

# MANNNA *in the wilderness*

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The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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## MY EXPERIENCE AT CATHOLIC WORKER

*Leigh, a young organic farmer from Canada, stayed with us for three months this winter. During this time he had many adventures, including going on a bus full of homeless activists to Carson City to sleep on the lawn outside the legislature, being jailed for trespassing after accidentally wandering on to the Paiute reservation taking pictures, and dealing with a series of break-ins to our new building.*

by Leigh Herbert

I had first read about the Catholic Worker when volunteering at L'Arche (a community for people with disabilities) in Eastern Canada. The founders of L'Arche Cape Breton had portraits of Gandhi and Martin Luther King hanging beside their front door. In the small library at the chapel, there were a couple of copies of Dorothy Day's books.

On a theoretical level, the philosophy of the Catholic Worker movement, with its nonviolence, mutual aid, voluntary poverty, anarchism, houses of hospitality, agronomic universities, and a green revolution sounded pretty good. I wondered what it would be like in practice.

Life being what it is, it was not until four years later, faced with the prospect of spending another winter doing very little at my parent's home, that I picked up the phone and began calling Catholic Worker communities. When Gary C. answered the phone, he said he could use the help, there was a place for me to stay, and I was welcome to come. I had some misgivings, as I wasn't entirely sure what Las Vegas was like, but I said I would be arriving in two weeks.

After a bus ride, a border crossing, a train ride, and another Greyhound trip I arrived in Las Vegas at 4:00 in the morning. I managed to find the 214 bus, and carrying my large backpack, asked directions on how to get to the Worker. The bus driver dropped me off, seemingly with some concern. The boarded houses, trash, and abandoned lots looked somewhat desolate, but I managed to find the house.

Dorothy Day wrote about the distinction between destitution and poverty. Poverty, in its voluntary form,

could be seen as a way of life where acquisition of money, material possessions, and status in society are not pursued beyond what is needed or beneficial, and even renounced. This is a practical (at least on a personal level) and nonviolent method of dealing with the form of oppression called destitution. You are not finding clever (or legal) methods of living off other people's suffering. Von, who has "mission legs" from riding the

I feel angry at a society that can create, or at least contribute to its own people having to live in sub-human conditions, then either remain largely indifferent to their oppression, or to see their suffering as a problem, not only as a matter of concern, but largely a question of visibility, because it interferes with the efficient operations of the larger society.

In Las Vegas, besides the military, casinos (i.e. tourism) are the primary



**Leigh Herbert at the gates of the Nevada Test Site during the Pacific Life Community gathering in March 2007. PHOTO BY MARIO INTINO**

buses sitting up all night, sums up the latter condition well. He is "just hanging on." Choice, if it exists for the destitute, is mostly on the level of survival, with little possibility of determining what better ways of life could be led. People who are homeless, yet are still able to retain a sense of self-worth and mental balance given their daily conditions and treatment are strong individuals.

I imagined that homeless people would, according to my preconceptions, be generous, open-hearted, and kind; the exploited innocents. People most hurt by the system would logically be most ready to change the system. Some of them are like that. But, I guess I was surprised to discover the extent of personal problems many homeless people have, how others are untrustworthy and manipulative, and how many hold beliefs that sometimes seem obviously in conflict with their own interests. But this realization only shows me that the homeless are no different than any other group of individuals in society.

source of wealth for a city surrounded by the desert. The city policy seems to be to keep the homeless hidden from the tourists (there is nothing like a homeless person to spoil one's vacation). Many legal instruments exist that can be selectively used to effectively criminalize homelessness. If the homeless are off the streets, or at least contained to certain streets, the "problem" is being dealt with. The two and a half days I spent in jail, charged with trespassing and obstruction, I feel were a good personal experience into how this system operates.

The word homeless implies that there is a shortage of homes, or houses. This is both true and misleading at the same time. There is an abundance of housing, often so-called luxury housing, both built and being constructed, in Las Vegas. But homes, in the social sense, are a grouping of human relationships based on love. I think this is where the true shortage is and anything that threatens this is the real  
*(continued on back page)*

# The House

by Ronnie Cleaton

A place where I can go  
Do my laundry, take a shower  
Relax and eat a good lunch  
Enjoying each hour

The people there  
Make me feel at home  
My problems disappear  
Though I'm homeless still  
I don't feel homeless there

Many thanks to Julia, Gary and Sally  
For making me feel at home  
For Ean, the cook, whose food  
I think  
Tastes better than Bally's

Warren, Gary W. and Eddie  
Help keep things running smooth  
And all the other volunteers  
Who lend their helping hands  
Anthony, whose kind words  
Help me get along

I can't say thanks enough  
For all the help they've been  
But the biggest thanks  
That I can give  
Is for making me feel human  
again.

## WEBSITES:

[www.lvcw.org](http://www.lvcw.org)  
[www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)

# AN UNEXPECTED EDUCATION

I sat down to lunch at the shelter one day next to an older gentleman with a thick blonde mustache and a white cowboy hat. He introduced himself as Clint, and shared that he was struggling finding work and appreciated being able to come in and have a meal.

What happened next was a real teaching moment for me. Clint got up from the table to get a second bowl of stew. One of the visiting servers smiled and handed him his bowl back, filled once again. Clint returned to his seat.

I saw the woman twist her face and mutter, "Goodness, you could at least say thank you."

Clint frowned, turned around and said, "Excuse me?"

"Where's your gratitude for the free

bowl of food?"

I watched Clint gently approach her. In a sincere voice he said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for the food. I really needed a good meal today and I really appreciate it. But I need to correct something that you said. This bowl of stew is not free."

The woman looked at him intently. "When I walked into this place, I paid a high price to be here for lunch today. I left my dignity there at the door. I have paid for this wonderful food with part of my pride."

"Still," Clint continued, "I apologize for overlooking saying thank you. But please remember that this food is not free."

*Edited article by Lance Cheslock from The Voice of La Puente, Alamosa, CO.*

## (continued from page 1)

problem. I think that the Catholic Worker is right, not in that it is succeeding, but that it is at least attempting to do its work from some understanding of this perspective.

I came to the Catholic Worker with the idea I would experience American society, the life at a Worker, and the life of the homeless. After living here for three months, I realize how complicated the whole situation is. It seems like there will

always be lots of work to be done for people that care. It's easy to get overwhelmed by it all.

I am grateful to have met and been given hospitality of one form or another, by all the people that live at the house: Tim, John then Eddy, Ean, Sally, Warren, Gary W., Julia and Gary C., Nick and Cody; and everyone else that is part of the larger "community", regardless of whether they live in houses or not.

**PRAY FOR  
PEACE  
IN OUR  
WORLD!**

(FOR  
TAB)

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

## Pope Benedict XVI, Excerpts from "God Is Love" Encyclical

On December 25, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI published his first encyclical entitled 'God is Love'.

The purpose of the encyclical: In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others.

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. (par. 25)

Love is free; it is not practiced as a

way of achieving other ends...Those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and let love alone speak. (par. 31)

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

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

Deliver food to homes in need.

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

Hospitality Day, we invite 30 homeless men & women home for showers, to wash clothes, & lunch.

**Thursday, 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.:**

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

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