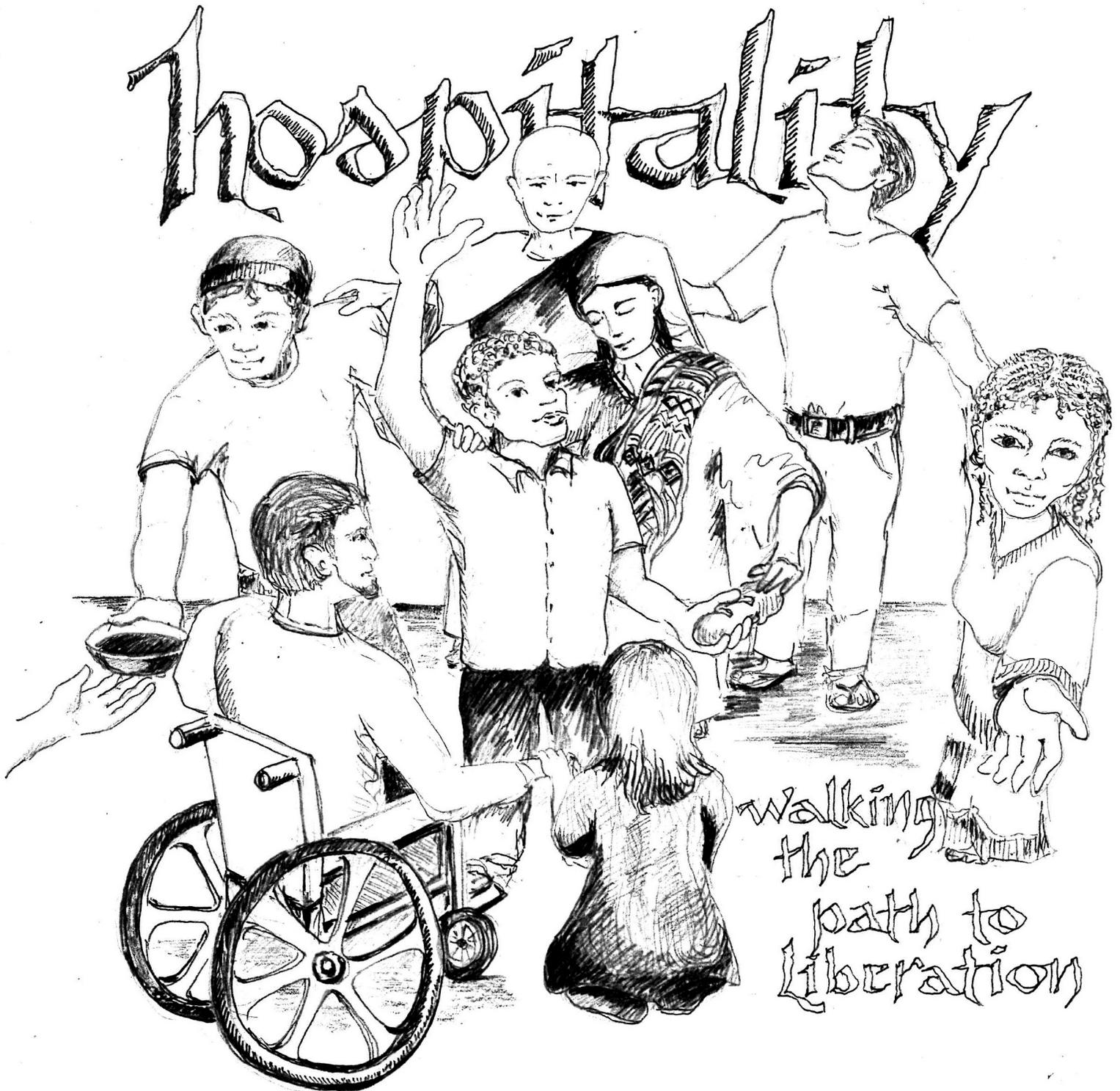


# THE Round Table

Summer 2011

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



# Why This Issue?

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Many of our readers, if they know anything about the Catholic Worker in St. Louis—or the Catholic Worker movement at large—know that we offer hospitality. It is one of the key practices with which we are associated. In the minds of many people this may look very much like a charitable act: There are some people who because of the turns of history have more time, money, privilege, etc. and because of the largeness of their hearts they offer some to others. This is not, however, the fount out of which our own hospitality flows.

As Workers we choose to offer hospitality, and extol on its virtues in these pages, out of a response to the injustices of the world; as an effort to invite liberation into our own lives and salvation into our communities. We look at our society and see strains in it that strive to divide us. We look at a history that has created racism, sexism, and classism to separate humans from each other for the economic benefit of a few. We bemoan anything that separates human beings, knowing that these separations are fabricated in order to confuse us and to contribute to an unequal economic distribution. We resist these movements in history by striving for justice. We experiment with hospitality because we yearn to live in ways that, though imperfect, break down these barriers; ways that unite us as people, no longer rich or poor, black or white, woman or man.

Yet, we do not ignore these realities that are within each of us, our internalized classism, sexism, and racism, and because we choose to acknowledge these issues and place ourselves in situations where we encounter them daily, we can begin to liberate ourselves from them. If we continue to live in homogeneous groups, the oppressive practices that function from within us will continue unchecked.

So read on for more stories and thoughts on how we resist the injustices of the world and strive for our liberation. Jenny Truax shares about the affinity between Gandhi and the Catholic Worker and how our hospitality is resistance work, how it is inclusive of all people, and how it will transform our hearts. Teka Childress invites us into her world of Winter Outreach, painting a picture of some of the people she encounters and the importance of being treated humanely. Carolyn Griffeth enlightens us on the centrality of hospitality in the Bible, pointing out stories such as the woman who helped Elijah, the story of Zacchaeus, and of course stories of Jesus. She also shares stories from her life where she has seen beautiful acts of hospitality. Ben Schartman tells us how his experiences with hospitality helped to liberate him from isolation and powerlessness. Megan Heeney has interviewed two people that have been connected with both Karen House and Kabat House in both giving and receiving hospitality and they share some insights into how it has altered their lives. Timmy Cosentino reminds us of the spiritual works of mercy in Catholic Worker Thought and Action. Finally, Heather brings us news of Kabat House, and Sarah Latham shares with us, in From Karen House, how a loving community brings freedom from fear, liberation, connectedness, and moments of heaven in our daily lives.

The authors invite us all to think of the simple ways we can open ourselves up more to inviting others into our lives, to make ourselves more vulnerable, to be more hospitable, and thus to resist the injustice in the world and struggle for a more loving world; a world where it is easier to be good and a world where we are walking the path of our own liberation.

- by James Meinert

Cover: Jeff Finnegan  
Centerfold: James Meinert

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# Reclaiming Radical Biblical Hospitality

by Carolyn Griffeth

In his 1975 book, *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen writes: “if there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality. It is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insight in our relationships to our fellow human beings.”

When I read these words of Nouwen’s many years ago I found them quite surprising. Having recently embraced the practice of hospitality within the context of the Catholic Worker, I had little idea

***Hospitality [is] the radical act of inviting someone who has been pushed to the margins of society into the center of our lives.***

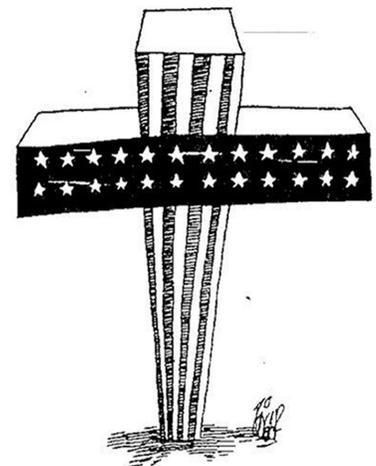
how central this concept was within the Christian tradition. Perhaps I thought hospitality, the radical act of inviting someone who has been pushed to the margins of society into the center of our lives, was a Catholic Worker invention. Certainly it wasn’t a practice that had ever been emphasized within my Christian education. I was living at St. Francis house in Chicago at the time and before going to sleep in the room that I shared with two women who would otherwise have been homeless, I would read a little of the Bible. Verses like Romans 12:13 “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” jumped out at me, as if I had never seen them before. Increasingly, I noticed that the Bible was full of stories, parables, and verses extolling the practice of hospitality.

How had I never noticed this before?

To answer this question, allow me to draw upon one of very few things I can recall from seminary school: the hermeneutic circle as put forth by Juan Luis Segundo, the Uruguayan Jesuit and renowned Latin American Liberation Theologian. Segundo defines the hermeneutic circle as “the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal” (Segundo). In light of Segundo’s understanding of how scripture is interpreted, it is no surprise that the radical teachings about hospitality in scripture had virtually escaped my notice until my “present-day reality” included relationships with the

less fortunate. In Segundo’s model the essential precondition of Biblical interpretation is simply the readiness to ask critical questions of one’s social context. In the US, Christianity has largely embraced a bland commercialized notion of hospitality in order to avoid questioning the capitalist context in which it is entrenched. For if we were to notice the biblical call to welcome the stranger, we would begin through these encounters to ask all kinds of new questions about our world order, and thus be compelled to change the world on behalf of those who suffer. The hermeneutic circle begins anew as we carry our new realities and relationships with us, as we once again engage with scripture.

