

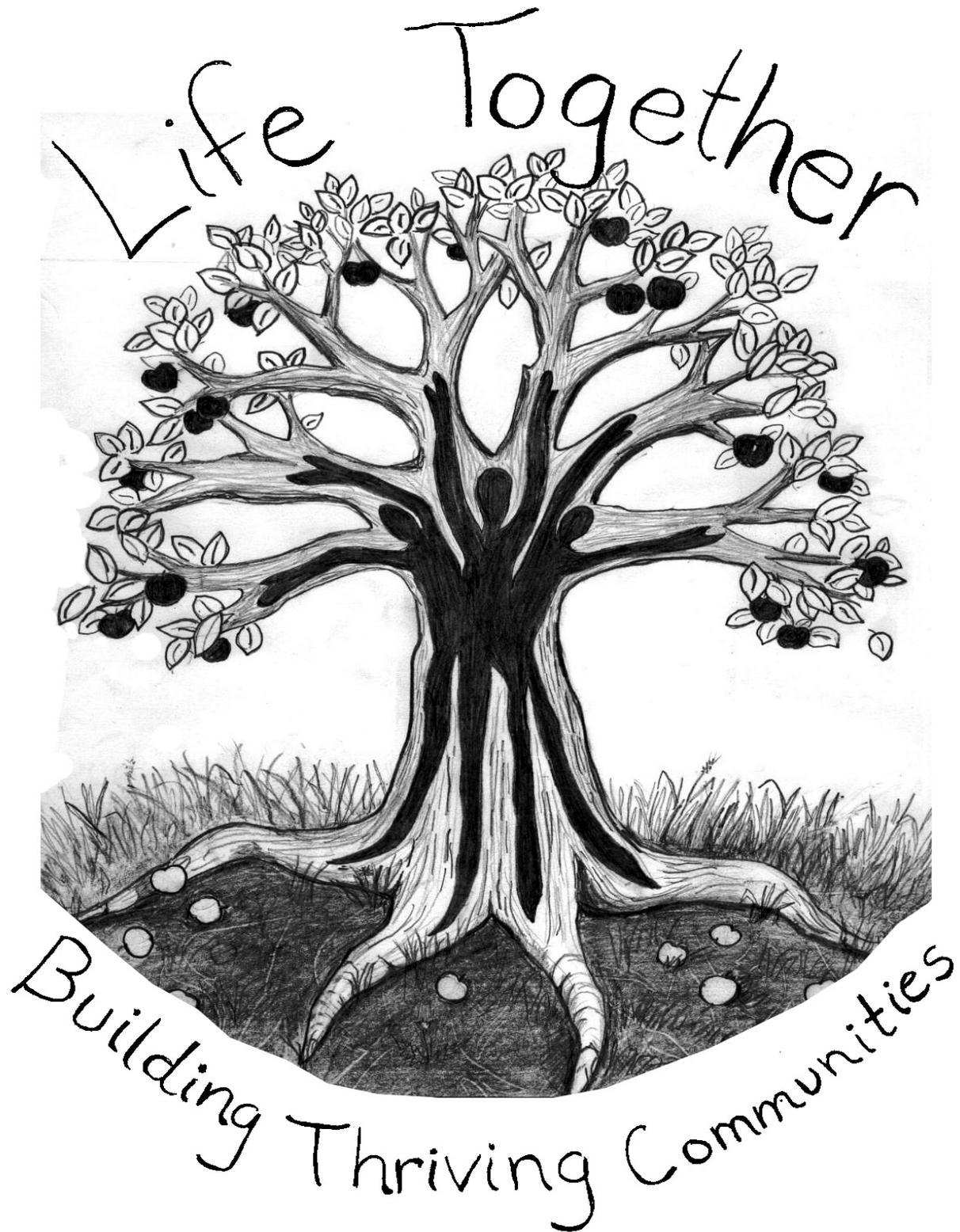
# THE Round Table

Summer 2012

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

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## Karen House is Closing (for a month) this Fall! Can you help us?



Dear RoundTable Friends,

We haven't closed Karen House for repairs in five years, and it's time! While not requiring the massive rehab of five years ago, the building does need a good purge, floor work, repairs, painting, and cleaning. We plan to close the house for about one month, starting September 13th, and we're writing to ask for your help to make this rehab possible.

