

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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A Tapestry of True Servanthood

by Julia Occhiogrosso

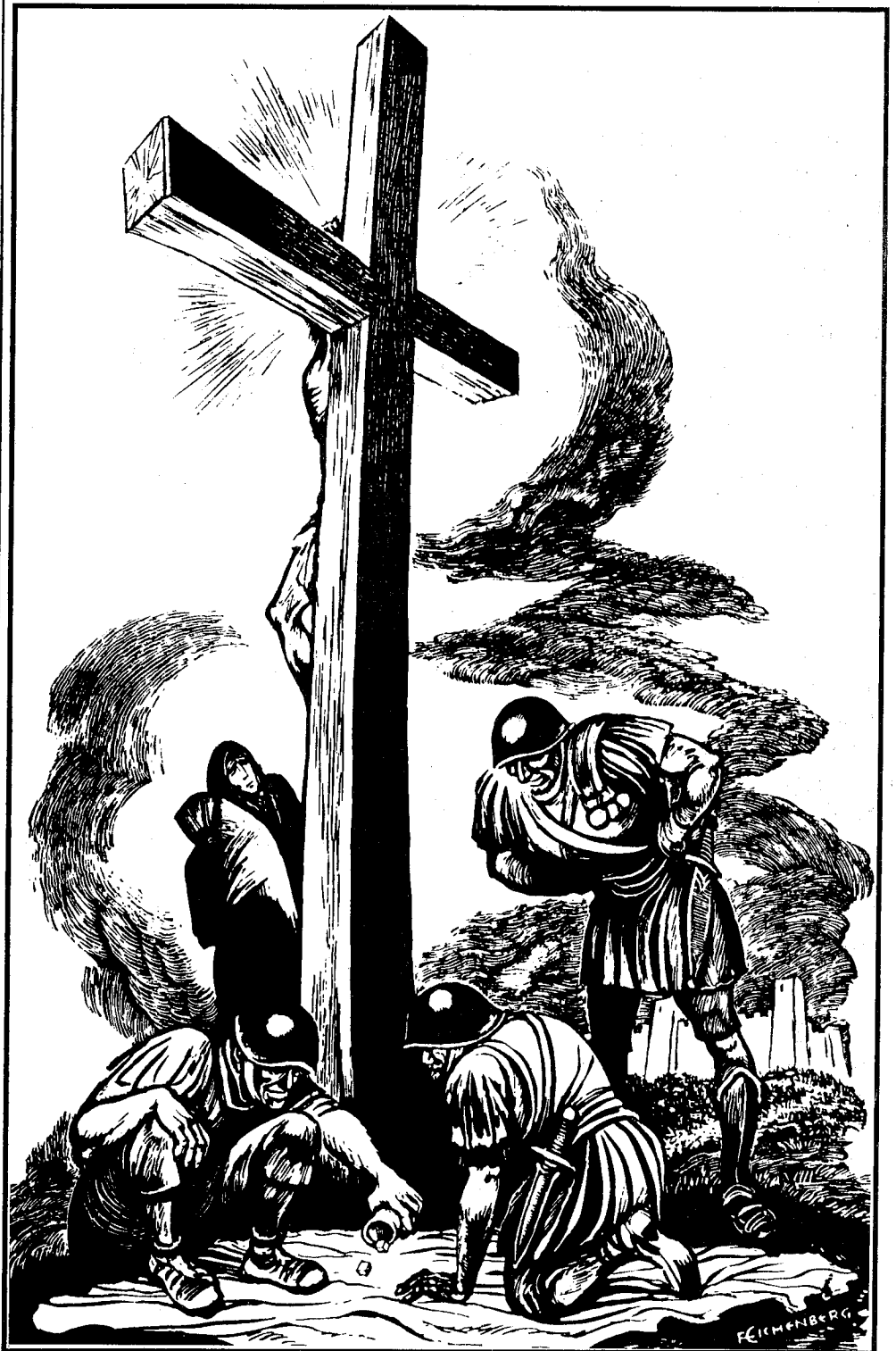
I recall the morning we first met Thomas*. Someone who knew of him because her husband had delivered mail to him for many years, had requested that he be added to our list of food box recipients. Upon knocking we could hear his struggling response. In between fits of wheezing, words became audible; "Come ... on... in." By the time we were in the door, Thomas was nowhere in sight. He had apparently stepped into the next room and all we heard was his distressed voice instructing us to leave the boxes on the table. It was difficult to completely understand what was being said. I stepped out of his tiny living room to follow his voice and to see if he needed help. He sat in the bathroom breathing through an oxygen mask. Careful not to overstep the boundaries and etiquette of this initial visit I inquired; "Are you all right?" He gave me a nod and I had the feeling this was part of the daily routine in the life of Thomas Freed.

On our next visit Thomas was feeling a little better. He sat on his couch and we were able to converse a bit. His apartment was neat and orderly. The walls were covered with images of Jesus. He expressed gratitude for last month's visit and proceeded to hand me a stack of index cards, while explaining; "These here folks, they could sure use some help too". On each of these cards were scrawled in pencil the names, addresses and phone numbers of each person. I felt an immediate pull of resistance to the idea of taking on the responsibility for five or six more recipients in our food distribution program. I gave a weak answer to his request. He didn't push.