Over the fifteen years that I have lived in communities of hospitality, I have come to recognize in the bible a multitude of hospitality stories which confirm and enliven my own experience. Although the Old Testament has many such stories I will simply touch on one of them, the story of Elijah and the widow from 1 King 17, which encapsulates the genre. During a serious drought, Elijah approaches a widow and asks for hospitality. The widow who had so little flour and oil that she assumes she is preparing a last meal for herself and her son, replies that they have nothing to share. To this Elijah replies “Do not fear . . . make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’ As an act of faith the widow offered hospitality to Elijah and was profoundly blessed: not only did her food supply



The New Christianity?

Carolyn Griffeth and her family are enjoying the hospitality of rural, radical communities this Summer as they get away to the Possibility Alliance, New Hope Farm, and Sandhill Farm.

never run out, Elijah also returned her son to life when illness overtook him.

This story is particularly meaningful to me for several reasons. First, I think it is instructive that Elijah was sent by God to go to a woman who herself was living on the margins, to find hospitality. This resonates with my experience that, generally speaking, the less people have the more willing they are to share. I have seen this not only in the more communal cultural practices of common folks in Latin America, but also amongst the homeless and struggling immigrants in the United States. I also experience this reality in the context of the Catholic Worker community where I live: it is because of our poverty that we are compelled to share with one another—our needs simply can not be met otherwise.

This story also speaks to me as a mother of two children, one with special needs which prevent him from living independently. Despite our desire to provide every opportunity for our children, my husband and I have chosen to use the little wealth we have toward helping the less fortunate and building community, at the cost of living more lavishly in the present or saving for our children's future. As a mother, I understand the difficult decision the widow was faced with—the struggle to have faith even when we have children! Likewise I relate to the resurrection story of her son; the Kabat House community has created a circle of love and support that gives me hope for my son's future.

Furthermore, the image of the widow sharing the little flour and oil she has with a stranger, and as a result never running out, is a beautiful metaphor for the blessedness I have heard many practitioners of hospitality reflect upon: The more we stretch ourselves to share, the more we are mysteriously provided for. Truly, it is in giving that we receive.

In the New Testament an additional theme becomes clear. Jesus not only extols us to practice hospitality to the least, “when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.” but also, beginning with his birth, Jesus becomes the least in order to invite others to be hospitable. In fact many of the New Testament narratives are about Jesus asking individuals like Zacchaeus for hospitality as means of inviting them into the reign of God. Similarly, Jesus directs his disciples to “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic” and thus to rely on the hospitality of others as they go forth to proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal the sick.

These passages of scripture highlight a truth that is rarely appreciated in our culture: It is often the person in greatest need that brings out the best in ourselves. In my experience the glue that holds many communities

together is not charismatic leadership but rather suffering people who bring healing to the whole by returning others to what is real and essential. One of the great challenges of the gospel is the call to become poor and vulnerable oneself in order to awaken the spirit of hospitality in others, and thus bring healing to our world. Which one of us would volunteer to be the person at the door asking for a place to rest or a meal, rather than the one who gets to help the person in need? Yet when Jesus says in Matthew 25 “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger

and you welcomed me...” he was not speaking just symbolically, this was in fact how he lived his life on earth.

Within the framework of the hermeneutic circle of Segundo it becomes clear that until we become poor ourselves, it

***The willingness of those who receive our hospitality to accept us as friends, despite the gulf in privilege that might divide us, is an acknowledgement of our common humanity and the belief that none of us need accept the roles society has handed us.***

is likely that we will miss seeing the poverty of Jesus, and thus seeing Jesus in the poor. The Catholic Worker, which has been described as “the most important modern movement to explicitly adopt hospitality as one of its basic tenets” grew out of Dorothy Day's charismatic ability to inspire others to embrace voluntary poverty and see Christ in the poor (Murray). Dorothy's main tactic was, of course, becoming poor herself and sharing the stories of her adventures in hospitality with others.

In a recent book, *Making Room*, by Christine Pohl, Pohl argues that hospitality is an essential lens, through which “we can read and understand much of the Gospel.” Yet to recover this lens, “the world needs living pictures of what a life of hospitality might look like.” In the story-telling tradition of Dorothy Day, I have chosen some “living pictures” of hospitality that have opened my eyes in recent years.

The first image that comes to mind is a Catholic Worker couple who desired to adopt a child, but were prohibited from adopting because of their poverty and life in a hospitality house. Instead this couple “adopted” both a teenage mother and her newborn child—an adorable little boy whom they are helping to raise while helping the mother get through school. Another living picture that comes to mind is a couple from Chicago who felt a calling to adopt not children, but rather two elderly acquaintances that would otherwise be in a nursing home. Later when they moved to Kansas, their elders moved with them to continue their lives together.

I am also inspired by Rob Boedeker, formerly of Karen House, who while struggling through law school has developed a strong friendship with a teen from the neighborhood named Biggie. Rob tutors Biggie regularly and does his best to keep him busy and off the street.

In exchange, Biggie has done his part to keep Rob sane and connected to his deepest values, even while in law school.

The last story I will share is that of Jimmy Delato, who died recently after spending 36 years as a guest at St. Francis house in Chicago. In fact, Jimmy's life at St. Francis house predated the community itself. An earlier community called the Gospel Family, which first owned the house invited Jimmy in as a homeless guest and when they sold the house to some Catholic Workers, Jimmy came with it. Though profoundly schizophrenic, Jimmy possessed a quiet and kind demeanor that invited friendship. Over the years, as community ebbed and flowed, Jimmy became St. Francis houses' most permanent fixture: his kind welcome and easy conversation created the atmospheric glue holding the place together. In his later years, Jimmy came



Biggie and Rob

photo by: Beth Buchek

down with prostate cancer, lung cancer, and suffered from incontinence. Even with these challenges, Jimmy was cared for by the community as well as an active extended community that came by to share a meal with Jimmy or help with a load of laundry. His recent funeral was the occasion of a Catholic Worker reunion. All celebrated the life of Jimmy, who through his vulnerability helped to build a community: Surely he brought the best out in everyone.

In each of these stories individuals have reached out beyond the boundaries of race, class, and family to create transformative relationships with the power to transform society as a whole. This is hospitality in the Biblical sense of the word. Hospitality in the Bible is translated from the Greek word, *philoxenia*, which literally means, extending *philo*, familial love, to *xenia*, strangers or foreigners. The goal of hospitality then is to extend the loving care typically offered only to one's family members to potentially all members of the human community, most particularly those who are outsiders to the established circles of support and fellowship. In contrast to the impersonal and socially marginalizing experience of most homeless shelters, true hospitality offers not only food and a comfortable place to rest, but also a respected place within a network of life-giving relationships. Or, borrowing the words of Henri Nouwen, hospitality is the creation of "a

free and friendly space where we can reach out to strangers and invite them to be our friends."

In a recent Kabat house meeting a community member posed the question, "What is our community's philosophy of hospitality?" Without any direct inspiration from the words of Nouwen, the Kabat house community quickly agreed that friendship, with all its richness and messiness, is the model of hospitality that we embrace.

Nonetheless, in discussing our community's practice of hospitality it is easy to over-emphasize the help that has been given to various individuals and underemphasize the gifts that these friends have given us. The gifts are numerous and priceless! The greatest gift being friendship itself, which when built across barriers of difference, tends to be particularly enlivening, funny, and authentic. Furthermore, the willingness of those who receive

our hospitality to accept us as friends, despite the gulf in privilege that might divide us, is an acknowledgement of our common humanity and the belief that none of us needs accept the role society has handed us. Also by sharing their stories and realities, our guests help us to see our position in the world with new eyes, and compel us to change it through resource and power-sharing relationships. Such shifts in the context of our lives and in our network of heart-felt relationships necessarily leads us to interpret scripture in new ways. Parables and verses extolling us to love our neighbor as ourselves take on a new meaning and depth--our faith is restored. For this, and for all the laughter and tears we have shared, I am truly grateful.



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Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality in the Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999.

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# Hospitality as Liberation

by Ben Schartman

Jenny Truax's most extraordinarily organized and excellently written article explores the practice of hospitality through the lens of hospitality as a resistance to societal injustice. In this article, I will be describing the practice of hospitality as a mode of life that is personally liberating to those practicing it. In my mind these two perspectives are fundamentally related, for in resisting what is wrong in the world outside of us we are at the same time liberating ourselves from some of the pain and confusion that come from living in a system that is unjust.

A note on language and the definition of words: The idea of liberation is a main theme in this article, so what is meant by liberation? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines to liberate as: to set at liberty; to free. This word is often used in a military sense, as in to free from foreign occupation. However, it also has a much broader meaning, borrowed in part from Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, denoting spiritual freedom, or freedom from wrong thinking (illusion).

