

MANNA *in the wilderness*

December 2010

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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TRYING TO LIVE THE WORKS OF MERCY

by Katie Kelso

Today I threw cheese at a woman. We were serving at G and McWilliams, the lot for our soup line, and as I was walking around with a crate of string cheese packages, she wouldn't take her hand out of the crate or let me walk by. I grabbed a handful of cheese and threw them on the ground at her feet. She called me a "bitch" and left. It was incredibly embarrassing and incredibly telling of my imperfections and limitations. It was also telling of a Catholic Worker certainty - this "work" that we do, exposes all of our weaknesses. It exposes our humanity and our own neediness.

When I first came to the Catholic Worker, which was in L.A., I knew two things: that there was a lot of poverty around, and that I didn't like that. There are a lot of people in the world who want to "help". What is most difficult, I think, is knowing how to do that and having the fortitude to continue with it. As Catholic Workers, the ways in which we "help" are by following the corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, giving shelter to the homeless, visiting the imprisoned, caring for the sick, and burying the dead.

The first three are perhaps the easiest. In urban United States, there is no shortage of food, drink or clothing. There are definitely problems with the distribution of these things, but generally, plenty of people are willing to donate these items. Many, if not most, Catholic Workers run a soup kitchen of some kind and have plenty of clothes lying around. What takes a little more time and a lot of organization, is getting the food to the people who need it, and serving them with kindness and respect.

We give shelter to the homeless by having what are called *houses of hospitality*. The Las Vegas Catholic Worker has six guests living with us; some have been here for over ten years while some have only been here for a matter of months. We do not operate as a half way house and remember that our community is a group of individuals, each with their own separate identities, needs and desires. Early Christian communities operated in a similar sense. The Bible tells

us that goods, "were distributed to each according to need" (Acts 4:32-35, NAB). We try to accommodate each of our guests as best as we can considering

Dostoyevsky reminds us, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering the prisons". We are all sinners and all in need of love and forgiveness,



Wood Engraving by Meinrad Craighead (based on Matthew 25)

their differences.

Visiting the imprisoned is not quite as simple. Many times, we do not know the people in jail (generally, it is Catholic Workers we visit who have been arrested for social justice issues). The way I try to follow this work is by writing to them. I currently only have one imprisoned pen pal but writing to him is enlightening enough for me. If we view people as their crime rather than as their self, it is much easier to ignore the pains they endure.

even murderers and thieves.

Caring for the sick, for me, is the most difficult. While I was living at the L.A. Catholic Worker, I did more of this than now. I remember sitting on the couch with one of our guests and lifting his limbs for him because he couldn't move. With that simple act, my pains were very quickly put into perspective. It is important to remember that we can all help the sick without being a nurse or doctor. Our

(continued on back page)

Thank you to our soupline volunteers:

THE MORNING KITCHEN CREW

John Lalone, William Reid, Warren Steffen, Tim Underwood, Eric Velasquez, Gary Williams

EVERYDAY SOUP LINE VOLUNTEERS

Mary Lou Anderson, Henry Freeman, Jim Haber, Lewis Lathan, Richard and Robert Majors, Sr. Megan Rice, Rikki Robinson-Ogawa

WEDNESDAY MORNING SOUP LINE VOLUNTEERS

Barbara Abeytia, Craig Butler, Jim Dufault, Modesto Fernandez, Chunhwa Jeong, Andrew Kohl, Greg Ramirez, Karen Reeve, Derek Rinaldo, Steve Stefani, Gloria Taylor, Gino Wideou, Harry Williams

THURSDAY MORNING SOUP LINE VOLUNTEERS

Dan and Lothar Batchelder, George and Peg Bean, Vikki Courtney, Dale and Peggy Devitt,

FRIDAY MORNING SOUP LINE VOLUNTEERS

Peter Daher, Immer Ravalo, Laurie Rivera, Anthony Smith, Midgene Spatz, UNLV Newman Center

SATURDAY MORNING SOUP LINE VOLUNTEERS

Ellen Bordinhao, Sonja and Marcus Brouwers, Annalyn Carillio, Denbe Cruz, Peter Ediger, Dr. Jerry Jones, Ed Martin, Laurie Rivera, John Seli, Ryan Taylor

MONTHLY FOOD BASKET DISTRIBUTION VOLUNTEERS

JoAnn Bingham, Lori Bossy, Dave and Carol Welch, Anne Welsh

we apologize for those we missed

**Mark your calendars!
The Eleventh Annual
Empty Bowl Benefit**

will take place on

Saturday, April 9, 2011

**Last year's benefit raised over
\$31,000 for the Catholic Worker**

(Kelso, continued from front page)

patience and attention has the ability to cure many ailments. Genuine love and concern can reach the deepest parts of the body.

Burying the dead is the least familiar of works for me as I haven't done it as a Catholic Worker. What is perhaps most important in this work is allowing for closure, for the living rather than the deceased. Properly disposing of the dead shows respect and allows the dead to be treated with dignity and love.

The works of mercy seem very simple but trying to live them everyday is a constant test. We, as Catholic Workers, sign up to help – to stand with the victims – to bring justice to the marginalized – and end up needing more help for ourselves than we give to others. Our impatience and short comings are constantly exposed and we find truth, once again, in Dostoyevsky's assertion that "love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams".

Katie Kelso is a member of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker community. (katie@lvcw.org)

**Websites: www.lvcw.org
www.catholicworker.org**

**PRAY FOR
PEACE
IN OUR
WORLD!**

(FOR
TAB)

**Thank You to our donors who
make this ministry possible.
2011: Our 25th year!**

Estimated Statistics for 2010:

Soupline:

Bowls of Soup served: 106,000
Cups of Hot & Cold Tea: 94,000
Loaves of Bread used: 2,500

Hospitality Day:

Lunches served: 1,280
Showers given: 930

Monthly Food Box distribution:

Food Boxes given out: 390

Hospitality House guests:

Room for 4-6 guests, average: 5

Beggar

by Julia Occhiogrosso (julia@lvcw.org)

eyes
give a glimpse
into the sorrow
of a mind disturbed

a genetic story
a brutal legacy

not *really* knowing
why
how
what to do

just a battered being
stumbling in front of
bumper to bumper traffic
paused

for a moment
to ignore,
acknowledge,
or pity
think about
the threadbare stranger

the ragged man
the soiled cap
upturned
pleading
a scant existence
from an anonymous hand
through a now moving
car window

Morning Soupline Statistics:

Soup: Wednesday: Rice
Thursday: Mac & Cheese
Friday: Spaghetti
Saturday: Rice

Each morning we cook 40 - 50 gallons of soup (426 - 533 12 oz. servings each) Also provided each morning: Hot & Iced Tea, Bread, Sweets and Water. **Monthly:** Christ the King Stew (1st Thurs.) and Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast (2nd Sat.).

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 to the poor & homeless (about 150 people).

Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - noon:

Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless men home for showers, to wash clothes, and to have a great lunch.

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

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

Thursday, 11:30 a.m.:

50 Bag lunches delivered to homeless.

Last Saturday of month, 8:00 a.m.:

Deliver food boxes to homes in need.

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