

MANNA *in the wilderness*

December 2000

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Volume 15, Number 2

OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS APPEAL: Fifteen Years of Caring for the Poor

Dear friends,

As we approach our fifteenth anniversary of feeding the hungry on the streets of Las Vegas, I cannot help but recall beginnings. It seems like not long ago when Ricky Chun and I pulled the CW wagon around serving ice water in August to the guys on the streets. We wanted to get to know the street people and learn from them what was needed. Many told us of the day laborers who frequented D & Bonanza streets, how they would appreciate a cup of coffee in the mornings. Our service ministry fell into place. The "Coffee Line" was born. And, while locations have altered and the guys and volunteers have had to adapt to different settings, the essential ingredients of our presence are what I hope with your help will never change: *The simple loyal*

commitment of ordinary folks to bring the face of compassion to our marginalized and socially despised brothers and sisters. By modeling the ancient tradition of breaking bread, sharing a meal made with care, we meet the needs of the body and offer a prayer of healing for our collective broken, hungry souls.

Perhaps by other standards, our efforts seem foolish and our operation a mite flimsy. Our guests are outside, sitting on curbs and dining on the hood of our old Dodge 600. Our ten gallon pots of soup are set on milk crates and our hot and cold drinks poured from containers on a trailer hooked to the back of the Catholic Worker vehicle. It is an undistracted, straight-forward encounter with the poor that helps us to hold our attention on what is significant about the

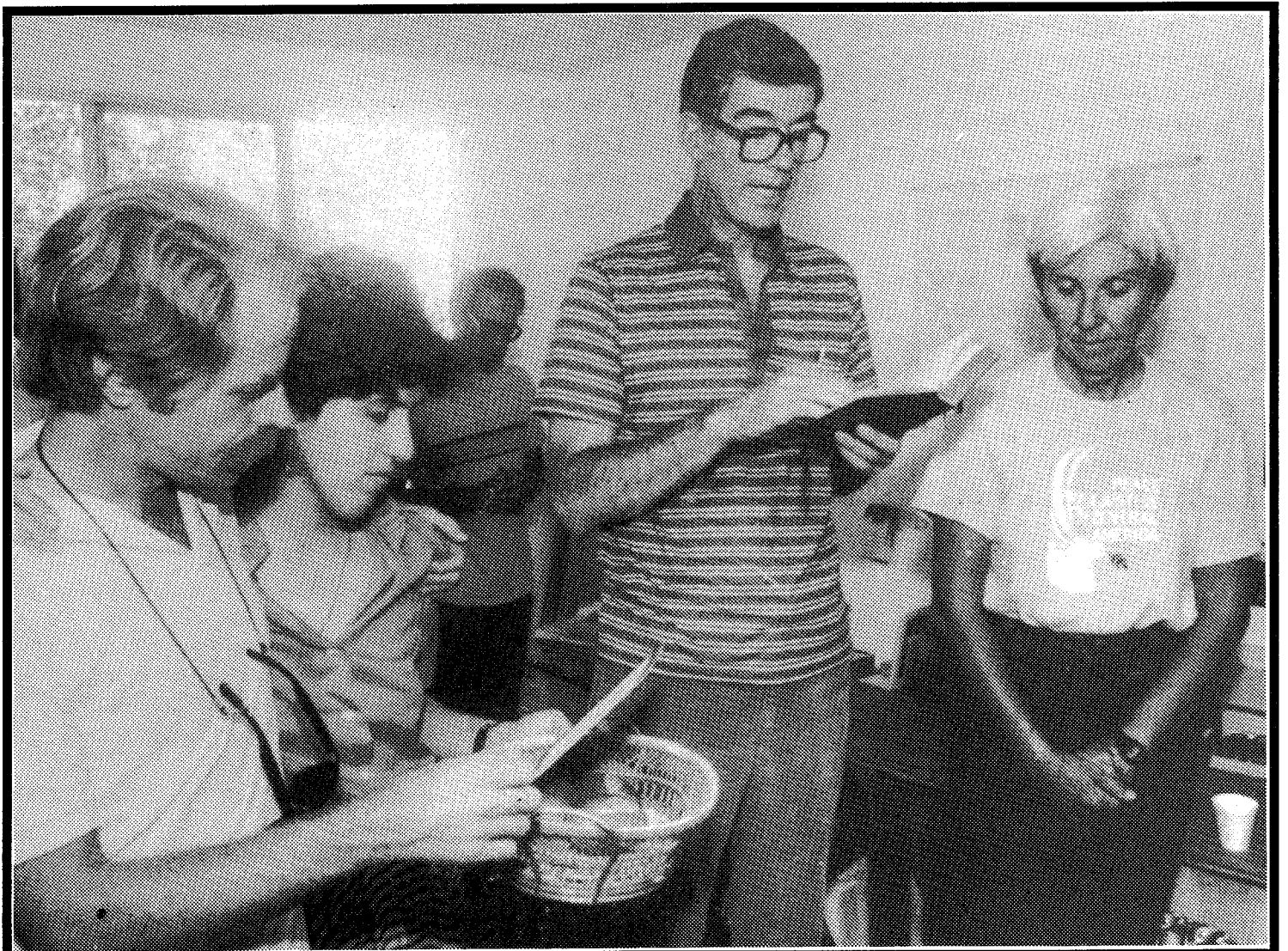
moment and what is important in our lives.

