

# MANNA *in the wilderness*

September 2004

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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## Reflections from our Summer Volunteers

by Julia Occhiogrosso

In the early days (1930's & 40's) of the Catholic Worker Movement, Catholic Worker houses provided a type of university setting for young Catholics who could not afford a formal college education. The New York Catholic Worker was a place for intellectual discourse and a way to put into action the rich world of Catholic social teaching. These "university" experiences were formative as well as informative. They gave young idealistic minds a place to experiment with a radical expression of Christian love. But most importantly, they offered a chance of knowing in a very human and personal context the suffering of the poor. This type of knowing would shape the faith journeys of many who would in turn dedicate themselves to the cause of nonviolent social transformation. In the spirit of this tradition, we had the opportunity to offer a summer internship to Melissa and Kelly, students from Marquette University (home to the Catholic Worker Archives). They had taken a class on the Catholic Worker Movement and they were inspired to seek out a way to volunteer with a Catholic Worker community. Knowing very little about the Las Vegas heat, they agreed to spend the six weeks of their summer with us. Our community was enriched by their generous energy and creative initiatives. They helped get our Wednesday Hospitality Days going and never missed a morning of serving on the soup line. Indeed, they returned my heart and mind to my first experiences at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker 25 years ago. By their own searching, they helped me touch again the excitement and hopefulness of the Catholic Worker vision that sustains and renews me each day. What follows are reflections by Melissa and Kelly.

### Round Table Discussions

Please come join us each month at the Catholic Worker House, 6-8 p.m. fourth Wednesdays of Month, call 647-0728 for more info.

**Sept. 22:** Factory Farming (Gary).

**Oct. 27:** Seeking Dialogue with those who Justify Violence (Eugene).

**Nov. 17:** Alternative Gift Giving (Julia).

**Dec. 22:** Advent Prayer Service.

by Kelly Von Ruden

Dorothy Day once said "The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart." Over the past six weeks, the Las Vegas Catholic Worker taught me to love. The members of this community are unbelievable people. They care and show overwhelming compassion for the nameless people of our society; the homeless. This summer I learned that each person has their own story and commands respect from

their fellow human. Yet, in our fast paced society we become blind to the homeless men and women we walk by on a daily basis. We forget to ask ourselves "Why are these people homeless?" and, "how can I help?"

My experience this summer opened my eyes to the violence occurring in our neighbors, some Americans are starving and without homes. I found myself at times overwhelmed with sadness and frustrated (see Kelly's reflection, back page)



Kelly Von Ruden (left) and Melissa Herguth (right).

by Melissa Herguth

As I reflect on my time spent as a volunteer at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, several things come to mind. First I think of how wonderful an opportunity I was blessed with to spend six weeks of my summer with some of the most amazing people in the world. Both the live-in, and frequently visiting volunteers at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker community are exceptional people who do truly work for the poor.

Many people in today's society claim to help out the community and etc. Yet, I feel that true service and outreach is done at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, rising 4 days a week at sunrise to live out the works of mercy. I am truly inspired by the dedication that the volunteers embody.

The second thing that comes to mind is all of the educational opportunities I experienced during my time in Las Ve-

gas. As a college student, education is one of my passions. Yet, this summer I was educated in so many ways that any classroom could not compare. I learned about real life issues that affect everyone in our society and in many cases the marginalized. These sessions were not only for educational purposes but they also stirred up emotions, and great conversations about how we can make a difference in our ever-complex world. I left Las Vegas with a more educated mind and a more nonviolent heart.

The third thing that comes to mind is how I fit in to all of these things. I learned a lot about myself during my stay. I learned that serving the poor and marginalized is where my heart is. I became familiar with more injustices that are in the world, and a passion to alleviate them. I want to make a difference with my career. I want to find (Melissa's reflection, see back page)

*(Kelly's reflection, continued)*

at the situation occurring in West Las Vegas. I am sure it is no different than any other run down "rough" side of town; our neighborhood was taken over by the drug dealers and prostitutes. It became an on-going joke what else the ice cream man sold beside ice cream sandwiches and push pops as he patrolled the streets late at night. I was beginning to lose hope in the American dream of prosperity. But, I found hope among the volunteers and community members at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. Though to some their contribution could seem miniscule compared to the large-scale homeless shelters and non-profit organizations that exist, their individual impact was grand. The Las Vegas Catholic Workers unselfishly dedicated their lives to helping the suffering individuals of their own community. Believe it or not they were even willing to wake up at hours foreign to most of us (4:30 in the morning) to prepare breakfast for the homeless.