**Our greatest need is for donations of money.** Right now, our budget is low; getting through the summer will already be precarious for us. If we receive enough donations, we will pay for both the house rehab, and window repair. (We have 13 windows yet to finish at about \$700/window, and then we'll finally have a completely lead-free environment!) If you are able to make a donation at this time, it would be very helpful.

We could also use help with volunteer labor! If you are interested in helping with any of these needs, please call us to sign up (314-621-4052):

- People with plumbing, electric, and carpentry skills
- Donations of materials (call to find out specifics)
- Groups to "sponsor" a room, where your church group, school organization or social club could provide skilled volunteers and supplies, or raise money to cover the repair cost.
- Large groups to purge, scrub, and paint

Leading up to September, we will help our guests find other housing. During the month of rehab, we won't be taking any donations of food or clothing in order to concentrate our energy on the rehab.

We strive to offer a clean, warm, safe and loving space for the thirty women and children who stay with us. Thanks for your help in making it possible.

*In gratitude,*

The Karen House Community:

Timmy Cosentino, Braden Tobin, Colleen Kelly, Tim Pekarek, Daniel Ryskiewich, Annjie Schiefelbein, Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Ellen Dempsher, Sarah Latham and Sheila Donnelly

**PS- We can receive donations both by check, and through Paypal on our website ([www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)).**  
**Thanks for your help in making this important rehab possible!**



# Why This Issue?

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Did your parents and grandparents walk uphill both ways (in ten feet of snow) every single day to school? Mine did. It seems that every generation tends to hallow the past and wonder what will become of the next generation with its “fancy technology” and “moral laxity.” It’s frightening that this generation might actually be accurate in its doomsday predictions; how we choose to react to them may determine the ultimate fate of both humanity and the planet.

Although we North Americans tend to either deny or ignore the fact of global warming, we can see its results already: oceans are rising, storms are both more frequent and more powerful, and temperatures are rising. In the near future we can expect massive species extinction, the fabled North Pole will be a water park, and our wars will be fought not over oil, but over fresh water. We’ve done more damage to the planet in the past 100 years than in our whole previous 200,000 years of existence. Unless things change radically, it is our generation that will be remembered for doing irrevocable damage to the planet - except that no one will be alive to remember or curse us for our sins.

So, what do we do in the face of such dismal news? For centuries, the answer for many has been to create intentional communities; groups of like-minded folks that work to better the world, challenge injustice, and render aid. In the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Across a great diversity of cultures and classes, intentional communities have formed to resist slavery and war, farm cooperatively, care for others, and seek solutions to local and global problems.

But getting along with people, working with each other, and sharing our lives is hard! Living in community has a way of revealing our own limitations and dysfunctions; we are often less aware of them otherwise. Changing the world requires us to change ourselves and to learn new skills of relating, communicating, and working together.

And so we present this issue of the *Round Table*, full of tools and wisdom for this great re-learning. The articles are mostly from the perspective of our particular experiment in truth, the St. Louis Catholic Worker, and we hope you will find them helpful in your respective experiments. For no matter how we’re seeking to improve the world, having the skills to nurture, support, and challenge each other is invaluable.

Carolyn kicks off the issue with an overview of a model for healthy community living. In it, she describes community as a tree - with roots that represent personal health, a trunk representing communal bondedness, and outreaching branches representing communal action in the world. The article is the basis for both a book she and I are working on, titled [Recipes for the Beloved Community](#), and a workshop she has been offering to intentional communities throughout the U.S.

Following this introduction, our articles highlight practices that enhance both individual and communal health. (Since most of our *Round Table* issues are focused on action, we decided to forgo specific articles on communal action.) Our articles include examples of communal spiritual expressions, thoughts on avoiding oppression, and tools to enhance emotional well-being. We highlight community examples of conflict resolution and self-education, discuss communal economic models, the importance of shared work and vision, and communal play. Finally, you’ll find a thoughtful Letter to the Editor and RT response, reflections from Karen and Kabat Houses, and a moving consideration on hospitality from Megan and Katie.

Parker Palmer observes that “Community is the place where people grow in love and in peacemaking. That is why it is imperative for communities to grow, expand, and deepen; and for many new ones to be founded and supported. Today war has become too dangerous; it could bring an end to our planet and to the human species. We are all called to learn to grow in love and forgiveness. Community means more than the comfort of souls. It means, and has always meant, the survival of the species.”

