

MANNA *in the wilderness*

February 2006

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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IN SEARCH OF GRATITUDE

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I see Vern walking toward the gate. His shoulders are rounded over and his arms hang heavy at his side, carrying plastic grocery bags stuffed with his gifts for us. He rides the bus all night. Public transportation is his home in the evenings. His legs are swollen from insufficient elevation. His hair is matted down in dregs that touch his shoulders. His demeanor is humble and kind. It seems that his evening ritual is complete when he finds his way to the back door of the Catholic Worker House and delivers his offerings. We receive an assortment of what he finds and what he has been given. Things like groceries, household items and clothes.

Whether it is daily or weekly, he almost never arrives empty handed. This exchange causes me to ponder the relationship between generosity and gratitude and our spiritual need for both. Time and time again I have experienced the Verns who long to give from their poverty as an expression of deep gratitude. Amidst scarcity they find a wealth of giving.

In contrast I have also seen where apparent excess breeds feelings of deprivation, a need to tighten our grip around what we have and limitations in our ability to experience authentic gratitude. These limitations are often highlighted in the cavernous desires of children. They get "everything they want" for Christmas and hours later see someone with the one thing they did not get and are promptly swept away by disappointment and a desire for more. Residue of this same pattern remains with us into adulthood. We are trapped by the very deceptions that give energy to our consumer culture. It is difficult for children to be discerning about the deception that is found in culture. The lie that convinces us that we in middle America are deprived and need more than what we already have. How do we sustain the spiritual attribute of authentic gratitude when we are continually told we do not have enough? How do we navigate through the deception? How do we avoid swallowing the poison that causes uncertain death to the freedom not to consume the merchandise or the lie? How do we reclaim and hold onto the experience of abundance that is discovered when our hearts are touched by authen-

tic gratitude? In my efforts to embrace material simplicity I am lost in the world of too much. Raising a family with these values creates conflict. How do we teach our children generosity and gratitude?

We can limit but not escape the world of shopping malls and TV commercials. How do we help children cultivate a sense of self that is not defined by name brands and corporate logos? How do we help them search out gratitude and their capacity to give? As a culture we are desperate to reclaim our understanding of gratitude if we are going to move toward a sense of who we are in relationship to

each other, the world, the planet and our human soul. We will know gratitude when we recognize "Enough". Then our generosity will express itself in works of justice. Then excess will disappear and true abundance will be found. Perhaps the secret to staying close to the gift of gratitude is in our willingness to journey to places where simple gifts seem to satisfy. Where sunlight on a winter's morning wraps around a chilled body sleeping on the street, where a bowl of soup is the daily bread, and where all a person has and gives away is carried in a grocery bag.



ARTWORK BY CHRISTA OCCHIOGROSSO

Blowing the Dynamite of the Church:

Catholic Social Teaching

"Catholic scholars have failed to blow the dynamite of the Church. Catholic scholars have taken the dynamite of the Church, wrapped it up in nice phraseology, placed it in an hermetic container and sat on the lid. It is about time to blow the lid off..." -Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. The Diocese of Las Vegas Social Action Ministry is presenting a seminar on Catholic Social Teaching on Saturday, March 4. (please see enclosed flyer in Las Vegas area newsletters).

edited by Ryan Hall

Catholic Social Teaching is a collection of the church's long history of lived experience in society with analysis on the val-

ues based in scripture. So essentially it is a moral guideline for how we should act out our Catholic faith and values in society. Our social teachings got a formal start in 1891 with Pope Leo's document entitled "The Condition of Labor" which emphasized the importance of decent working conditions. From then on various documents called encyclicals have been written on issues of social concern. The Bishops of the US also put out various documents concerning the social issues. The problem with Catholic Social Teaching (CST) nowadays is that no one knows about it. CST used to be taught in parishes, seminaries, and universities. It is happening much less frequently now. Today (continued on back page)

Date Change! EMPTY BOWL BENEFIT

The date has changed!
The Sixth annual Empty Bowl
Benefit will take place on
Saturday, March 25, 2006

(continued from front page)

it is called the church's best kept secret. There are seven key themes that the church has put together to emphasize our social value.

1. Life and Dignity of the Human person. "The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching"*

2. Call to Family, Community and Participation. "The person is not only sacred but also social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship to others."** We are called into community by Christ. It is there that we begin to understand ourselves and God. Our first community is the family. It is where we learn and act on our values. Beyond our family we are called to participate in the greater community. "A central test of our political, legal and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people and how people participate in them."**

3. Rights and Responsibilities. "People have a fundamental right to life and to those things that make life truly human: food, health care, education, security, and employment."** These rights are bestowed on us by God, not created by society. They help us judge how society's in-

stitutions are protecting human dignity. "Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to one another, to our families, and to larger society, to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good."** If we as a society do not provide an adequate economic situation where the rights of workers are protected then an individual's right to work is meaningless.

4. Option for the Poor. "The prime purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. The "option for the poor," therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons. These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves."***

5. Dignity of work and the rights of workers. "Work is more than a way to make a living; it is an expression of our dignity and a form of continuing participation in God's creation." "People have the right to decent and productive work, to decent and fair wages, to private property and to form and join unions and worker associations of their choosing in the exercise of their dignity and rights." "The economy exists to serve people, not

the other way around."***

6. Care for God's Creation. The church's teaching about environmental responsibility and stewardship of natural resources is rooted in the message of Genesis — the goods of the earth are gifts from God. We humans are not the ultimate owners of these goods, but rather, the temporary stewards. "It is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness. Their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed."****

7. Solidarity. "We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences." "We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers" "Violent conflict and the denial of dignity and rights to people anywhere on the globe diminish each of us. This theme of solidarity expresses the core of the Church's concern for world peace, global development, environment, and international human rights."**

* U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*

** U.S. Catholic Bishops, *A Century of Social Teaching*

*** U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*

**** U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*

PRAY
FOR
PEACE
IN OUR
WORLD!

(FOR
TAB)

*Thanks to all our
Donors who make this
ministry possible!*

Mass at Catholic Worker

on Thursday, March 16, 2006

Fr. Bob Stoeckig, celebrant

Potluck at 5:30 p.m., Mass at 6:30 p.m.

Join Us Every Thursday Evening for a Prayer
Service (Potluck 5:30 p.m., Prayer 6:30 p.m.)

WEBSITES:

www.lvcw.org

www.catholicworker.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Las Vegas, NV 89106-3039

PLEASE JOIN US:

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

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

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

Breakfast served to the homeless.

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

Deliver food to homes in need.

Wednesday; 8 a.m. - noon:

Hospitality Day, we invite 10 folks home for showers & lunch.

Thursday; 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.:

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

Thursday; 5:30 p.m.: Potluck, 6:30

p.m.: Prayer Service or Mass.

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