

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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Through the Eye of Mercy

by Julia Occhiogrosso

From my kitchen window I see him. When washing dishes or preparing the evening meal there he is: sitting outside our side gate, underneath the olive trees, catching a reprieve from the summer sun. He approaches and offers to sweep up the debris as a gesture of his appreciation for allowing him to sit in our shade. With limits on the rooms in our Hospitality Houses, this is the best we can offer him. My husband says that living in a neighborhood plagued with poverty, he often feels like he is an awkward spectator into people's vulnerability and pain. While the Catholic Worker practice of opening Hospitality Houses in poorer neighborhoods may have its origins in simple affordability, certainly Dorothy and Peter were deeply attuned to the spiritual importance of heeding the Gospel invitation to see and be Christ among the poor and vulnerable in our communities. For the Catholic Worker, this has meant living among them.

In Las Vegas, the Catholic Worker started in 1986 by serving ice water in the heat of summer out of the back of a VW station wagon. Soon our water recipients suggested a location to serve coffee and donuts to day laborers lining the street by the freeway. The "coffee line" evolved into a hearty morning meal, still served three mornings a week in the same general area.

While the food line meals are prepared in the kitchen of our Hospitality House, we set up and serve outside on the street a few blocks away from the house. We have never been able to acquire a building in the neighborhood for inside serving. Being "buildingless" and serving outside forces us to at least briefly be exposed to the precarity of being homeless. As we approach with our vehicles full of food, we cannot help seeing the way homeless people attempt to negotiate a place of refuge. Tarps and boards attached to chain link fences make for flimsy shelter. The absence of bathrooms or trash service forces people to sleep in the squalor of debris. These harsh circumstances are worsened by the extreme weather conditions, cold, wind, heat, and even rain.

Most mornings, despite the challenges, they wait patiently in line for the Catholic Worker volunteers to arrive. In contrast to their dreary and difficult circumstances, we



Details from John Alan Warford's mural in the vestibule of Tucson, Arizona's St. Augustine Cathedral. Dorothy Day (co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement) looks down from a balcony with mercy at a homeless man.

Photos by Julia Occhiogrosso

are met by resilience and grace. We are humbled by the smiles and expressions of gratitude that greet us as we hand out simple bags containing a hot meal.

While I only endure these conditions for the brief time we are serving, there are days when a particular image haunts me. In the chill of winter mornings, the cold can linger in my bones even after being indoors for a while. As witnesses to the scene, our hearts cannot avoid being awakened to the human cost of disparity and injustice. If new volunteers have any judgement or hardness of heart, it is softened by the morning's end.

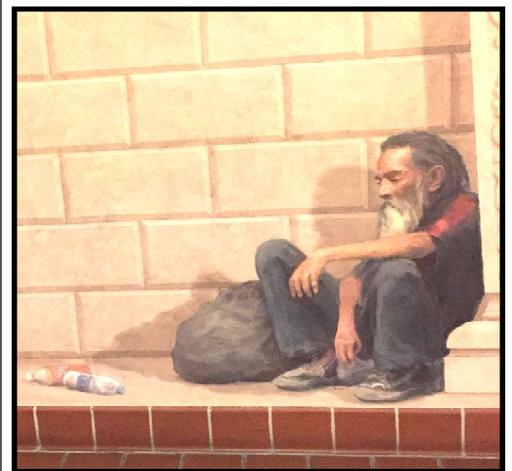
From its beginnings the Catholic Worker has been a place of refuge for the most desperate, for the outcast of outcasts. For people of privilege, it has offered a unique opportunity to move, sometimes awkwardly, into the world of the poor. Not for the novelty of the experience, but, as Dorothy seemed to know, seeking the Christ in the outcast we also contact the Christ within us.

This contact was essential in cultivating our capacity to work towards the promise

of a Beloved Community. We would find the source of the great love we had to share with a broken world.

In Las Vegas this sharing happens in our houses of hospitality, food serving and mobile shower project. People come to us, vulnerable and in need. With the model of the Gospel, we are given a way to respond. We give food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless and clean clothing to those without.

Meeting vulnerability and struggle with mercy and compassion is prompted by a faith in the power of Christ's love. While it



is easy to grow weary and want to avoid the reality of suffering just outside my front gate, this reality ultimately takes hold of my heart, informing my decisions and actions. It motivates a desire to create a just and compassionate world. I am convinced that my desire to do so would be weak and forgotten without the gift of solidarity formed from a sustained connection to the marginalized present in my life at the Catholic Worker.

Donation Information:

Checks: Please make checks payable and send to:

Las Vegas Catholic Worker

500 W. Van Buren Ave.

Las Vegas, NV 89106-3039

Zelle:

mail@lvcw.org (no fee)

PayPal Giving Fund:

<http://lvcw.org/giving>

(No fees taken out)

Credit / Debit Card:

<http://lvcw.org/donate>

Click the "Donate" button above the credit card icons, enter the amount, then click the bottom "Donate with a Debit or Credit Card" button.