What is at stake is indeed the future of this planet and of humanity; there is no better time to consider the imperative of community than now. ✝

-Jenny Truax



Cover: Carolyn Griffeth  
Centerfold: Jenny Truax and Jeff Finnegan

*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. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Daniel Ryskiewich, Tekka Childress, James Meinert, Sarah Latham, Carolyn Griffeth, Braden Tobin, Ellen Rehg, and Ben Schartman. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

# A Model for Building the Beloved Community for Catholic Workers and Fellow Travelers

by Carolyn Griffeth

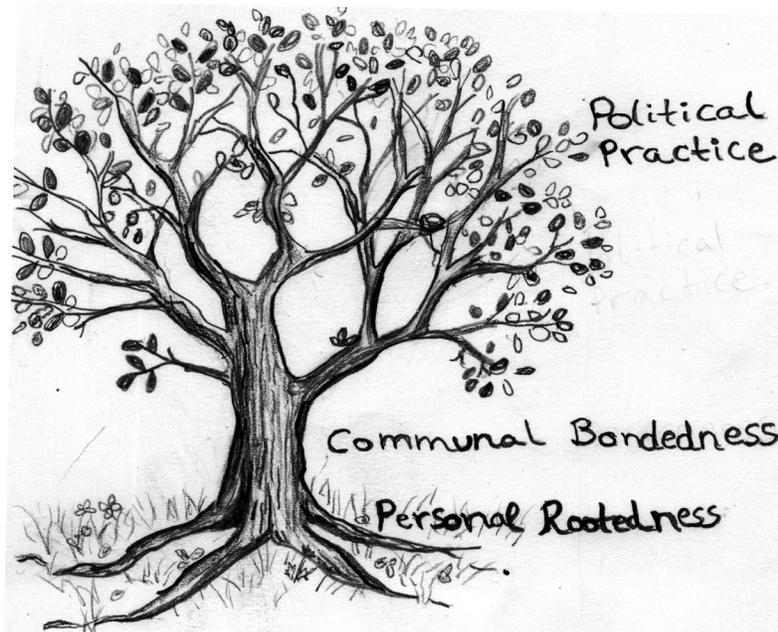
Since I moved into my first Catholic Worker (CW) community about 15 years ago, I have been asking myself: What practices are most essential to building a thriving community life—one in which individuals are growing towards wholeness and connection with one another and sustaining themselves in a life of service and prophetic action?

In his book, Who Will Role Away the Stone, Ched Myers observes that countercultural Christian communities have tended to take two forms. In the first form, which he names the *isolationist*, the community tends to disengage from the world for the sake of faith and community. The second form, named *activist*, views community not as an end in itself but as a means to perform some ministry or activism. Ched argues that “countercultural communities have failed or at least become sterile and irrelevant whenever they have lacked both the communal discipline of the isolationist and political practice of the activist communities.” Ched also contrasts these two forms of communities as the inner life versus the outer life.<sup>1</sup>

Building on Ched’s insights, I would argue that for an intentional community to be truly dynamic there are three poles that must be held in balance; we must not only balance reaching inwardly toward God and outwardly toward the world, we must also have a disciplined practice of reaching towards one another. Furthermore, we need to skillfully use our togetherness to support our growth towards wholeness and our work for social change. About a year ago, I experienced a vision of community with these three poles held in a natural balance. The image I had was of a thriving tree with three distinct aspects: roots, trunk, and fruit-filled branches, which stand respectively for personal rootedness, communal bondedness, and political practice. Personal rootedness represents each individual reaching inwardly to connect with God

and one’s true self. Communal bondedness represents the bonds formed as community members share life and work and reach out to one another. Political practice includes all our efforts to serve and transform the world. **The Roots: Personal Rootedness**

In this model, the roots of the tree represent each individual pursuing both God and personal wholeness, which provides strength and health to the community as a whole. In the words of Jean Vanier, “Each of us should deepen our own personal conscience and mystical life. It is precisely here that the weakness and strength of community lie.”<sup>2</sup> An insight I have gained from the Possibility Alliance is that individuals must cultivate all four aspects of human wholeness for community to be properly rooted: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.<sup>3</sup> This is simply because the Spirit dwells within the human person where mind, body, and heart (our emotional center and place of connection with others) converge. As we invite the spirit of love to more fully dwell in



Original Artwork - Carolyn Griffeth us, Spirit simultaneously seeks to flow through us through our

free and formed mind, body, and heart.

