

MANNA *in the wilderness*

Our 25th Year!

June 2011

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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HEALING CHILDREN ON THE MARGINS

by Julia Occhiogrosso

It's May in the mountains outside of Denver. It is a time when the soft tender greens signal the dawn of Spring. I see gusts of white powder filling the corners of the window pane and I just threw more logs on the fire. I sit back and breathe deeply all that has transpired in the year that we have been away from Las Vegas.

During different moments in community at the Catholic Worker, discussions revolved around what more could be done to help alleviate the suffering of men and women we served in our soup lines and Hospitality Houses. What kinds of "structural" changes would improve the quality of life for the destitute? We would pray for guidance and insight.

During our almost 12 months of Sabbatical time in a small mountain town just west of Denver, I have frequently felt like these prayers are being answered. I am gaining insight and understanding of why and how so many are marginalized. While there are many reasons why people end up on soup lines, I am ready to say that a good majority are marginalized due to a failed mental health system.

Tucked away amidst old pines and Aspen groves, we came to befriend the therapeutic foster families caring for mentally ill children. We found out about this almost anonymous haven when our sons were in desperate need of their services back in 2008. We returned here to live for awhile for the purpose of gleaning the support and wisdom of this very experienced team of experts.

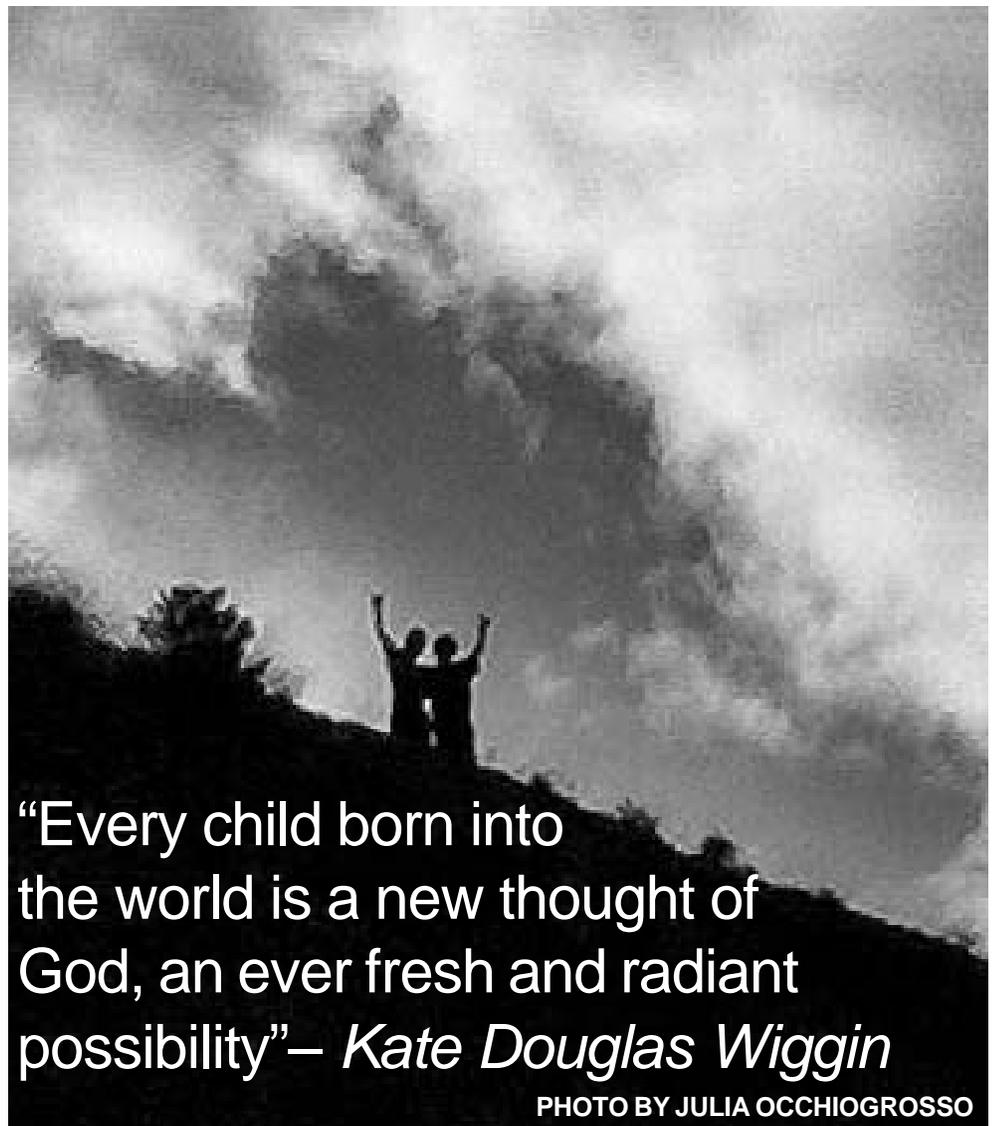
We were inspired by the therapeutic parenting they provide for some of the most severely hurt children in our society. Within a few months we too were involved in the work of caring for these children. Our experience with the Catholic Worker made us feel at home with the spirit of service and community that fuels the team here at the Institute for Attachment and Child Development.