Personal liberation from distress and confusion is also the main goal of Re-evaluation Counselling, a kind of peer-based counselling which has become part of the culture of our Northside CW communities, and Reevaluation Counselling's perspective on liberation has been influential in my thinking for this article.

The practice of hospitality has been liberating in the communal life of the Kabat House CW as well as in my own life in particular: 1) It has helped act as an antidote to feelings of isolation, 2) It has provided a different model

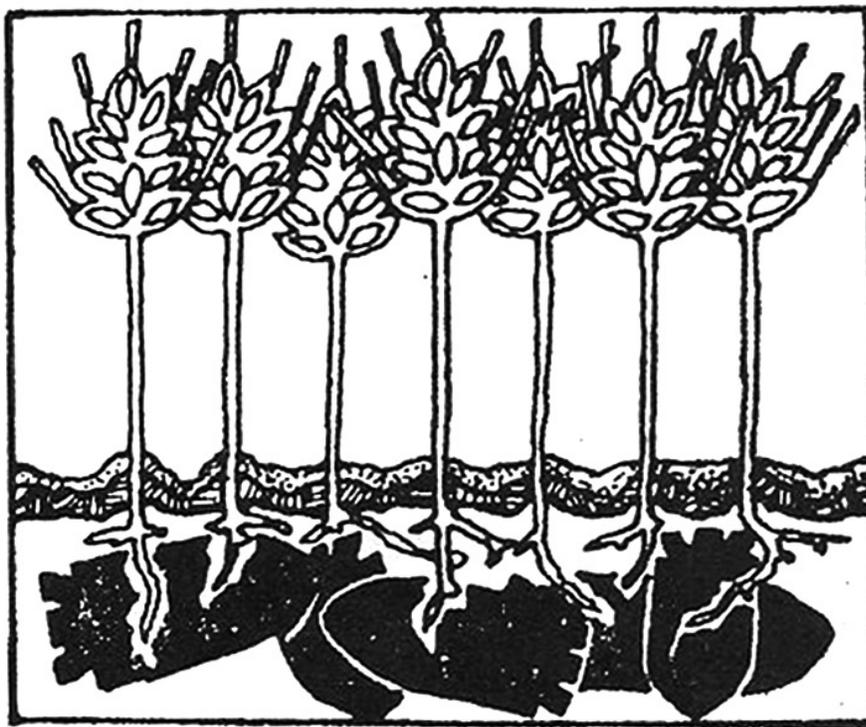
for doing good, which has helped contradict feelings of powerlessness, 3) It has also helped change the way that we think of ownership.

Being welcomed into a community where hospitality is a core practice has allowed me to adopt a more liberated framework for relating to resources than the one I had before. Previously, I would think: 'I shall make this decision or part with this resource if it is clearly to my personal gain.' Through living in a community and culture infused with the value of hospitality, I have come to a different way of

thinking. Now I think, if I have this thing (such as a space to live) then I will share it with someone who is in need, and I shall trust that if I am in need then someone will share with me that which I need. This change in thinking has been fostered by living closely with people who were formerly homeless and have much less than I.

It seems to me that in the Kabat House community, hospitality has acted as a seed out of which has grown a kind of informal gift economy or gift culture. A gift culture is a culture where goods and services are given

without any explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards. In this kind of culture/economy people make decisions about distributing resources based upon the needs of others or the needs of the group more than upon personal benefit or profit. It is said that the gift economy is a kind of informal social insurance, and this seems to be coming true within our community. In this way of life, we assure our security not by storing away money or resources that belong to us alone. Instead by contributing to the welfare of others and our community as a whole, we



**Ben Schartman** has been thinking about how to stay cool in the St. Louis Summer without air-conditioning. He has had some good ideas but he has still been very hot.

have our security not in things but in our relationships with people.

In this context, I have begun to feel that the natural way for humans to interact with one another is through friendship and sharing. Indeed, in living in a community where the value of hospitality and giving is supported, I

groups. Furthermore, many of us grew up in the middle class, which contributes to a particular type of isolation. Below is a quote from *Our True Selves*, a Reevaluation Counselling journal devoted to understanding and liberating those who grew up middle-class from the kind of conditioning they received. "Isolation is a central part of middle-class internalized oppression. We were systematically separated from other working class people. The lack of real human contact with the middle-class people around us often left us further isolated. We were expected to relate through a veneer of politeness."

## Isolation is a central part of middle-class internalized oppression

have found that I take great joy in giving to and sharing with others. The practice of hospitality in our community has helped me rub away the strong boundary I had around myself as a single individual and someone else as different than me, and has helped me experience that I and the 'other' are really very close and should be friends.

This brings us to isolation or feeling that we are separate from and different than others. I believe that this is such a dominant way of feeling for most people in this culture that it is hard to see it as something that is out of balance. I was struck by this again in reading a quotation from the Roundtable's 1987 issue on Hospitality drawn from Leviticus 19:33: "And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" What is most striking about this is just the significance given to the fact that there is a stranger. In our modern life, particularly in our cities or suburbs, our lives are filled with strangers.

Not only are our lives filled with strangers but of those in our lives who are not strangers still very few probably fall into this other category of "one born among you." This language is familial or tribal and speaks of a kind of community and belonging that we have lost in our modern age. Within the Kabat House community all of us grew up in nuclear families, which are normal these days, but certainly have not always been the norm. Nuclear families are themselves relatively isolated when compared to tribal or extended family social

In the Kabat House CW, hospitality is a kind of antidote to this pervasive isolation. For hospitality is not just offering someone a place to live but it is inviting someone in need to share life with us. It is the invitation to someone who is a stranger to become part of our family. And this practice helps us to begin to expand the trust and closeness we feel in familial bonds out to others. Although it is not possible that we will know every person in St. Louis, the practice of hospitality can help us to imagine that every person whom we see is someone whom we could live closely with (a potential member of our family). And this changed way of thinking can liberate us from feelings of isolation and help us to feel much more at home with others, and much more at home in the world.



Sarah, James, Marc and Mary in the Karen House dining room, makin' music. photo by: Beth Buchek

This increased feeling of belonging can be particularly meaningful and liberating when the people whom we are living with and learning to feel close to are of a different race or nationality than us. All of us have received so many messages that we are different from people who do not have the same skin color as us, that we can start to believe that this is somehow true. However, having the opportunity to live with people from all over the world (as we do

at Kabat House) provides an important contradiction to these messages of difference and separation.

I have also experienced the practice of hospitality as being liberating from the experience of powerlessness I had so often felt when confronting the ills of the world. This feeling of powerlessness came in part from the experience that the pain and suffering in the world is much larger than I can bear or change myself. It was easy for me to get stuck here and move no further. However, being welcomed into a hospitality community and having the opportunity to offer hospitality myself has helped me develop a different perspective. This perspective is that I can not change the world out there per se; however, I and those whom I live in community with can change our little piece of the world. And as stable and safe and beautiful a place as we can create, we can share it with those in need. I had my first opportunity to offer hospitality in my own space last fall, when a homeless friend of ours was being released from the hospital and needed some place to stay. At the time, the carriage house that I live in and am in the process of rehabbing had just one small livable room, but it was big enough to fit the two of us in. During the month and a half that this friend stayed with me I had such a feeling of satisfaction. Just by sharing the little that I had, I could help make this person's life

more stable and enjoyable. Since then space has opened up in Kabat House and this man has moved across the street to become a funny, energetic and supportive part of our community.

Hospitality is a much different model for doing good in the world than I had ever had before. Earlier in my life, I believed that what good I would do in the world I would do through my work, which was inextricably connected in my mind with my job; then in returning from work I would stop doing good and busy myself living my personal life. It has been immensely liberating for me to realize that the work I do in the world can be working with friends to build a supportive culture and community that can be a home to those who have not had a home.

In the ways mentioned above but in so many more as well, hospitality has been and continues to be a practice that is liberating in our individual lives and in the life of our community. Through the writing of this article I have had much time to reflect on the communal life of Kabat House, and it is good. Hospitality is at the center of this shared life, and the values of hospitality--particularly that of making a central space in our lives and our hearts for the least among us-- reach out and pervade the culture that we are creating here. It is a much saner, more secure and happy culture than the general American culture I knew before and I am deeply grateful to be part of it.