1) At the core of personal rootedness is spiritual practice, the pursuit of God, the ground of our being and our truest selves which gives our roots depth. For a community to be properly rooted, each community member should be seriously engaged in some spiritual tradition. In the last year I have presented this model of community in workshop form at Catholic Worker gatherings. In these workshops, individuals have shared a variety of spiritual practices that they are engaged in, including daily prayer, scripture study, Mass, time alone in nature, meditation, and spiritual direction.

Though ideally community life also includes shared spiritual practices, they are not a substitute for each individual’s pursuit of



**Carolyn Griffeth** has enjoyed meeting individuals over the last year from many intentional communities in the context of her “Thriving Community Life” workshop, which she has presented to around 35 different communities. Contact her for more info: 314-588-8351

God in their own way and in their own hearts. The same could be said for practices of mental formation and pursuing physical and emotional health; communities are wise to encourage growth in all these areas, yet personal growth requires that each individual also takes his/her own initiative.

2) Mental formation has a big place in the tradition of the CW. Peter Maurin taught that change begins with the clarification of thought, the process of trying to get to the roots of a problem in order to forge a radical solution. For a community to remain both relevant and inspired, mental formation should include both studying what is wrong (engaging in critical analysis of the nature of oppression in society) and steeping oneself in what is right (the radical vision one's community is striving to build). In the Catholic Worker, we have a rich tradition to look to for inspiration, which includes not only philosophy, theology, and social analysis, but also participation in craft schools and Round Table discussions. As individuals and as a community, we are able to live our values more fully when we both understand the structure of "the filthy rotten system," and have the skills of self-reliance that allow us to build better alternatives.

3) Physical development is a much weaker tradition in the Catholic Worker. It is challenging to balance self-care with caring for others who are suffering and striving to change the world. Nonetheless, an essential part of our work towards healing the world is taking good care of ourselves. By eating well, sleeping sufficiently, and getting exercise we can not only prevent disabling illness, but also better enjoy every part of our lives. Choosing to be addiction free also enhances our personal freedom. We all must struggle to rid ourselves of our bodily addictions to the toxic foods and drugs that capitalism has pushed upon us since childhood—processed foods, packaged drinks, and yes, even sugar and chocolate! We can more effectively dismantle global capitalism when we are not addicted to its products. To this end, we must also reclaim manual labor, according to our ability, as a means of earning a living by the sweat of one's own brow, rather than by someone else's.

4) Emotional wellness is the area which is least understood and most often neglected in intentional communities and society in general. Reflecting on his experience in radical, Christian communities, Ched Meyers writes: "I have become convinced that community is doomed without an accompanying therapeutic process undertaken by each member." Ched also quotes Richard Rohr, who argues that "community simply cannot bear the overwhelming intrapsychic and interpersonal needs that people bring to it because of the epidemic dysfunction and breakdown in post-industrial family life."<sup>4</sup>

We have all experienced the hurt of growing up in a culture that emphasizes setting oneself apart through wealth, looks, or achievement, over building close mutually-supportive connections with people of all kinds. This is no accident—for the capitalist system to be maintained individuals must be made to feel inadequate and separated from those with whom they would otherwise form alliances. Sexism, racism, ableism, and heterosexism (just to name a few) serve this end by elevating some individuals above others, therefore, everyone's sense of self and belonging is diminished. It is this separation that Dorothy Day writes about so movingly in The Long Loneliness, "We have all known the long loneliness and discovered that the only solution is love and love comes with community."

The question, then, is: How with all our hurt can we love each other well while in community?

In recent years within the Kabat House community in St. Louis, most of us have begun doing inner-healing work in the form of Co-Counseling also called Reevaluation Counseling (RC). In Co-Counseling we learn to assist one another in liberating ourselves from the trauma and internalized oppression we have acquired. It is amazing the way this practice has increased everyone's well-being and sense of connection with one another.