The Institute for Attachment and Child Development treats children with Reactive Attachment Disorder and related mental illnesses due to trauma and disrupted attachment to a primary caretaker during the first two years of life. Most children are placed into treatment from adoptive or foster homes. Usually

children are admitted into treatment and stay from five weeks to a few months. They return to their family or foster family where the recovery continues.

Miles away from our Catholic Worker life and work in Las Vegas, I find myself in strangely familiar territory. We are living in homes that feel like Hospitality Houses. We are serving children who have been alienated or displaced from normal family life. Our task is to cultivate connection with children who have

watching their progress left Gary and I wanting to do more. We started with an eighteen-year-old who had been adopted as a child but became so unmanageable by his teen years that his adoptive parents severed the adoption. While in foster care he arrived at the Institute. He made significant progress in the program. When he was ready for discharge the County had trouble finding a placement. He came to live with us on an extended foster care plan. He continues with outpatient care



"Every child born into the world is a new thought of God, an ever fresh and radiant possibility" – Kate Douglas Wiggin

PHOTO BY JULIA OCCHIOGROSSO

learned not to trust adults and who acquire oppositional behaviors to keep them at a safe distance from authentic reciprocal relationships. Without recovery work, these children will and do arrive on the margins of society; on the streets, psychiatric hospitals, jails and soup lines.

When I first came out I was invited to be trained to do relief for the full-time foster parents. Since each parent is given three nights and four days off each month, this kept me busy. I was suddenly Mom Julia to all the kiddos from the different houses. Getting to know these kids and

through the Institute. With the help of the therapist he was gradually able to reconnect with his adoptive parents and younger sister. It was a poignant moment to watch them embrace for the first time in years as his adoptive parents attended the high school graduation they never thought was possible for him.

Given our Catholic Worker formation it is hard for us not to respond with hospitality for these situations. Whether we are here or at the Catholic Worker we seem to be called to the vocation of *(continued on back page)*

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welcoming the stranger.

Just yesterday we met with the team to consider taking in a fifteen-year-old who also has no viable placement. He suffers from schizo-affective bipolar disorder. He has done very well in the program. The concern is if they move him to a foster home outside the circle of therapeutic families he has learned to trust he will fall apart and destabilize. We will likely take him in as well.

Our only plan when we came out here

National Catholic Worker Gathering

Everyone Invited! As part of our 25th Anniversary Celebration we will be hosting Catholic Workers from across the U.S. on Oct. 7-9, 2011. Events will be at Christ the King Catholic Community Hall on Friday and Saturday. Featured speakers include Wes Howard-Brook and Sue Ferguson Johnson speaking on Friday, 6:30-8 p.m.; "Coming Out of Empire, Within and Without" and on Saturday, 3:30 -5 p.m.; "Loving Our Enemies/Destroying Our Enemies: Which Joshua?" Also we will be showing the Documentary on Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day; "Don't Call Me A Saint" on Saturday from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Workshops will take place on Friday and Saturday and a liturgy will take place on Sunday at the Nevada Test Site with a vigil following at Creech AFB. More info will be sent to our mailing list or go on our website: www.lvcw.org

was to take some time to get our boys into a better environment for recovery. Our boys have made steady progress despite some early setbacks when we first arrived. Nick has a job washing dishes at a local Café. Cody is starting a program at the Community College in Denver to get his GED. We do not think it a good time to move them back to Las Vegas.

Gary and I continue to work with Katie Kelso and John Yevtich from a distance to support the work of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. We are so blessed that they wanted to experience running a Catholic Worker at the same time we were in need of moving to get support for our children. We are grateful the Worker is in good hands with Katie and John and Mark and the support of our volunteers and donors. We are presently working on the National Catholic Worker Gathering for October 7 - 9, 2011 (see left). And, at least until the boys are eighteen we hope that we can sustain a long distance relationship until our return to a ministry with the homeless in Las Vegas. I am certain we will have more to offer when we return. We may bring with

**Website: 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!***

us a few new long-term hospitality guests who will enrich our community.

NEEDS: Used Bicycle, Gas Dryer, Musical Instruments, call Katie or John at (702) 647-0728

Mental Illness Facts:

In 1955, about 560,000 Americans were being treated in state mental hospitals. Based on population growth since then, you would expect more than 930,000 people in such hospitals today. There are only 55,000. Nearly 300,000 are imprisoned. Another half-million are on probation.

The largest public mental-health facility in the U.S.? The Los Angeles County Jail, home to 3,000 mentally ill inmates.

reprinted from Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness by Pete Earley.

Empty Bowl Results:

The benefit on April 9 brought in \$32,032 in income, minus \$2,662 in expenses; a total of \$29,370 for our projects feeding the poor and homeless citizens of Las Vegas. Thank You to Green Valley High School, the Nevada Clay Guild and the Fiber Guild.

POPE CALLS FOR "NON-VIOLENCE OF JESUS"

"Above all we want to make the voice of Jesus heard. He was always a man of peace. It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces. That he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all. He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, to-

tally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they

are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin anew with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This is Jesus' true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside."

-Pope Benedict XVI, Good Friday, 2011

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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 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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