A few days later I had a message on the answering machine from Thomas. He was calling to make sure I had the correct information on the index cards. When we spoke he went on to give the stories behind the names. "Now let's see, you have Daniel Jones* on your cards. He was shot in the head ten years ago, gets around in a wheel chair now. Then there is Sandra Hill*, had a stroke some time ago, can hardly talk,

doesn't get out of the house much these days. And Lillian James*, she has health problems too. Her grandchildren are always in and out of her place. Rita

Banks* has heart problems. None of these folks can get around too well. They can't stand in line to get food in
(continued on other side)



CASTING THE DICE BY FRITZ EICHENBERG (1954)

Jesus Was A Victim of the Death Penalty

"The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."—Pope John Paul II, January 27, 1999
For more than 25 years, the Catholic Bishops of the United States have called for an end to the death penalty.

(continued from front page)

those missions.”

We were on the phone for forty-five minutes as he told and retold more stories. I listened, my mind wandering back to the image of his apartment. I could see it clearly. Thomas had set up his own home-style social work office. His telephone and answering machine were the extent to his high-tech resources. His index cards in ordered piles on his coffee table served for his filing system. When he was not breathing through an oxygen mask, he was on the phone as a self-ordained advocate for those he knew in need.

By the end of the conversation I was swayed. He had worked his magic and I solidly assured him that the persons he had referred would be put on our recipient list and would receive food boxes at the end of the month.

Over the last nine months, myself, along with other volunteers have had the blessed opportunity to meet and nurture relationships with those once only names on index cards. Daniel Jones received his gunshot wound while working as a security guard and moving a woman out of a line of fire. He is a relatively young man, with a pleasant hopeful disposition. He spent a year in a coma and the last nine years rebuilding and healing his body with a dedication to walk again. Rita Banks has moved from the projects to upgraded subsidized housing. She still needs help with food and other basics as her young adult children and their children depend on her for support.

Sandra Hill had a stroke and has trouble communicating with words, but understood very well as she hobbled out of her apartment with a sobbing embrace for Peggy who one Saturday had brought a vase of flowers along with the regular food box delivery.

A few months ago we went to deliver food to Thomas and he was not there. We learned from one of his friends that he had been hospitalized. Soon after we learned that he had died. During one of our last phone conversa-

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 1999

Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 1999

INCOME:

Christmas Appeal-	9,820
Monthly Donations-	10,420
Regular Donations-	6,481
Past Donor Appeal-	85
Large Donations(\$500+)-	11,170
T-Shirts, Merchandise-	150
from IHN for utilities-	3,289
TOTAL INCOME:	41,415

EXPENSES:

Soupline supply costs*-	6,459
Food Basket program-	454
Hospitality House:	
Utilities-	3,679
Maintain & Repair-	2,007
Improvements-	201
Property tax-	450
Fire/Liability 1999**-	2,025
Fire/Liability 2000-	1,987
Chickens, Dogs, Cat-	717
Guest Hospitality-	1,670
Other Help to Poor-	3,115
1988 Dodge 600 costs***-	5,875
Newsletter mailing-	729
Supplies/Postage-	1,275
Volunteer costs-	167
Retreat costs-	437
Shortage/Overage-	73
Tues. Nite Liturgy-	59
Staff expenses:	
Julia & Gary Stipend-	2,700
Julia & Gary's house-	4,800
Health Insurance-	1,611
Social Security-	900
TOTAL EXPENSES:	41,390

by Gary Cavalier

President Eisenhower said: "every dollar spent on the military is a theft from the poor". We realize that every dollar donated to the Catholic Worker is to help the poor; hence, every dollar we take for our personal "salary" above what we need is also a theft from the poor. Our "salary" is based on room (our home), board (use of donated food), a small weekly stipend and the use of the Catholic Worker car.

Monthly "salary" for Julia & Gary:

Each receives:	
Room (our home & utilities):	\$ 200
\$25 weekly stipend:	\$ 100
Monthly "take-home":	\$ 300

Other monthly benefits (each):
Major Med. Health Insurance: \$ 67
Social Security/Disability: \$ 38
Julia and I also have part-time jobs: I do bookkeeping for Nevada Desert Experience and Julia works for the *From Violence to Wholeness* program of Pace e Bene. This extra income pays for our second car, milk and vegetables, extra home costs, other needs for our boys, etc. We also receive the Earned Income Credit (Negative Income Tax) for families that are working but don't earn enough to pay Federal Income Tax.

*Most soupline food is donated. **paid in Jan. '99. ***Dodge: Includes many major repairs. This year: No repairs so far!

Thank you
for your
support &
generosity!



Our friend Toni Flynn has started the High Desert Catholic Worker in Valyermo, California (near Palmdale). For info please contact her: (661) 944-2655, P. O. Box 62, Valyermo, CA 93563.

tions Thomas expressed a sincere happiness that food was being brought to his friends. He made a statement that in retrospect I wish I had asked him to explain. He said, "I have been praying for this for thirty-two years".

I tell this story of stories to honor the witness of a special man. I tell this story of stories to remember the significant, mysterious function of relationship; our life stories, shared and woven in love to

create a tapestry of true servanthood. While I was barely getting to know Thomas, I cannot hold back my perception that he was a man with a mission. Once accomplished, he was freed to leave this life where even breathing was difficult, and return to the place where he has been all along; in the heart of Divine Love. Farewell Thomas and much thanks.

* names changed for privacy.

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PLEASE JOIN US:
Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:
Breakfast meal served at St. James Church parking lot (G & McWilliams St.) to the poor and homeless.
Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.:
Mass or Liturgy, potluck following. Call for location.
Seven Days a Week:
Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, call 638-8806 to volunteer.
Last Saturday each month; 8:30 a.m.:
Deliver food to homes in need, gather for reflection & prayer, call for info.
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