...We can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. – Dorothy Day

# Love is the Measure

As easy essay by James Meinert  
inspired by Pete and Dottie

as Dorothy Day used to say,  
Love is the measure,  
but to truly love each other,  
we must first know each other,  
and to know each other,  
we must first listen to each other,  
and to listen to each other,



photo courtesy: Marquette University Archives

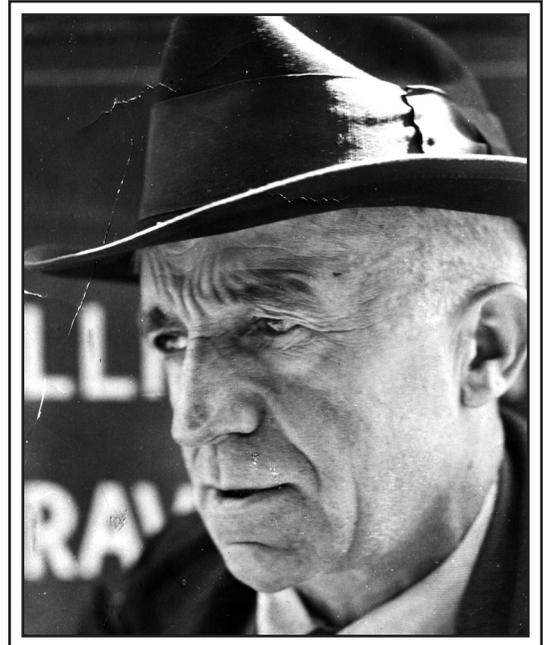


photo courtesy: Marquette University Archives

we must first slow down,  
enough to simply be with each other.  
but capitalism doesn't want us  
to slow down.  
capitalism wants us to speed up  
in order to increase profits.  
yet the true prophets of our age  
reject the capitalist adage,  
and embrace instead  
slowing down  
to be with each other  
to listen to each other  
to know each other and  
to love each other  
because, as we know,  
Love is the measure



# Hospitality as Resistance

by Jenny Truax

“Why do you have those signs?” I took a long pause before answering the group of eighth graders. They were gazing quizzically at our large hand-written signs reading “U.S. Drones Out of Pakistan” and “End the War in Afghanistan”. How could I explain (in an age-appropriate way, in thirty seconds or less, in a manner that didn’t engender guilt) the relationship between the homeless women at Karen House and anti-drone signs?

I don’t remember exactly how I answered that day, but the question - “How does your hospitality relate to your work for justice?” - is revealing. It’s easy for even long-term Catholic Workers to view the movement in two branches: the resistance arm and what some outside of the movement would call the charity arm. If you search for the word “resistance” on the Catholic Worker website, you’ll find that it’s frequently used separately from hospitality; “we do hospitality and resistance”, or “hospitality and some resistance”, or even “we do not do hospitality, we are a house of resistance.” Are the two really mutually exclusive? Could hospitality itself be an act of resistance? The Indian Independence Movement, led by M.K. Gandhi, sheds some light on this question.

## Three Strands of the Gandhian Program

When you think of Indian resistance to British rule, what image comes to mind? For many, it’s pictures from the Salt March. This political action was certainly part of the Gandhian agenda, however, his program of nonviolence was far more expansive than many are aware. Not simply a nationalist movement seeking expulsion of the

British, the Indian Independence movement sought to pioneer entirely new ways of living. Gandhi’s program included three broad strands: personal transformation, the constructive program, and political action.

Narrowing in on the second element of Gandhi’s program, the constructive program, we discover how spinning khadi, or cotton cloth, became such a powerful symbol of the Indian Independence movement. Six distinct characteristics help us understand the importance of spinning. First, it was both symbolic and tangible; rooted in Indian culture, spinning also provided real work for real people, fostering local economic independence. Spinning was a radical confrontation with the central myth of colonialism, dependency. Rather than depend on the occupier, Indians began to feed and clothe themselves. Spinning was an activity that everyone could participate in, across class and caste lines, and it served as a daily spiritual discipline, encouraging personal transformation and reflection. It was proactive and simple; people needed clothes, and could now make them. Lastly, spinning enabled active non-cooperation with British occupation; it enabled the mass boycott of foreign-made cloth (decimating the colonial cloth market in India). As one element of a wide-ranging constructive program aimed at asserting self-rule, spinning was key to the nonviolent revolution in India.<sup>1</sup>

## The Catholic Worker and Gandhi

So what does all this have to do with anti-drone signs at Karen House, or hospitality’s relationship to resistance? How are the Works of Mercy, and hospitality in particular, similar to Gandhi’s practice of spinning? First, some comparisons might be helpful. The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker are our template for building a new society, roughly akin to Gandhi’s three strands of personal transformation, constructive program, and political action. The Aims and Means describes four practices (manual labor, nonviolence, the Works of Mercy, and voluntary poverty) towards building a new society founded on personalism, decentralization, and a just relationship with the earth. These four practices clearly harmonize with Gandhi’s constructive program.

At their roots, both movements attempt to resist oppression - from the oppression of the lower caste in India and the oppression of the Indians by the British, to the oppression of people of color in the U.S. Both movements



Photo - bharatkhandi.com, an organization seeking to build a non-violent, non-exploitative social order as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, and to relieve the rural people from their existing poverty.

Jenny Truax has added the show, “Battlestar Galactica” to the handful of popular culture exceptions to her otherwise highly counter-cultural lifestyle.

resist the specific policies that manifest oppression – imperialism, capitalism, war, fear, segregation, etc. Our vantage point is one major difference between the two movements. Gandhi led the indigenous people who were occupied, while Catholic Workers in the U.S. are largely the beneficiaries of occupation and imperialism, trying to lasso the beast from within.

Let's compare Gandhi's constructive program to the Works of Mercy practiced in the Catholic Worker. Both are foundational practices within these two movements. Both are seemingly non-confrontational, but in reality, both embody essential acts of resistance. Gandhi considered the constructive program to be the essential positive foundation of Satyagraha (resistance); the activities within it were considered a prerequisite to the more public marches, fasts and campaigns. In his book *The Catholic Worker After Dorothy*, Dan McKanan makes a similar statement regarding the Works of Mercy: "One cannot claim to be a Catholic Worker unless one is practicing the Works of Mercy, and for most Workers, the Works of Mercy are not merely a practice but also a way of seeing the world."

So, within Gandhi's three strands and the Catholic Worker's Aims and Means, both spinning and the Works of Mercy are foundational to the goal of resisting oppression. In both movements, resistance takes the form of both direct action (not cooperating with injustice) and also the form of "building a new society within the shell of the old" (creating just alternatives).

Now, let's take those six characteristics of spinning, and compare them to the specific practice of hospitality. I hope that by expanding our description of hospitality, we might think of it the way Gandhi thought of the constructive program: as an essential component of our resistance to oppression.

## 1. Tangible and Symbolic

Providing hospitality to the homeless is certainly both tangible and symbolic. Tangibly, Catholic Worker houses seek to provide stability, love and a real home for guests. This idea is embodied well by Mark van Steenwyk, describing one of their community's first guests: "Michael

will always define hospitality for me because, to him, we have become his home. We are the people he comes back to—we have become his family. That, ultimately, is the goal of hospitality. And it is what makes hospitality so difficult. It is easy to give charity. But it is difficult to give yourself. It is easy to tell someone that God loves them. But it is hard to love them yourself."<sup>2</sup> Providing a home, and love, to those who need it is a very tangible act of resistance to a culture that often provides neither to those in need.

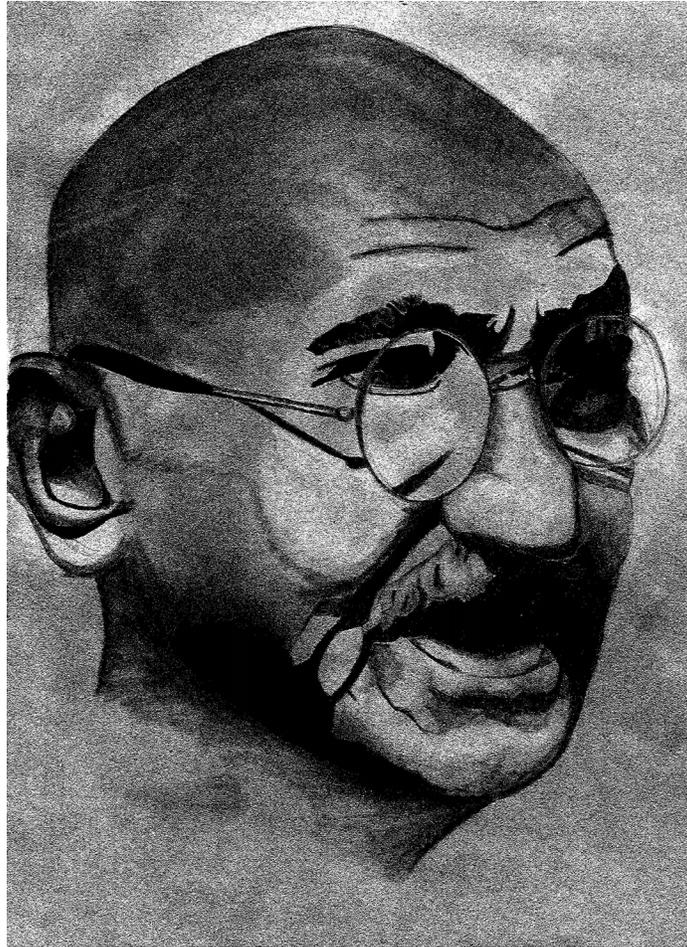
Doing hospitality also symbolizes our goal - in a new society we will take care of each other, provide safety nets for each other, and help meet each other's needs when they arise.