Until this summer I did not realize the impact a simple gesture can have on someone's life. Providing a person with a tasty meal, warm shower, or good company can easily change someone's misfortune into luck. For instance, during Hospitality Wednesday (a program that allowed seven men and women to join at the Catholic Worker house to wash clothes, shower and share a meal with us) I met a couple that made a huge impact on my life. This couple appeared dishev-

eled and scared when they arrived at the house after spending their first night on the streets. They struggled to find a shelter that could accommodate both of their needs. What seemed like an impossible mission continued hours after Hospitality Wednesday was over. The couple used our phone to contact the limited shelters in the area and left the Catholic Worker with only minimal prospects. I was frustrated and very angry I could not do more to help them. I found it dreadful that people begging for shelter and help were denied. To my surprise, the couple appeared at our door the next Wednesday with smiles on their faces. The simple gesture of inviting them into our house and being gracious enough to let them use the phone allowed them to more easily find a shelter and begin a treatment program. I regained hope by just looking at these two people's faces. Just caring for one another can make a difference.

I want to thank all the people who taught me to stop being angry at the injustices of society and start opening my heart to fix them in whatever way I can. The Catholic Worker community does not just include the six live-in volunteers but the entire neighborhood of people. This community inspired me to change the world through love.

*(Melissa's reflection, continued)*

the root of the problem for issues that exist so that we can really solve issues of hunger and homelessness.

The fourth thing that I have taken away from Las Vegas is my relationship between faith and service. I realized that through prayer and being a prophetic witness to others you can truly use your faith to fuel your passions to serve. I learned that it is okay to stand up for what you believe in, no matter how radical it may seem to others. Because if someone does not make a stand about an injustice that occurs in our world, then no one will come together to make a difference.

I have gained a positive attitude about citizens as a whole and social change. I believe that people do care, and that if you bring people together you truly can make a difference.

I believe that nonviolence is the answer to the world's problems. I do believe what Dorothy Day said, "The only solution is Love."

Since my time spent living at 500 West Van Buren I can proudly say what I believe in. I am now a more well rounded woman who is eager to change the world. Thanks Las Vegas Catholic Worker for all that you did to allow me to learn and grow into who I am today.

**PRAY  
FOR  
PEACE  
IN OUR  
WORLD!**

(FOR  
TAB)

**Las Vegas Catholic Worker website:**  
<http://community.link.reviewjournal.com/lvrj/lvcw>  
**National website:** [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)  
**Thank You for your faithful support!**

## **GOODBYE STEVI CARROLL, VOLUNTEER & FRIEND!**

*by Julia Occhiogrosso*

There is a time for every purpose under heaven, but little did I think there would ever be a time for bidding farewell to our good friend and Catholic Worker family member Stevi Carroll. As one of the earliest volunteers, Stevi has made many important contributions to the life and work of the Las Vegas Catholic

Worker from the first days of serving coffee on D and Bonanza Streets until just this morning as we served on yet another new location.

Before she retired as a teacher, she was one of the few participants at our vigils who could defend herself against hecklers as having a real job. From souplines to master food box assembler, Stevi never

hesitated to offer her expertise and demonstrate how to do the job right! Upon moving to California, we wish her many blessings and know that she will continue to touch lives with her seemingly infinite capacity to think up random acts of kindness. We love you Stevi, and will treasure always all we received from you; our darling hopeful cynic.

### **PLEASE JOIN US:**

**Wed., Fri., Sat., 6:00 a.m.:**

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

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

Breakfast served at G & McWilliams street to the poor and homeless.

**Last Saturday of month; 8:30 a.m.:**

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

**Wednesday; 8 a.m. - noon:**

Hospitality Day, we invite 7 homeless men & women home for showers, to wash clothes, & lunch.

**Thursday; 8 a.m. - 9 a.m.:**

Vigil for Peace in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 S. Las Vegas Blvd.

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