info.

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