## 2. A Radical Confrontation with the Central Myth of Colonialism: Dependency on Empire

Doing hospitality contradicts the myth that we need the government, or some impersonal nonprofit agency, to do good. Explaining why the Catholic Worker is not an

incorporated agency, in 1972 Dorothy Day wrote, "No one asked us to do this work. The mayor of the city did not come along and ask us to run a breadline or a hospice.... On our responsibility, because we are our [sister and] brother's keeper, because of a sense of personal responsibility, we began to try to see Christ in each one that came to us. If a [person] was hungry, there was always something in the icebox... If [s]he needed clothes, there were our friends to be appealed to, after we had taken the extra coat out of the closet first, of course... Ever to become smaller- that is the aim. And to talk about incorporating is somehow to miss the point of the whole movement."<sup>3</sup>

By doing hospitality, we are taking personal responsibility for the needs of others, relying on our extended community in St. Louis and beyond for support, rather than relying on the U.S. government or a foundation. Teka's article on Winter Outreach provides an amazing example of this social anarchism in action: a small group of St. Louisans saw the need for emergency winter beds for people sleeping on the street. After receiving lackluster response from city officials, the Winter Outreach group



Charcoal drawing, Robert McGee, 16, Teka Childress House

**NABI SALEH**, a small village of around 500 people located near Ramallah in the West Bank, experiences fierce violence from the Israeli army, including targeting and arresting their children, yet they continue to non-violently protest the confiscation of their land. The courage this village displays is incredible; visiting it and receiving their generous hospitality was so moving.



The home of Manal, a mother in Nabi Saleh. It has multiple windows broken from tear gas canisters. After the army breaks the windows, they drive a tank through town, spraying "skunk water" into all of the houses, causing a smell that lasts for weeks.

# Hospitality

Often people think of hospitality as something we are called to give rather than humbly receive. Recently, I had the extraordinary pleasure of traveling to Palestine. Going to the region was moving - this region faces harsh restrictions and an enforced lack of resources by the Israeli army,

We had the great pleasure of visiting with family members of the St. Louis Palestinian Solidarity Committee in **BEITIN**, a small village near Ramallah. It used to take twenty minutes to get to Ramallah, but with the construction of the wall the destruction of



all roads leading to Ramallah, it can now take up to two hours - sometimes more if there are impromptu checkpoints. Coincidentally, many Palestinians living in St. Louis come from this village!



Much of the separation wall on the Palestinian side is filled with art that symbolizes the resistance, and with messages of hope and perseverance.



Colleen with kids in the Bedouin village

The **BEDOUIN** people of Palestine, historically nomadic, are especially vulnerable to the occupation. They live on land and in villages that are unrecognized by Israel, and therefore ineligible for municipal services such as connection to the electrical grid, water mains or trash-pickup. The Israeli army periodically comes in and destroys their houses and structures; they continue to rebuild.

# in Palestine

which is funded by our country—the United States. To receive hospitality from people whose children bear the marks of tear gas canisters that read "Made in the USA" is heart wrenching.  
- Colleen Kelly



Iyad's daughter showing us the tear gas canisters fired in her village - made in the USA.



Walking with Iyad Burnat, head of the Popular Committee in Bil'in and two of his children on our way to the wall.

By annexing close to 60% of **BIL'IN** land for settlements and the construction of the separation wall, the state of Israel is strangling the village. Bil'in residents have organized non-violent protests every Friday for the last seven years. They won a court case with the Israeli Supreme Court to stop the building of the wall and return a portion of their land. That ruling was five years ago and has yet to be honored.

decided to meet the need themselves. Now, hundreds of people throughout St. Louis work together to house homeless folks during dangerous weather conditions. We need not wait for someone else; we can change the world, love those in need, and build the new society today.

Rather than reinforcing societal arrangements of empire (especially the regrettable notion of giver-receiver in a “charity model”), we hope our hospitality calls these definitions into question. We strive to create personalist relationships with all those we encounter, be they homeless men from the neighborhood, or wealthy students from the county. “[Hospitality that welcomes the least, and recognizes their equal value, can be an act of resistance and defiance - a challenge to the values and expectations of the larger community.”<sup>4</sup>

We rely on the central myth that we need the government to do things for us; we also rely on other myths that keep the empire running: 1. We (white, educated, U.S. citizens) are more deserving than others – of the world’s resources, of wealth, of freedom. 2. People who don’t make it (the poor, people of color, the unemployed) really only have themselves to blame. 3. It is not important to think about the collateral damage that we leave behind – to the environment, to sweatshop workers, to “the other”. It is more important to seek security, gratification and entertainment. These three myths maintain the status quo of injustice, and are ingrained in our culture. Doing hospitality confronts all three myths in a personal, powerful way.

### 3. An Activity that Everyone can Participate In

Across lines of race, class, sexual orientation, culture, age, and ability, everyone can participate in hospitality in some way. At Karen House, a group of retired folks makes bologna sandwiches for us to give away; a formerly homeless man comes regularly to help answer the phones and take the trash out; college students learn to take house; church youth groups weed in our garden; people throughout the country donate money to pay our bills; our guests themselves help keep the house clean; one of our community members writes the thank you notes while another monitors our website; families with children cook dinner; folks from our neighborhood donate clothing... I could go on, but you get the point.

Hospitality is inclusive, and welcomes participation from across the spectrum. It’s a special thing (and one that happens in Catholic Workers everywhere) that one can be chatting with a homeless woman from St. Louis City and a tenured professor from St. Louis University, over dinner that was donated from Girl Scouts in West

County, at a table that has hosted several generations of such interactions.

### 4. A Daily Spiritual Discipline

Any Catholic Worker will tell you that doing hospitality creates a daily spiritual discipline. In the day-to-day of sharing life with our guests, we learn to give and receive love from people who are different from us - one of the greatest blessings of doing hospitality. We learn to accept and abide in suffering, which was a cornerstone of both Gandhi’s and Dr. Martin Luther King’s conceptions of ac-

tive nonviolence. We learn to absorb violence - from people wounded by the system, from witnessing the system harming these people, and from our own shortcomings and

limitations. We learn to seek and choose love, beyond hopes of success or personal fulfillment. We learn to trust that that no amount of love given is wasted. Again describing their guest, Mark observes, “[A]s I relate to Michael, I am forced to come to the end of myself and trust in God more.”<sup>5</sup>

We try to live out personalism - the philosophy that, in simple terms, regards the dignity of the human person as the most important consideration in all matters - within our hospitality. Practically speaking, our goal is to see God in every person that comes through the door, and to live with our guests in a way that recognizes our mutual equality. This might be the most radical thing about the Catholic Worker; our hospitality is NOT the stereotype of the white, educated do-gooders saving the poor people from their own destructiveness. Ironically, often the hardest part of hospitality is learning to live and make consensus decisions with fellow community members. Our friend Mark Chmiel once said that people aren’t burned out by injustice, homelessness, or war; they’re burned out by living with their fellow community member’s dirty dishes. Injecting personalism into our daily encounters with guests, community members, volunteers, and the wider community is a challenging and transforming spiritual practice.

The practice of personalism echoes the Gandhian value of heart unity, the concept that everyone and everything is united in the deepest sense of the word. Heart unity implies that our perception of separation is a delusion and, due to this, we should treat all beings as we would like to be treated ourselves. (Sound like the familiar Golden Rule?) Heart unity “bridges the gap between the oppressor and the oppressed; it finds a common ground where they both can stand.”<sup>6</sup>

**“We learn to seek and choose love, beyond hopes of success or personal fulfillment, and trust that that no amount of love given is wasted.”**

## 5. Proactive

No Catholic Worker is the same; each crafts its mission and work around the needs of the wider community, rather than imposing a cookie-cutter model. Our hospitality is hopefully proactive and direct; people need safe, stable housing and we try to provide it.

## 6. Enables Active Non-Cooperation

By doing hospitality, sharing resources, and living communally we can start to withdraw our cooperation with oppressive structures. By experimenting with voluntary poverty, central to Catholic Worker philosophy, we can withdraw our support of the evils of capitalism and consumerism. We try to both make individual choices of non-cooperation, and also create communities that reflect this value. We can examine our life choices more intentionally, and try to make choices that rectify, rather than amplify, injustice, minimizing our purchases, guzzling less gas, etc. As an example, many Catholic Workers do war tax resistance by living under the taxable income, or by redirecting a percentage of their income away from war spending towards positive community projects.

As a Catholic Worker house, Karen House is not a 501(c)3 non-profit; we choose to remain outside of the state's definition of "charity work" (a category that requires limiting social justice work). We believe that the more a group is aligned with Empire the more complicit it is in its policies, and the less ability it has to resist. Dorothy Day said, "Our refusal to apply for exemption status in our practice of the Works of Mercy is part of our protest against war and the present social 'order' which brings on wars today."<sup>7</sup>

Beyond living in community, doing hospitality specifically provides an active vehicle for us to stop cooperating with, and consenting to, the injustices of homelessness and poverty. It allows us to take action, to provide a home to people, to redirect our time and talents from the status quo towards building a new society that includes the Works of Mercy.