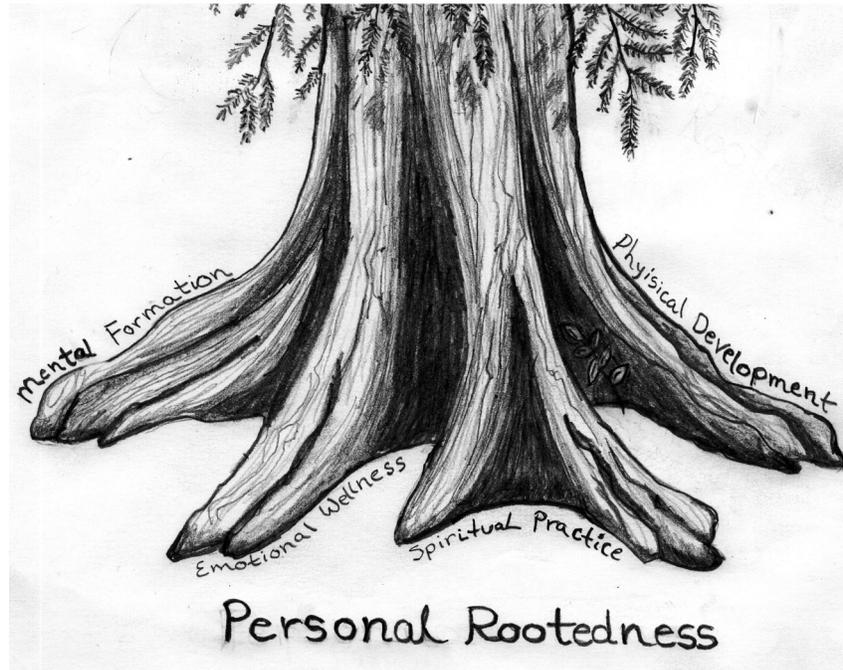
In leading my "Thriving Community Life" workshop I have discovered that much

communal discord is rooted in a lack of emotional wellness. Men's groups, women's groups, anti-racist groups, as well as journaling and 12 step programs can help individuals to become more self-reflective and to grow in openness to one another. Working on the emotional level (like spiritual practice, mental formation, and physical development) is about freeing ourselves to move with Spirit, so that our individual lives and communal lives are truly Spirit-inspired.

### The Trunk: Communal Bondedness

The trunk represents our relationships with one another in community or our communal bondedness, which supports our out-reaching work of service and resistance. The strength of the trunk rests largely on each member's personal rootedness, represented by the depth of the tree's roots. In the words of Peter Maurin, "Everything begins with oneself." This is particularly true when it comes to building a healthy community—so much rests on each individual taking responsibility for their personal well-being.

Peter Maurin also believed that no one should have to go it alone. The structures of 'society,' beginning with our shared life in community, should aim at fostering the holiness of each individual. In the words of Peter Maurin, "We should create culture where it is easier to be good." Aspects of such a culture include Catholic Worker practices of radical economics, mutual aid, shared labor, communal



Original Artwork - Carolyn Griffeth

meals, prayer, consensus decision making, and community living. Traditions such as emotional check-ins, making music and playing together, and creating special celebrations make our shared lives even more bonding. In all these ways we begin to form ourselves into a people and become in the words of Gandhi, “the change we wish to see.”

As wonderful as such practices are, true communal bondedness cannot be achieved solely by outward acts. On the deepest level it requires that we truly embrace one another in all our brokenness. The whole of the Christian message can be summarized in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable, the prodigal son rejects his father’s home, gets lost in the ways of the world, and eventually returns totally beaten down and hoping only to be one of his father’s servants. How surprised the son must be when his father runs out to greet him and embrace him in his loving arms! The less appreciated meaning of this parable is that each of our returns home is not complete until we too become like the Father (God) and fully embrace others on their return home. On the spiritual level, this is the essence of hospitality in the Catholic Worker tradition, which we strive to extend both to our guests and to one another.

Every person comes into community seeking a home where she might be known and embraced for who she is. We want our gifts to be recognized and encouraged and we want to belong to a people. This desire to find a place of love, acceptance, and belonging is as true for Catholic Workers as it is for the individuals struggling with homelessness whom we welcome into our lives. From my perspective, this is the central project of community: to fully embrace each individual, both as a means of returning him to the reality that he is loved, and as a means of wrestling with the hatred and hurt that lies in ourselves. For this reason, Jean Vanier writes, “The Enemy in community reveals the Enemy in ourselves.”

If we can overcome our inner “enemies” and manage to truly embrace one another, a transformative experience of community life is possible, as described in [Community and Growth](#) by Jean Vanier:

*“In community people care for each other and not just for the community in the abstract, as a whole, as an institution or as an ideal way of life. It is people that matter; to love and care for the people that are there, just as they are. It is to care for them in such a way that they may grow according to the plan of God and thus give much life. And it is not just caring in a passing way, but in a permanent way. Because people are bonded one to another, they make up one family, one people, one flock. And this people has been called together to be a sign and witness, to accomplish a particular mission which is their charism, their gift.”*

Whatever the particular mission of a community, its realization rests in large part on whether its members can manage to love one another well. We can only forge a radical new direction if we can manage to get along!