We need your financial help to sustain and enhance our soup line and food-distribution projects. We depend on your donations to help us maintain the Catholic Worker hospitality house (in need of many repairs) which continues to serve homeless families as a daysite for IHN. We are deeply appreciative of all who have given so that we are able to celebrate fifteen years of service and prophetic action.

Thank you for helping us stay faithful to this purpose,

Julia Occhiogrosso
Julia Occhiogrosso

Gary Cavalier
Gary Cavalier



Dedication and Blessing of Las Vegas Catholic Worker ministry on Gold Ave. on August 4, 1986. From left to right: Jeff Dietrich, Julia Occhiogrosso, Tom Machado (in background), Fr. Don Kribs, Catherine Morris.

A Morning at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker Soupline

by Sonja Brouwers
Saturday, 6:00 a.m.

It's almost daybreak when I pick up my friend, Lori and drive to the Catholic Worker house. Lori has been volunteering in the Catholic Worker soup line for eight years. I am a relative novice, with only three years under my belt. We are each wearing our typical Saturday morning "uniforms". Lori is bundled up in purple sweatpants, two undershirts topped with a ratty-looking purple sweater, and a baseball cap. I am wearing an oversized sweatshirt, a baggy pair of overalls, thick socks and tennis shoes. Neither of us is wearing any makeup.

It's terribly cold outside as we leave the warmth of my car and walk in through the back gate of the Catholic Worker house. The front of the house is pretty, with a stone facade and a terraced vegetable garden, but the back is rather plain. There is a high chainlink fence surrounding the property, enclosing the two friendly "guard dogs", a chicken coop, a bare dirt yard, and a clothes line. We enter the house through the kitchen door.

Inside, the other volunteers (there are usually eight to ten of us each week) are already gathering up the breakfast items to load on the trailer hitched to Gary Cavalier's old Dodge sedan. Gary is giving his final stirring to the three huge ten gallon pots on the stove. Lori and I each carry outside a milk crate loaded with condiments and utensils. We all then return inside and gather around the long butcher block work table in the kitchen. Holding hands, we recite the prayer of Mother Teresa. "Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our brothers and sisters throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger...". And then we are off.

The St. James Catholic Church parking lot, located on the corner of "G" and McWilliams, is just a few blocks away from the Catholic Worker. There is already a long line of people, mostly men, forming on the sidewalk as we drive up. Some of the volunteers unload three fold-

ing buffet tables from the back of the open trailer, and top them with the creamer and sugar dispensers, hot sauce, salt and pepper shakers, and old coffee cans filled with plastic spoons. Other volunteers pass out cups and paper bowls to the people in line. Lori places herself near the tables with a large plastic tub filled with assorted bread. Wearing a plastic glove, she is ready to hand out bread to the men who have already gone through the soupline.

I grab a metal ladle and approach the first soup pot, which one of the men has placed on two overturned milk crates, so I can serve from it. My friend Peter, a 74 year old former Mennonite minister, is similarly situated with a second pot across from me, so we may serve two lines simultaneously. I open the lid of my pot to reveal a thick stew of macaroni and cheese with ground turkey and vegetables.

The soup is incredibly hot. I plunge in the ladle repeatedly for the next half hour, serving bowl after bowl, until this pot, and then another one like it, is empty. We usually serve between two and three hundred people on these mornings. The lines move quickly, and I hardly have time to look up and see the men I serve. Mostly, I see their hands. The majority of hands which hold out their bowls for me to fill are rough, cut, dirty and worn. Occasionally, I see a

for wearing women's clothing. Robby is very nice and helpful, and always asks me how I am doing in school. He had his blanket stolen once and I gave him an old green one I was carrying in the back of my van. He also likes to warm his hands on the grill of my automobile in the wintertime when I drive up to the parking lot. Another nice man, whose name I do not know, offered me his gloves to wear while I served on a day when the cold air was especially bitter.

It would be misleading to characterize the street people as all being addicts or obnoxious or crazy. It's simply not true; some are quite "normal", but this point brings me to one of the main philosophies of the Catholic Worker, one that is prominently displayed in the Catholic Worker house. "Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. (Thomas Merton)." It matters not why they are living on the street or how they got there. The people we serve are cold or hot according to the season, exposed to the elements, tired, dirty, hungry. We do not know what it's like to walk in their shoes. We cannot judge them.

Sonja Brouwers has been a Catholic Worker volunteer for 3 years. This is excerpted from a paper she wrote for class.

Thank you
for your
support &
generosity!

(FOR
TAB)

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

We will be serving our annual Ham & Egg breakfast to the homeless on Dec. 23, 2000. We need boneless cooked hams by Dec. 20. Call 647-0728 for info.

smooth hand, and then I do look up and see the rest of the man, and I think "He is new here. He has not been long living on the streets."

Many of the men at the park are there briefly, and then move on, but there are others who are regulars. Reggie is a slender, mature black man who wears tuxedo dress shoes at all times. Andrew is an obese diabetic, who pours sugar over his soup before eating it, and has a penchant



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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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