### Resistance: Remaking the Heart

The six characteristics of spinning can certainly open up space for us to consider hospitality in a new light. It is important to recognize that the Works of Mercy are not the only Catholic Worker practices that have corollaries in the Gandhian program. Many of us would consider

other foundational practices of the Catholic Worker - nonviolent civil disobedience, organic farming, practicing voluntary poverty and manual labor, to name a few - as essential elements of resistance. It would be interesting to find further similarities between these practices and the Gandhian movement.

Karen House is supported by so many people. Some folks might perceive our hospitality as charity, perhaps even thinking that Karen House is an agency, run by a paid staff on grant money, catering to "clients" (or the new buzzword, "consumers.") We hope that you, our faithful RoundTable readers, can continue to help us refine our understandings and explanations of the hospitality of Karen House.

"...[T]he call to hospitality is not simply a call to charity but is, rather, a call to remake the heart."<sup>8</sup> In providing hospitality, we seek to remake our hearts so that we can love more deeply, beyond comfort zones and societal segregations; sometimes even beyond common sense. What a wonderful form of resistance it is. ✦



Story time with Beth and the girls

1. "Spinning and Khadi: Weakening the Foundations of Empire," John Humphries (jhumphries@igc.org).
2. "Unpacking Hospitality," Mark Van Steenwyk, [jesusradicals.com](http://jesusradicals.com), September 29, 2010. Mark's community, Missio Dei, is an urban intentional community committed to simplicity, hospitality, prayer, peacemaking, and resistance, rooted in Anabaptist beliefs.
3. "Story of a Legacy," Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, May 1972, 3.
4. [Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition](http://jesusradicals.com), Christine D. Pohl
5. "Unpacking Hospitality," Mark Van Steenwyk, [jesusradicals.com](http://jesusradicals.com)
6. "Heart Unity - The Nonviolent Principles of Nature," Scott Riley, *Peace Power* Volume 3, Issue 1, Spring 2007
7. "We Go On Record: CW Refuses Tax Exemption," Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, May 1972, 1,3,5
8. "Hospitality and the Will to Embrace," Richard Beck, [jesusradicals.com](http://jesusradicals.com), November 16, 2009

# The Personalism of Hospitality

by Teka Childress

They sat there quietly waiting for a car or van to come back and pick them up. The weather had turned cold and those of us doing Winter Outreach had been met by a crazy number of people, all desperately seeking shelter on this cold night. We had devised some sort of system to take everyone to shelter from the Centenary Church where we met them, yet these four had been left behind to wait after all the cars had been filled. I sat there with them, thinking that if I had been homeless, I would have been among the impatient ones wanting to go early. I was struck by the quiet demeanor of these last four and wondered if their expressions reflected placid natures or simply resignation. They desperately needed to be inside and were forced to wait to be taken by me, or someone they didn't know, to somewhere they hadn't chosen. I was grateful they would have somewhere to go, but knew they deserved far more.

Several years ago a man named Ed died from the cold as he spent the night at a bus stop. I had tried to get him to safety that night when I found him extremely inebriated. I had called 911 to request an ambulance take him to the hospital after I had been unsuccessful in getting him to come with me. Yet, the ambulance had refused to take him because he declined to go. His death was devastating to me. In Ed's honor, I attended the annual gathering remembering all the homeless who had died that year. I asked those gathered to help prevent further deaths from the cold. This effort, the St. Louis Winter Outreach was born and has attracted many generous volunteers over the last several years. A group goes out on cold nights and invites people to accept an offer of shelter and a ride to get there. Blankets, gloves, hats and sometimes food and water are offered to those who decline.

One of the honors of riding with folks on the way to a shelter is getting to know them a little. My father always called people "characters", referring to himself, as well as others. He understood that the variety of personalities we encounter make life a joy to live. Several years ago when I saw a film about Dorothy Day I was struck by one scene. In it, Dorothy refused to put out a woman who was raising hell. The woman had been really hard to live with, and Dorothy appeared absolutely angelic in her response to her. It appeared unbelievable that she was so stoic. Others characters in the movie thought Dorothy was crazy, and disagreed with her decision. Dorothy's heroism was probably intended by the film-makers to be inspirational but I thought it didn't give enough credit to the guest. The scene didn't make sense because the woman had no real personality. She was a cardboard caricature of

a person. None of the guests we've had at Karen House, nor any one of the people we've met while doing outreach, has been anything if not multidimensional.

John was one of the people who broke our hearts. Frequently we would find him outside, lying on the grate near the Civic Center to stay warm. We would take him to New Life, the long-standing

No one asked us to do this work. The mayor of the city did not come along and ask us to run a breadline or a hospice to supplement the municipal lodging house....No one asked us to start an agency or an institution of any kind. On our responsibility, because we are our brother's keeper, because of a sense of personal responsibility, we began to try to see Christ in each one that came to us. - Dorothy Day

shelter nearby. He would gladly go, but, almost without fail when we did a final loop around downtown at the end of the night, we would find him outside again. He hadn't stayed. He apparently found it almost impossible to stay. His schizophrenia had the upper hand in determining his behavior, greatly affecting his safety or lack of it.

Raymond had a very different story. He had been trying to get a painting business going and would ask us to think of him if we knew of work he could do. He would graciously accept a ride to shelter but was very clear about his own plans, his capabilities and his intention to

Teka Childress can't wait to eat the food of her Irish ancestors, the potatoes she grew in her garden.



Photo – S.J Carey

take responsibility for his own life.

Lisa and Joe were a young couple, both in school hoping for a better life. One of their concerns was figuring out how to get to school everyday. They were very committed to their plan but Lisa appeared to struggle with an addiction to alcohol which added further to her difficulties.

Thomas always slept outside in a doorway. He was one of the very few who never wanted shelter but would always take food and water. He had been outside for years and we knew little of his story. He seemed happy to have it that way.

Shante had been homeless for several years after moving to St. Louis from Chicago. When I first met her she was sleeping outside and living with the indignity of scabies, a condition she likely developed from having to sleep outside with little access to bathing facilities. This made her miserable but she finally received treatment. Yet, here she was, a good year later and little had changed for her. She was still homeless with little hope of finding housing. She had worked from time to time but not done so anytime recently. In her late forties, with minimal work experience her chances of getting an income were not great. I suspected that she might have a rather latent mental illness, quietly hidden but making it difficult to succeed and also making it unlikely that she would qualify for disability income.

Several folks had come in from small towns surrounding St. Louis after becoming homeless in their own hometowns. They had lacked resources and jobs. Among the many we met, few seemed to find better luck in St. Louis.

Everyone we met talked about the difficulty of getting on their feet while sleeping outside, having little

place to wash their clothes or bathe and few options for transportation.

One of the things we learned during Outreach was just how important it was to the people we met to be treated humanely and with respect. Some people declined to go to shelters which overflowed with huge numbers of residents. Many refused to go to any shelter where they felt their dignity was not respected.

One night a year ago, I was tossing and turning, unable to sleep. I was frustrated that we had not been able to find shelter for people. The City had not opened a Winter shelter that year and they were not being responsive to our appeals to address the needs of those we were meeting.

During that week I had also been editing the Easy

### Municipal Lodgings by Peter Maurin

People who are in need  
are not invited  
to spend the night  
in homes of the rich.

There are guest rooms  
in the homes of the rich  
but they are not  
for those who need them.

They are not  
for those who need them  
because those who need them  
are no longer considered  
as the Ambassadors of God.

So the duty of hospitality  
is no longer considered  
as a personal duty.

So people without a home  
are sent to the city  
where hospitality is given  
at the taxpayer's expense.

Essays of Peter Maurin for an issue of The Round Table. All of a sudden, I was struck by a thought, as if haunted by Peter who I had professed to follow most of my adult life. The words of his Easy Essay I had typed earlier that week, came to my head, "Don't go to the Muni" (the New York City shelters) to take care of the homeless. I

realized I had lost my vision and Peter returned it to me. I woke up the next day and wrote an email to our Winter Outreach group, saying, "If someone is homeless, it is all of our responsibility and we all have the opportunity to respond. We need not wait for the City to meet their need." The amazing people in our Winter Outreach group agreed and we all began a plan to ask some churches and communities if they would consider offering shelter for the coming winter. And, even more amazing, some very generous communities agreed. Americorps, MCC (the Metropolitan Community Church) with the help of One St. Louis, and the College Church, responded and opened up space, offering welcoming hospitality this past winter. In the meetings together [with the winter outreach group and the communities willing to offer shelter] we discussed what we would like to offer people. We decided we wanted to have the shelters to be small and personal. We never regretted that decision. For the most part people loved the three shelters that were opened. Finding kind hospitality made all the difference.