### **The Branches: Political Practice**

The branches of the tree are the ways a community seeks to reach out to the world, through hospitality, service, earth-care, peacemaking, direct action etc. We can only undertake this challenging work in the spirit of love, if we have grown into a new way of being through spiritual practice and communal discipline. This is why, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr. “To leave community is to leave resistance.”

Scripture tells us that a tree will be judged by the fruit it bears.

Truly it is by reaching out to touch the world, that the fruit of the spirit is shared—planting seeds in the hearts and imaginations of others. In the words of Jean Vanier, “Community must exist for an aim outside itself. It is only as great as the gift it offers the world.”

The beautiful thing about the model of the Catholic Worker is that by sharing our lives with the marginalized, we are able to see the nature of oppression in our society more clearly and are compelled to act on behalf of those we have grown to love. It is worth noting that nonviolent public resistance was not originally part of Peter Maurin’s three-fold program, which included Round Table discussions, Houses of Hospitality, and Farming Communes. Yet once Peter’s program was put into practice, Workers were compelled to actively resist injustice, and direct action soon became an integral component. This is not to say that prophetic action is an “add on” to the Catholic Worker vision, but rather that it is the natural fruit of the CW way of life. This dynamic combination of serving those in need, challenging injustice, and building a radical, alternative culture, remains the hallmark of the Catholic Worker, which is lived out uniquely in each community.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Each community must find its own means to wholeness and its own unique balance. There are many types of trees, each with its own proportions. What type of tree is your community, or the community you would like to be part of? How deep are its roots? What is the strength of its trunk? What are its fruits? Does it look healthy and well-balanced?

For a community to flourish, the weight of its branches must be adequately balanced by the depth of the roots and strength of the trunk. Therefore, we must resist the desire to simply push forward to produce fruit—acts of service, or direct actions to awaken the world—until we have the personal rootedness to sustain us, and communal bondedness necessary to gracefully bear the weight of ripe fruit. That said, it is the desire to bear fruit, to touch the lives of others and transform the world, which draws us into community with one another to begin with.

Lastly, we should remember that the growth and belonging we experience in community needs to extend beyond ourselves. Jean Vanier puts it well:

The longer we journey on the road to inner healing and wholeness, the more the sense of belonging grows and deepens. The sense is not just one of belonging to others and to the community. It is a sense of belonging to the universe, to the earth, to the air, to the water, to everything that lives, to all humanity.

For those of us who choose to build community let this be our goal: For our hearts to be opened wide enough to embrace the whole. ✚

1. Ched Myers, [Who Will Role Away the Stone?](#), quotes taken from 179-187.

2. Jean Vanier, [Community and Growth](#).

3. The Possibility Alliance is a non-electric, petro-free community of integral non violence in La Plata, Missouri.

4. Ched Myers, [Who Will Role Away the Stone?](#)

# Creating A Playful Spirituality in Community

by Carol Bradsen

What sums up the practice of spirituality at Casa Mariposa is that we keep trying. We've danced in the street, sung around a fire pit and the dinner table, lit candles and incense, dug in the garden, chanted Psalms, sat in silence listening for the voice of God, read aloud sacred scriptures and poems, contemplated the lives of saints, and watercolored with our toes. Priests have led us in communion. We've made our own communion. We've celebrated love with a feast of chocolate and fruit. We've stretched our bodies and breathed deeply. We've free written our minds on paper and sung with the chickens. We've made labyrinths to walk our prayers and washed away our fears in a cattle tank on Easter morning dawn.

We've experimented with different times and different practices over the three years we've been a community. Often we shift depending on the gifts, traditions, and schedules of the residential community members. For the last year or so we've committed to morning prayer five days a week, Monday through Friday. Currently we meet at 7:30 am. We take turns leading. It is not mandatory to come, but most of us try to come most of the time. We also invite guests, neighbors, and community members who live in houses other than Casa Mariposa to join us. And some do. Sometimes we'll offer morning prayer mostly in Spanish if our guests speak only Spanish. Residential members all commit to participating in morning prayer on Monday mornings together before our weekly house check-in and meeting. At morning prayer in the last year we have read Buddhist meditations and readings from the Bible. We've prayed from the [Episcopal Book of Common Prayer](#), the [New Zealand Book of Prayer](#), and read advent and Lenten devotionals from other communities. Most recently we sit in silence, then read the day's entry from the book, [All Saints: Daily Reflections on](#)

[Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time](#), by Robert Ellsberg. Then we offer prayers aloud.

