

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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Faithful Failure: Sojourn of a Young Catholic Worker

by Ryan Hall

I'm sitting here in my room staring out the window at a beautiful green tree taller than this three-story house we're living in. Its branches hang low from the weight of the leaves while they blow in the cool California summer wind. Peacefully I'm reminded of a prayer I said the day before I arrived here near the end of June, "God let there be at least one beautiful green tree near the house." I prayed for a tree that day in the event that I wouldn't fit in here at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. I knew I could always find God's gentle peace and comfort at the sight of a tree, and coming from Las Vegas you learn to appreciate the presence of even a tiny tree attempting growth in the desert land. That prayer has been answered a thousand times since being here and yet I find there was no need for it to begin with. I've been blessed to live six weeks in a community of incredibly hospitable and loving people. Fitting in was as easy as showing up.

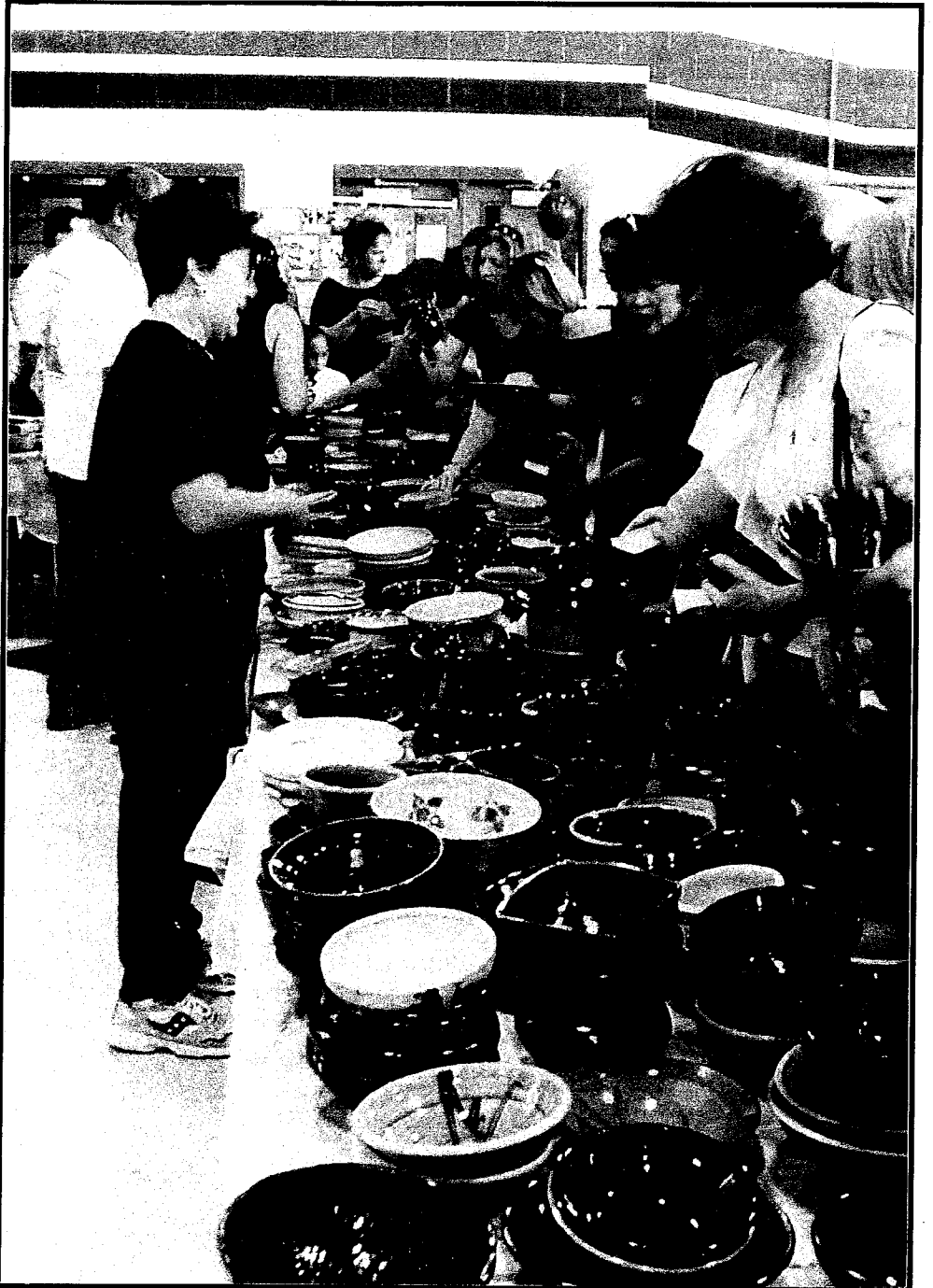
Like any young idealistic Catholic Worker I want to change the world. It seemed so much easier a task when I was younger though. Everyone at least pretended to listen to me. All we had to do was learn to share a little better and only take what we need to survive and be happy. How things have changed.

I graduated from high school in 1997 in Las Vegas and decided to attend UNLV. Knowing only that I wanted to be a part of creating a more just world, I chose to major in Sociology to hopefully grasp what is wrong with our global society. I quickly realized that the world could be changed drastically if we shared more; however, it was much more complicated than that. During this time I got more interested in my Catholic faith and began volunteering at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker with Gary Cavalier and Julia Occhiogrosso. Slowly I saw how I could be a part of this changing world. Having heard many exciting tales from Julia about her experience

at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker some years ago, I thought I had to see what it was all about. So my Los Angeles Catholic Worker summer began, and life as I knew it ended.