The vision to make each person feel valued, and to take personal responsibility to respond to those in need, rather than waiting on the City, was inspired by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. These two founders of the Catholic Worker had a mystical vision of the body of Christ and their vision of Christian personalism is at the heart of the movement they founded. They saw offering hospitality to anyone as offering it to Christ. And in this vein, we carry on.

Dorothy wrote in *The Long Loneliness*, that "We recognize each other in the breaking of the bread and we are not alone anymore." Welcoming another heals us of our experience of alienation. The radical importance of each person that is therefore evident, might seem similar to the individualism of our own culture, but rather it is the opposite of it. By looking to Jesus we see how it is possible to choose love—God—over everything. This makes union and community possible and shows us how to move out of our isolation and desolation.

I will never look at doorways the same again. Nor am I likely to miss taking a scrutinizing look at dark spots under bridges. Not only do I do this to see if there is anyone finding refuge there, but I've begun the imaginary search for what spot I would choose if I were to need to sleep outside.

After all of these years of living with people facing

homelessness I frequently have an experience that feels like waking up. I suddenly realize again what it might be like to not have the simplest, most basic and necessary thing, a safe and warm place to go, especially on frigid nights.

Therefore in seeing these four at Centenary awaiting a ride to shelter, I became acutely aware of the reality of their situation. The experience that most of us have had doing Winter Outreach is similar to the humbling one I had that night.

As we think about how to end homelessness or how to tackle the needs of all the people we've met, we have become more and more convinced that the answer is the Personalist one. What a community of people we made, those of us needing shelter and those of us offering hospitality! What if each person had somewhere to go to find community, support and shelter? What if there were more small shelters where communities could share their resources with those in need. Last year we still fell short in offering enough space. There were times when Americorps had to take in 75 people in order to keep people from simply freezing to death.

Peter Maurin told us not

to look to the "muni" (city) to answer this problem. We need not wait for anyone else to respond to our brothers and sisters in need. The three communities who offered hospitality last year found it to be an amazing experience. Because of the need we are seeking three or so additional communities to join us this coming winter to open space to 12-15 people on cold nights. Be assured that if you and your community would like to join us, you will find support and community, and in the breaking of the bread, you will not be alone anymore. ✝



Photo- Anonymous

# Water in a Cup: The Mutuality of Hospitality

Interviews by Megan Heeney

Denise moved out of Karen House at the beginning of May, after gracing us with her presence and joy for four months. Next month Denise will be clean for six months, after eighteen years of using drugs. She lived three of those years on the streets. Denise is the proud mom of five beautiful grown children.

Leo is a frequent volunteer at Karen House. Leo was homeless for three years. Teka and Leo have been working together for several years, he recently moved into his own apartment. Leo is looking forward to continuing to work on himself.

**RT: How would you define the term hospitality?**

**D:** Courteousness, generosity and kindness given to others.



Sarah and Kaniah

photo by: Beth Buchek

**Megan Heeney**, who continues her great outreach work at Places for People, just moved into the Green Bee Catholic Worker (former home of Tony and Julie) on Madison St. and is dreaming of building a hummanure compost.

**L:** In general sharing your life with people.

It includes educating people on different things, like what is happening in the city, on different foods, and sharing knowledge about what you care about.

I was looking for community in all the wrong places and then I found the right places in these places of hospitality

**RT: Where have you experienced Hospitality throughout your life?**

**D:** The Adams Mark Hotel was the first place I received hospitality, I worked there for 7 years as a banquet server. I worked at the America Center as well for 4 years as a banquet server. They offered hospitality by teaching me to be generous, courteous and kind. They taught me the skills to give hospitality, how to accept hospitality and how to identify hospitality when I see it.

When I was tired of being an addict I received hospitality from the Queen of Peace, Karen house and Places for People. I went to treatment 30 times over the course of 18 years and then I surrendered. God called me to do something different in my life. Every time I got high I saw angel (sic). No matter how hard my problems got, God had his arms wrapped around me. I got sick and tired of using.

I believe you never forget your roots in your life, I was out of place with my friends who I used drugs [with]. I kept trying to fit in, where I didn't fit. I got tired of doing that, I was so tired of getting sick and tired. I got down on my knees one day and asked God to help me, God led me to paths where I got help and I haven't looked back.

I was looking for community in all the wrong places and then I found the right places in these places of hospitality.

**L:** [I first experienced hospitality in] Boys Town in St.

James, MO. Different people I ran into doing odd jobs, mostly people who are elderly. These people shared the love they had, it was being exposed to good spirit that was enlightening for me.

## They go hand in hand – giving and receiving hospitality.

### **RT: What are the difficulties of receiving hospitality?**

**D:** The only difficulty for me is that I can't receive hospitality, if I don't give it to others. They go hand in hand-giving and receiving hospitality. You can't get water in a cup, if you don't put some in your cup. I couldn't stay clean if I didn't put in the effort. You have to give up stuff. Nothing from nothing leaves nothing. You can't get love if you don't put love in.

**L:** Not feeling worthy to receive it. When I do good deed instead of thinking about it I feel worthy.

### **RT: In what ways do you currently give hospitality? In which ways do you envision offering hospitality in the future?**

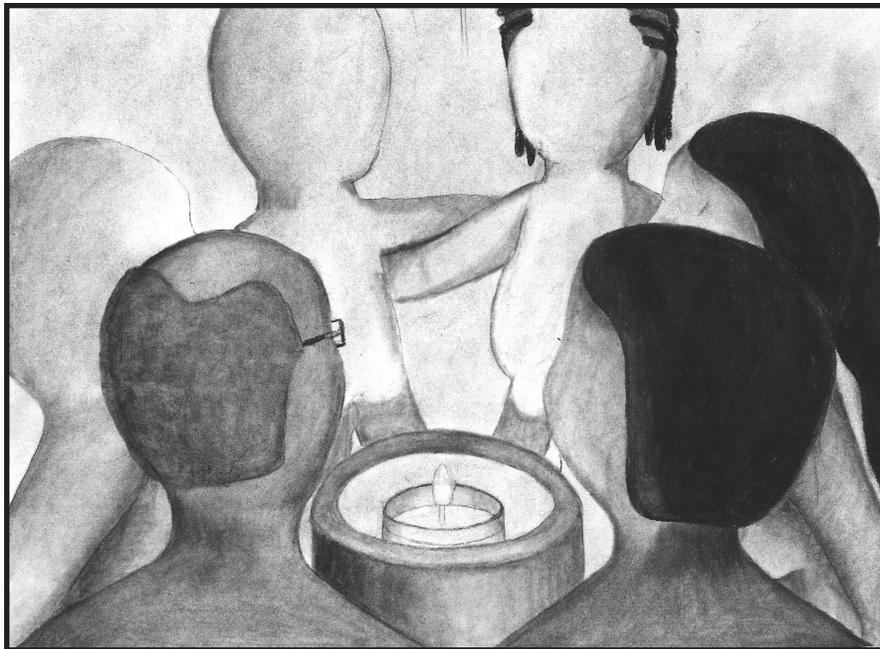
**D:** From my own pain, I want to take other people's pain. I want to alleviate someone else's pain so they don't have to go through what I went through to get where I am at today. I am reaching out and bringing people in who are in need. I try to let people know they don't have to go as far as I went, I tell people that this side of the track is better. I say that people really do care about you. I want to let people know that the abuse they experienced stops them sometimes from letting others in, but when you come over here to hospitality you can be affirmed and loved.

On one side there is neglect, abuse and rape, over on the other side there are people who really honestly want you to grow and experience love and respect. You can let go of the past and move on, because life is more important. You have to let God take away yesterday so you can live in the today.

When you are using, time goes by too fast, you stop having any respect for money, time, yourself or anyone else. Now life is amazing. I can experience time, love myself and love others. Even when I was using God protected me, I would pray everyday, and that led me to where I am now.

I try to continually invite other into groups, NA Meetings, and Treatment that has been healthy for me and help them know they have a safe place to go. When you are out using it doesn't always seem like there is a safe place. I want people to know that courteous, generous and kind places exist.

**L:** Right now I give my love to people out of the kindness of my heart. I just do it, offer love whenever I see them. I am not very social, but when I am I choose to show the love in my heart and my knowledge with other people. I try to give people the shirt off my back and bring food to people in need. I want to try in the future to share my wisdom with kids on a larger scale. I would like to work for systemic justice by educating myself and overcoming my learning disabilities so I can communicate properly. I want to learn to talk with people. I'd like to talk with TC who lives at Karen House and gives speeches, hoping he could teach me how to reach my audience. I am extremely passionate about ending child trafficking. I don't want to just sit around in a world where people are being hurt, I choose to do something. First I have to work on myself, the first step is self awareness. ✦



Charcoal drawing by Robert McGee



# From Kabat House

by Heather Hollingsworth

The five-year anniversary of the formation of Kabat House this summer is a great opportunity for us to reflect on what we are doing well! Two of our strengths are our commitment to welcome those who enter our community and our pursuit of growth and healing in our hospitality and in our communal lives.