The community also hosts a Quaker meeting for worship led by young adult Quakers every Wednesday before our shared, open meal. The Quaker worship has taken place weekly at the house since we began and was first led by one of the original



Original Artwork - Carol Bradsen

community co-creators even before Casa Mariposa existed. In the Quaker tradition, we sit in silence, listening for God, and speak aloud only if we are sure the Spirit is prodding us to offer something aloud for everyone to hear. We take two retreats a year in which we work in a little long-term community visioning and plenty of space for rest and playing and eating lots of good food. We take turns leading vespers and morning prayer while on retreat. We have settled into two yearly traditions: Processing in Tucson's All Soul's Procession

each November to remember the hundreds of men and women who die crossing the border each year, and hosting an all night Easter vigil in which we use the framework of the Episcopal Easter Vigil liturgy and add to it with creative art stations. The liturgy helps us remember times when all seemed lost, but God came through. As part of the Easter Vigil we light a fire in a fire pit in the backyard around 10 pm, then someone keeps vigil at the fire all night and we end with a sunrise mass and an Easter Feaster (potluck breakfast). Recently a Playful Spirituality play group has formed and offers "Spirituality Surprises" at group events. They are also planning a play day soon.

Perhaps what keeps us going is our commitment to playful spirituality. When we wrote "playful spirituality" into our statement of intention for our community, none of us were exactly sure what we meant by it. But we liked it. And we wanted to try to live into the question of what playful spirituality would mean for us.



**Carol Bradsen** was among the co-creators of the Casa Mariposa community in Tucson, Arizona. She and her wife Kate met at seminary 10 years ago this fall. Carol's favorite spiritual practices are silence, sabbath, being creative, and throwing dinner parties. Their community website is <http://restorationproject340.wordpress.com>



Source: Unknown

At the time we started Casa Mariposa, many of us were feeling overburdened with meetings, actions, expectations of boards and congregations, and the overwhelming realities of responding to the humanitarian crisis on the U.S./ Mexico border. We longed to simplify our schedules and deepen our spiritual lives. We wanted to feel lighter and playful, resting in the bigger reality that we weren't the ones holding the world up on our own shoulders.

Beyond the creativity and commitment of community members, there is a playful Spirit that brought this community into being, and I believe it is what ultimately sustains the community. Over the last few years community members have come and gone, but our collective intentions have stayed the same: We seek to live in right relationship, offer hospitality, live simply and sustainably, and practice peaceful, prophetic action, and playful spirituality. But before all this, our mission/ intention statement starts with these words, "Nourished and empowered by the Spirit..." From the beginning we have sensed the Spirit in our midst, drawing us together, bringing encouragement, laughter and singing into our gatherings, and giving us a vision that took a physical form. Creating and being a community has always felt a little beyond us. The community came into being with calm, light strength that was steadier than any of ours alone. It has always been bigger than us. Never about us as individuals. We are keenly aware that it is the Spirit which brought us together and sustains us.

In the best moments our community has been transformed and nourished by the Spirit through our spiritual practices. I remember gatherings where I showed up feeling fried, lonely and discouraged. After eating together and everyone checking in about their highs and lows of the week and singing together, the energy of the room and in me shifted. I felt lighter, transformed. Music can do that. A connection to something bigger than our small lives and vision can do that. Community can do that. Good food can do that. Laughter can do that. A second chance can do that. Hope can do that. Collective spiritual practices can roll a lot of these things up together.

Then also, at times our community's spiritual practices have bored and annoyed me. I don't always like what other

people like. I don't always feel like getting up for 7:30am morning prayer. Our commitment to spirituality has at times divided us, and even poked at old religious and family wounds. In about our second year, when some of the founding members had moved and new members had joined, we talked a lot about what 'spirituality' means. And we didn't really agree. Some people were struggling with their inherited religions and weren't sure they felt comfortable being part of a faith-based community. They liked the rest of what we were about. But did we have to pray and sing and bring God into it? We kept listening to each other and talking about it. It was during this time that our communal spiritual practices started to lag. It got too hard and many people just weren't that into it. It was also during this time that we had our second year check-in retreat with the broader community. Members who didn't live in the house but who came weekly to Quaker Worship and the open meal at the community house said they noticed a difference. The spirit had shifted. They could feel it when they walked in. We residential community members weren't as kind and welcoming as we used to be, they said. "Could you start praying again as a house community?" they asked. It was an important insight and a turning point. We had to decide just how important spirituality was going to be to our community and what that was really going to look like. We recommitted to shared spiritual practices as a house community and have stayed committed to that ever since. Some people left. New people came. We realized that for our own health as a community we needed to hang on to this key part of our community's foundation. And we haven't looked back. ✦

