
MANNA *in the wilderness*

December 1999

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 14, Number 2

“We were just sitting there talking when lines of people began to form, saying, ‘We need bread.’ ...

December 1999

Dear friend,

The basic routine has been part of the fabric of our lives for so long that it is easy to take it for granted. From a sleepy dream state I hear Gary close the front door behind him. The familiar scene creeps into my brain as I imagine him driving in the silence of pre-dawn traffic to the Catholic Worker house. I see through the mist of my imaginings the Catholic Worker kitchen; pots boiling, beads of steam clinging to the windows and walls. I hear the clanging of pot lids and the stirring of the day's soup. As Gary pours pasta into ten gallon pots, his crewmembers around the Vegas Valley arise in solidarity to ready themselves for their weekly trip down to E and Van Buren. For us at the Catholic Worker the loyalty of our extended volunteer community is the sustenance, the daily bread of our efforts to feed the hungry and be a compassionate presence to the poor. In the raw chill of winter mornings our volunteer's supportive presence becomes especially meaningful. Gradually they trickle in to take their place about the chopping block, to help carry pots or do whatever needs to be done. Some volunteers wait with the patient line of street people at the serving site for the caravan of servers to arrive.

Over the last fourteen years hundreds of volunteers from all different walks of life have joined together for the common purpose of feeding the folks on the street. Many relationships and deep bonds have formed. And as we come to you once again with our annual appeal for financial assistance we wish to give special attention to the gratitude we feel for all those who support our work in the many ways that this support expresses itself. We recognize our dependence on the Grace of the Holy One incarnated by the generosity of many. We continue to need financial support for our food line, for our monthly food distribution project to families and seniors and for the maintenance and upkeep of the Catholic Worker Hospitality house, which continues to serve as a daysite for the homeless families in the Interfaith Hospitality Network program.

Each morning before we go out and serve we gather in a circle around the chopping block and read together a prayer inspired by the followers of Mother Teresa. These words help to center us and keep us close to the simple purpose of our mission. Thank you for helping us stay faithful to this purpose,

Julia Occhiogrosso Gary Cavalier
Julia Occhiogrosso, Gary Cavalier

WEDNESDAY MORNING SOUPLINE VOLUNTEERS:

Derry Cartwright, Michele Brodoski, Colleen Brown, Bernie Carey, Mary Dickie, John Hazard, Fr. John McShane, Gene and Joanne Scherschel

THURSDAY MORNING SOUPLINE VOLUNTEERS:

Peg Bean, Derry Cartwright, Paul Colbert, Dale and Peggy Devitt, Gisela Walquist, Anne Welsh

FRIDAY MORNING SOUPLINE VOLUNTEERS:

The UNLV Newman Center and friends, including: *John Eustice, Ryan Hall, Elizabeth Kang, Fr. Fred Lucci, O.P., Jennell Miller, Jonathan Morgan, Eric Orzel, Pauline Villapando*

SATURDAY MORNING SOUPLINE VOLUNTEERS:

Lori Bossy, Sonja Brouwers, Derry Cartwright, Peter Ediger, Jim and Marsha France, Brock Fraser, Bob Schill, Anne Welsh

MONTHLY FOOD BASKET DISTRIBUTION VOLUNTEERS:

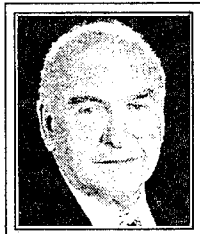
Lori Bossy, Sonja Brouwers, Nancy Carlzen, Laurie Caves, Dale and Peggy Devitt, Jane Fransiolì, Anne Welsh

... We could not say, ‘Go be thou filled.’ If there were six small loaves and a few fishes, we had to divide them.”

-Dorothy Day, Co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement

WHERE I STAND

A new homeless policy



Mike O'Callaghan

MORE THAN 10 YEARS have passed since I first joined Julia Occhiogrosso and her volunteer Catholic Worker crew feeding the homeless down by the railroad tracks. Less than a year later the city asked us to move from that area because of the growing number of cardboard shelters and the desire of a business to build warehouses there. So the breakfast feeding program, with city approval, was moved to Ethel Pearson Park where it remained until last month.

It was Friday, Sept. 17, at 6:45 a.m., that city marshals told the volunteers they could no longer feed the poor there. No prior warning, and no offer of another reasonable place to feed the homeless, it was move on and don't come back. It was a real shock for the UNLV students serving food that day. This is a radical change from the days Metro officers would stop and visit during those cold early mornings in December and January.

The marshals told Gary Cavalier that he "was undoing their good work." Of course, the 600,000 meals that Gary and his volunteers have served the homeless over the past several years isn't good work. So instead of feeding poor people at 6:30 a.m. the park is empty and is decorated with signs telling people about the new rules.

The past three days I've gone past the park at least twice a day and it has been empty and the basketball courts aren't echoing from the bounce of balls or squeak of shoes. Even teenagers aren't allowed there to play basketball on the outdoor courts.

In the Catholic Worker October newsletter Cavalier writes:

"The new law was passed on July 12 of this year due to complaints from neighbors about 'considerable drug activity and the



MIKE SMITH / LAS VEGAS SUN

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 marshals admitted to me there are few children living near these parks. The law is just an attempt to kick the homeless out of the one fairly beautiful and safe area left when you have nothing; the public parks."

In the meantime, the Southern Nevada Homeless Coalition has been attempting to reach a compromise with the city. According to Cavalier, "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." Until another site is found, Fr. Michael Blackburn of St. James Catholic Church is allowing the feeding program to continue in the church's parking lot.

How everything has changed since Cavalier's wife, Julia Occhiogrosso, was given a certificate by then-Mayor Jan Jones for her work and the volunteers' efforts in helping the homeless.

In December 1989 I wrote:

"During the daylight hours Julia and friends can be found giving out warm clothes they have gathered and back in their stone house in West Las Vegas preparing food and drink for those who have so few material goods or human comforts. The food, hot drinks and clean clothes are dispensed sans sermons or preaching to the needy, no matter what their sex, race, religion or personal background. They are fellow human beings in need and the workers are there to help them."

The Catholic Worker volunteers haven't changed and the need of the homeless is still great. The only thing that has changed is a new law passed and enforced by people who have forgotten the needs of less fortunate human beings.

Mike O'Callaghan is the Las Vegas Sun executive editor and former two-term governor of the State of Nevada.

Note: Please call Councilman Gary Reese (229-6405) or Mayor Oscar Goodman (229-6241) or write them (400 Stewart Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89101) and express your opinion.

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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