I came here to learn, to grow and to see how I could fit into the Catholic Worker vision. I found a place that extends its countercultural vision to the world in the hopes that others might see the beauty in this lifestyle and stop being complicit in

what society tells us is right for us. Through our many protests against National Missile Defense, the death penalty, the new cathedral, and Taco Bell, I saw how the rest of the world sees those who have a moral opinion—as people simply wasting their time standing there waiting to be ridiculed and told to find a real job. Through our bible studies and cultural critiques, I've begun to see our *(continued on back page)*



Second Annual Empty Bowl Fundraiser Nets \$9,058

The second annual Empty Bowl Luncheon and Auction was held on Saturday, April 6 at Green Valley High School. The event was sponsored by the Nevada Clay Guild and Green Valley High School, all proceeds were donated to the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. Each

participant paid \$12 for a lunch of soup and bread. As shown in the photo above, each participant selected their own unique ceramic bowl, picking from almost 1,000 hand made bowls. Thank you to all the volunteers and donations which made this fundraiser possible.

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country and my faith very differently than when I first arrived, and this is a conflict I now have within me. I've found that once we become aware of what our faith truly calls us to do, once we become aware of what the power elite are doing to all people, including themselves, our view of life turns completely around. Jobs that you hope to get are so often in the very corporations controlling our lives, exploiting their workers, polluting our earth, and increasing the gap between the rich and poor. The food we eat is being altered and doused with chemicals that harm us; the clothes we wear are made by people in sweatshop conditions. Every aspect of our lives has to be looked at more closely to see where we might stop our support of these situations. Throughout my life I've heard about Jesus and His message to serve the poor. Society recommends jobs you can do to help the poor: you can be a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer, a politician; indeed, all great ways to help those in need. However, I have to ask myself how many of these people do we actually see serving the poor, inviting the homeless into their homes to live, to eat, to form relationships? I don't remember Jesus saying to just donate money in order to serve. He wanted us to care for their souls, to show them love and be loved in return; this is how we all grow.

I had many fears before coming here, but my greatest fear had not yet been realized—that my life and world views would change so much that I no longer fit in with the rest of society. I had been worried about fitting into the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community, now I worry about finding common ground with the rest of society. In Matthew 5:10, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness." I never quite understood this passage because every time I've served God and God's

people, everyone thanked me. So why would I be persecuted for that? I soon realized here that when you start questioning why these people are poor, that's when you get persecuted. People (including myself) don't like to hear what's wrong with the world and especially how they're contributing to it. But how else can we change it? The challenge and the conflict within me has to be resolved. Do I follow through with what I've now learned or do I try and forget the new knowledge? Ignorance was bliss before, but there is no going back now. If we want to change the world, our minds have to be expanded.

I'd like to talk about all the fun I had at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker — the free concerts, the road trips, the art museum, the movies, yoga on the lawn, bike riding to the beach— because all of this is a vital part of the Catholic Worker vision to build community and relationships. Jesus was a partier after all. However, this isn't what impacted me the most. My life was affected more concretely by seeing Jesus' vision of the Kingdom enacted here on earth through working at the soup kitchen and being able to impact someone's life and be impacted as well. I met a 70-year-old

African-American man, missing his teeth but always smiling, who talked to me about our connectedness to each other. "We are all one," he said "even this day is all one day if we follow the sun." The Kingdom is also enacted through our community members going to trial, standing up for themselves and humanity, for their trespassing prayer actions at Vandenberg Air Force Base. It is enacted through sharing the liturgy together with songs, food and stories of our lives.

I've heard it said that we are failures in our mission— that we boast about our service to the poor and our resistance to those in power, and yet the world is no different. The homeless are still homeless, the corporations are still running the government, and the people of the country aren't interested in our message. They have a point, but whose Kingdom are they comparing it to, God's or the world's? God's Kingdom is measured in very different ways and can be effective in very small yet powerful outcomes. Our community friend Ladon said one evening, "We're not called to be effective, we're called to be faithful." That's all it takes, being faithful to the call of Christ's mission of service and love; not to say that it is easy, but that it is possible. So now I return to Las Vegas for one more year of school and a possible year-long commitment to the community of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, another 'faithful failure' in Christ's mission.

**PRAY
FOR
PEACE
IN OUR
WORLD!**

(FOR
TAB)

**THANK
YOU
FOR
YOUR
SUPPORT!**

Welcome Bonnie Pilcher

Bonnie moves into the Catholic Worker this month as a full-time volunteer. Bonnie comes from Idaho and has been living this past year in Las Vegas as a volunteer with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration's Shared Horizons program. This past year Bonnie has been a talented handywoman at the Catholic Worker house.

This article is reprinted from the Sept. 2001 Catholic Agitator, the newspaper of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. Ryan Hall has been a Las Vegas Catholic Worker volunteer since he was a student at Gorman High School. In May he graduates from UNLV and will be living at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker House of Hospitality as a full-time volunteer.

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wed., Fri., Sat., 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.

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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