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 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.

Dostoevsky 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)
Thank you to our soupline volunteers:

THE MORNING KITCHEN CREW

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 Abeyta, Craig Butler, Jim Dufault, Modesto Fernandez, Chunwha Jeong, Andrew Kohl, Greg Soupline volunteers: Thank you to our Rinaldo, Steve Stefani, Gloria Taylor, Cruz, Peter Ediger, Dr. Jerry Jones, and Robert Majors, Sr. Megan Rice, Dan and Lothar Batchelder, George and Peg Bean, Vikki Courtney, Dale Ellen Bordinhao, Sonja and Marcus Ed Martin, Laurie Rivera, John Seli,

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 Carillo, 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

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

PRAY FOR PEACE IN OUR WORLD!

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

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

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

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, to give a glimpse of a mind disturbed, a brutal legacy. For a moment to ignore, acknowledge, or pity think about the threadbare stranger the soiled cap turned upturned pleading a scant existance from an anonymous hand through a now moving car window.