The Kabat House community has grown from only a handful of individuals to a group of nine community members, five houses and gardens, and 15-20 in our extended community. With so many understandings of anarchism, so many different spiritual and inspirational paths, so many different ways of living out our communal and individual values, Monroe Street has seemed to some a strange mis-mash of people living together. But it is undeniable to those who visit how much we love each other and enjoy being together. Many of them love being welcomed so fully into that love and communal life.

Carolyn has reminded me many times that it is a miracle itself that we are able to live so closely and manage to get along. Our commitment to community leads us to nurture relationships with each community member and resolve our conflicts with



one another as best we can. Although we each have our own unique path, we benefit from stretching ourselves to understand each others' perspectives and from the inspiration and support that encourage us to grow and pursue our individual dreams. In this safety and freedom, we are able to live more simply and have more time to consider what we really care about and want to spend our time and energy doing.

For many of us, Kabat House and Monroe Street is a place where people (whether ourselves, our guests, or our friends and extended community) can find welcome, love, and the opportunity to discover what we want to be. Our philosophy of hospitality is focused on friendship and personal relationships between all community members and guests. We hold in tension an openness to all with a desire to discern who will fit best in our community, based on our goal of developing wholeness for our guests, household, and community. Instead of creating

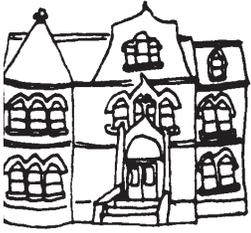
limits on the amount of time individuals are allowed to stay, we invite guests to stay as long as they are growing, which has meant for a few guests sharing our lives together for years. A kind word at the right moment, a loving and helpful presence, a different way of looking at the world, and a sense of humor are some of the gifts our guests have brought to our community. At times we are able to admire and support our guests as they grow and work towards their goals, while at other times we have experienced heartbreak over the addictions and mental illnesses that have bound guests and the good-byes we have had to say in order to choose the health of the household.

In the last months, we have begun and continue many exciting experiments to move us towards acceptance and healing. Many of us use the skills of co-counseling, a mutual peer counseling theory, to work towards relating better with one another and to remove the obstacles preventing us from working towards our goals. Since our recent inter-community retreat on Gandhian non-violence, we have been considering what it would mean to more fully incorporate practices of nonviolence in our communal lives. For example, we have recently decided to let go of a large corporate food donation so that we can live more simply, have a clean home, and focus our energy on growing and preserving our own food. This year, almost half of our community members are also members of New Roots Urban Farm working for food security in our neighborhood. Others in our community, who organize "Food not Bombs" picnics out of our kitchen, are building relationships in the downtown park. We are thankful for some recent donations that we are hoping to use to further our eco-village dreams: a neighborhood picnic area, an outdoor kitchen and shower, a pottery studio and wood shop.

Most exciting of all we were thrilled to share in the commitment ceremony of Mary Densmore and James Meinert this past May. We are delighted to welcome James (all the way from Karen House) into our community! We hope that the love of this community will encourage him to thrive and grow along with us.



**Heather Hollingsworth** has moved into an apartment in the neighborhood and continues making yogurt and tending to herbs!



# From Karen House

by Sarah Latham

I moved into the Karen House Catholic Worker Community about 10 months ago. During this wonderful time I have experienced and learned many things. I feel like I am now able to see the delicate beauty surrounding me more purely. I think this is because when a person has a loving supportive community surrounding them, they are made free; free to give and receive the love that is everywhere. Free from isolation, free from fears of inadequacy, free from the way that capitalism makes you feel like you need to be the most efficient machine that you can be to climb that ladder and one day maybe you will “live the dream.” Community makes that dream present daily.

Trying to get by and succeed in our society can be very lonely. Not knowing if you are being productive enough or smiley enough, or tidy enough can wear on us everyday. Since I joined the Catholic Worker, those anxieties have begun to seem kind of pointless. I have been allowed to relax and know that my community is behind me supporting me in all of my choices, and that if something isn't life giving for me or isn't bringing me joy, I can choose to stop doing it.

I recently had a conversation with some fellow Catholic Workers about what in our lives feels dehumanizing. Among the answers were debt, beauty standards, alienated labor; but the most interesting topic for me was our conditioned fear of admitting that things aren't ok. It seems this affects males in our society more than females but is pervasive nonetheless. From “sucking it up” and quickly moving on when you stub your toe, to acknowledging the unequal balance of power in our world. If we all felt free to scream “THIS ISN'T OK. THINGS ARE NOT OK. I'M NOT OK RIGHT NOW” just like we all did when we were

three years old, how much more empowered and connected would we all be!

When you are allowed to step outside of the oppressive “rat race” and admit to yourself and those around you that what has been set before you isn't ok, isn't fulfilling or dignified, ideologies of beauty and joy change shape. I feel more encouraged to define my own ideas of “success” or “productivity” and find that I want all of my actions to reflect love. When you love more freely, you notice more of the love that is given to you daily. When you try to be merciful to those that come to the door and curse at you, you are able to more gracefully receive the mercy shown to you.

In experiencing this joy, the sermon on the mount becomes apparent.



The Karen House Community, Spring 2011

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and  
thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted  
because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
(Matthew 5: 3-10)

I don't think Jesus was telling us we will receive these rewards in heaven, or after we die, I think we experience them now. Heaven exists now, in the moments you love. We all can strive to be more present in the Heaven here on Earth, and not only “stop and smell the roses” but plant more roses in our community everyday.

When I look back on the past year and think of the moments in which I received grace, it was the times that I was set free from the fear that so many of us feel we were born with and was able to strive for a pure heart. In those moments I was able to see Goodness. ✦

**Sarah Latham** has been helping build homes for Habitat for Humanity in South Dakota. She loved it so much she's planning on going back in August!



# Catholic Worker Thought & Action

## *Works of Mercy*

by Timmy Cosentino

The foundation of the Catholic worker (and this section of our publication) is based on the seven aims and means. These seven guiding ideas are a call to live in a new and different way. They have a way of pulling a person in a new direction that they did not see in their future and cause them to act in ways they previous would never have imagined. This is very true for the works of mercy.

The works of mercy are a list of seven actions; specifically, to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, to visit and ransom the imprisoned, to clothe the naked, and to bury the dead. While they are a Biblical reference back to the beatitudes, the works of mercy are the basic actions of charity and kindness to other humans. They reflect the needs in the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and remind us of our shared humanity. Generally speaking these actions are relatively easy for people to perform and have been shaping the work of Catholic Workers since the beginning. However, they are only half of the works of mercy, the corporal or bodily half. They are easy to see and do; and generally speaking are done in the short term.

There is another half to the works of mercy though. The spiritual works of mercy, which we don't talk about as much because they are harder to see and do. The spiritual works of mercy are: instruct the uninformed, counsel the doubtful, admonish sinners, bear wrongs patiently, forgive offenses willingly, comfort the afflicted, pray for the living, sick and the dead. This is a much more difficult list, for me at least. The application of the spiritual works of mercy is not active per se but rather reflected in our choices and actions in life. They are not as easy to see or do, and are usually muddled

with emotions, opinions, and perceptions. As a Catholic Worker I have begun to try to incorporate the practice of two of them into my life: bearing wrongs patiently and forgiving offenses willingly.

Luckily at Karen House a typical house shift, or cooking and serving lunch, can usually provide ample opportunity for the practice of both spiritual works of mercy. Truly though the application of bearing wrongs patiently and forgiving offenses willingly is such a radical and foreign idea that it is a regular exercise in humility and humor to remember and embrace them. They do not require action but rather thought and reflection. I find myself usually failing to bear patiently and unwilling to forgive right away so I tend towards the comfortable and familiar corporal, bodily work of feeding and sheltering. The challenge for me is to remember that the spiritual works of mercy while directed at ideas, emotions, and thoughts are just as an important part of our shared humanity. They represent the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy and remind us that people need more than bread. They also need roses; they need to know they are body and spirit. In a way

failing to address the spiritual works of mercy can mean failing to address the full humanity of a person. However, I willingly forgive you for trying and failing if you will patiently bear with my own failed attempts to bring the spiritual works of mercy into our lives. ✦



Timmy Cosentino is at camp again

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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*The Round Table* is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Tekka Childress, Megan Heeney, Timmy Cosentino, Colleen Kelly, James Meinert, Sarah Latham, Carolyn Griffeth, Heather Hollingsworth, Ellen Rehg, and Ben Schartman. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

## Karen House Needs

- Personal hygiene items
- Beds and dishes to give away
- Canned goods to give away
- Gently used furniture
- Volunteers and summer cooks

## Kabat House Needs

- Your prayers and thoughts for our wellbeing!



“Our community celebrated the commitment of Catholic Workers James Meinert and Mary Densmore in May – congratulations, newlyweds!”

Colleen recently returned from her time in Palestine and Israel. Follow her trip and read more at : <http://www.stl-psc.org/>



Check [www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org) for updates on Karen House, information on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!