Venmo:

@LasVegasCatholicWorker



Seeking the Path of Nonviolence

by Julia Occhiogrosso

One of my earliest memories is when I was probably three or four years old: my mother was lacing my shoes as I sat on the edge of the kitchen table with the radio broadcasting a news report about dying soldiers. I assume that was in Vietnam and it was years before I would be able to reflect on this memory with any kind of understanding. At the same time as I was formulating an aversion to the horror, violence, and futility of war, I was incrementally being introduced to the principles and practices of engaged nonviolence.

First, during my years in Catholic grade school when I read the Gospels. Here I was exposed to the difficult teachings of Jesus. "You have heard it said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but, I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." A teaching he would poignantly exemplify during his crucifixion when He proclaimed, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do."

In high school I learned about Cesar Chavez, the plight of the farmworkers and their nonviolent campaign for justice. "Nonviolence is our Strength," was Chavez's message. These words touched me to my core. Even with the limitations of my youthful grasp, these words resonated deeply as true. To this day I have the lapel pin I wore, that carried this verse.

Fast forward to 1982 while living and working with the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, where I would learn about Dorothy Day's pacifist stance. She saw all war as a contradiction to the Gospel of love. For her it was a complete undoing of the Corporal Works of Mercy. Her uncompromising belief in the Mystical Body of Christ and the sanctity of all life caused her to adhere unequivocally to her pacifist stance for herself and the Catholic Worker Movement.

In 1989 I was invited by Franciscan Friar Louis Vitale to be part of a group of

people who were wanting to expand their understanding and practice of nonviolence. They believed that nonviolence held within it a capacity to yield a more peaceful and just society. Together we founded "Pace e Bene" which translates from Italian to mean peace and all good. It was the greeting used by St. Francis.

Last month I attended Fr. Louie's memorial service. Ken Butigan, who joined Pace e Bene in its first year and is still working for Pace e Bene today, pointed out that I was the last surviving member of the Pace e Bene founders. How grateful I am to have been part of this circle. What a gift to have had Fr. Louie Vitale, Fr. Alain Richard, Sr. Rosemary Lynch, and Peter Ediger as my mentors in nonviolence.

It was under the influence of the Pace e Bene community that all the fragments of ideas and intuitions that had taken root in me about nonviolence began to gain cohesion. I began to see nonviolence as a viable tool I could use to resolve interpersonal and communal conflict. I would use nonviolent principles to de-escalate tensions in our foodline. and be proactive with interventions that could prevent conflict from arising.

Through Pace e Bene, I came to lead nonviolence workshops where participants began to break from the stereotypical perspectives they held about nonviolence. They saw that to practice nonviolence was not about passively submitting to aggression. Principled nonviolence is creative and concrete, and yields effective and life affirming outcomes. We saw that the characteristics of violence, whether interpersonal or global were the same. Similarly, the principles of nonviolence which are operative and effective on a small scale could be employed to avoid and respond to large scale conflicts as well.

Once again, we are witnessing the heart-breaking violence and devastation of living beings in the futile cycle of violence and retaliatory violence in Palestine and Israel.

This is the familiar tired scenario of war, where no one wins and innocent lives are lost or fated to suffer long into the future.

In the face of devastating violence, I feel compelled to hold fast to the vision of a culture of nonviolence. I want to share what has been gifted to me about the power and efficacy of engaged nonviolence. I want to encourage those who have not done so to study nonviolence. For the sake of all victims of war and violence it becomes a sacred duty to embrace and work towards an alternative.

Pace e Bene's website: PaceeBene.org
Ryan Hall, Executive Director, is a former community member of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker.

Lamentation for the Holy Land

Oh, my anguish, my anguish!

I writhe in pain,

Oh, the agony of my heart!

My heart pounds within me,

I cannot keep silent.

For I have heard the sound of the trumpet;

I have heard the battle cry.

Disaster follows disaster;

the whole land lies in ruins,

In an instant my tents are destroyed,

my shelter in a moment.

How long must I see the battle standard

and hear the sound of the trumpet?

- Jeremiah 4:19-21

We Will be Closed Dec. 28-30

PLEASE JOIN US

Volunteer Scheduling:

(702) 647-0728

or mail@lvcw.org

Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker

Thurs.-Sat., 6:15 a.m.

Over 300 hot meals served to the poor and homeless (6:15 a.m.: meal assembly, 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.: meal distribution)

Friday, 8 a.m.-10 a.m.:

Clean the World Foundation shower trailer in our empty lot, up to 40 showers given. We provide clean clothing and hygiene supplies, Touro University students offer a monthly medical clinic.

Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.:

50 lunches taken to the homeless

Second Sat. of the month:

Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast (In December, the Pancake Breakfast will be Sat., Dec. 23rd, none in Jan. 2024)

We are a Participating Member of:
Nevadans for the Common Good

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