**RESOURCE BOX**



**How Inclusive is My Community?**

In our communal journey to fight oppression and recognize the dignity of every person, some questions to consider:

Do we commit to challenging people (whether volunteers or guests) when they use racist, homophobic, sexist, transphobic or otherwise oppressive language?

How do we include people who are disabled as both guests and volunteers?

In what public, private, individual or communal ways do we affirm the dignity of the poor, the immigrant, people of color, the elderly?

Do we publicize that we accept and affirm LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) people, both as community members and as guests?

Do we use gender-inclusive language in liturgy and worship?

What does it mean for my community to be allies with those being oppressed?

# More Than a Game: Play in Community

by Mary Densmore

Every Sunday we pull out two sets of orange construction cones and head to Jackson Park to play soccer with friends, neighbors, and each other—a tradition in our community we've been carrying over the last several years. We come together on the field to be together, have fun, exercise, and play hard, but I think we'd all agree that coming together on the soccer field is a special time in our week when we get to know each other in a setting that steps us out of our everyday lives and brings us together to play hard and love each other.

What once began as a struggle to drag people out on the field to get enough players has now become a very regular game that many friends come to without fail. In the cold of winter with snow covering the field or in the dead heat of the summer, I know that my friends will show up to play together in a very dependable way. Playing soccer together creates a space for us to interact and work together in a completely different way compared to what can be the very routine schedule of our lives living in community. Many weeks we'll want to play until there is no more sunlight or our bodies can't handle running up the field one more time.

As the years have passed we have marked the passage of time on the soccer field by watching the migration of birds, having injuries occur and recover, noticing the days shorten and lengthen, seeing little Douglas grow to be taller than most of us, and now watching the construction of a new bridge overhead. But what is most noticeable is that over time we've managed to come together to create a culture of cooperation, compassion, and community building where we all feel at home. As one would explain the rules of any game to someone new, we too have to share with newcomers to the field how we have a set of unspoken rules, or a spirit, that we try to uphold when we play. Pass to everyone on the team, go easier on people that are just starting to play, cheer for both sides, if you foul someone give them the ball, don't hurt anyone, and if someone gets hurt we all stop immediately. You always know it's someone's first time playing when they ask what the score is because we don't count points (but that doesn't mean you won't hear the occasionally whisper of "did it

go in?" when someone makes a close shot), and we play with no sidelines, feel free to make the field as wide as you like. On some days we shine better at sticking with these rules than others, but we try. It's amazing how this intention of playing so that everyone gets better has allowed for so many of us to hold each other up, watch newcomers improve, work together, and heal past wounds we have from playing competitive sports most our lives.

We have a very natural, but almost silent and strategic way we break into two teams to begin the game; we shuffle ourselves around to best create two teams of equal skill level. We all know the real goal of our game is to be together and have fun, so if the balance is off or something isn't quite right we will change teams again to get it right. While we try and make the teams different each week so we get to play with a variety of people, my partner and I found that it was much more fun for us to play on the same team, so now in a very unspoken way the teams shuffle around so we can be together.

Often during a game, I'll glance to the sidelines and notice how the soccer field is a gathering space not just for those that want to play soccer, but also for those that want to build community: Carl or the guests will often come by to watch for a while, friends stop by on a walk with their dog, kids play on the play

ground, and neighbors sit and watch as they grill or drink together. Soccer is a safe place for us to invite co-workers, students, former guests, friends we just met, and friends from other cultures to feel at home playing. The game has even expanded, and now we share a meal together afterwards.

Someone once told me that it was healthy and important for communities to find spaces where they can play together. That there can be a time to relax, have fun and see all the different personalities that come out in a different setting. I've noticed for our community how stepping onto the soccer field together as a community is also a playing field for real life. We create a space to be together and support each other but also have to deal with the reality that sexism still exists in community, and we each carry our own package of hurts—messing up, lack of belief in ourselves, feeling like we aren't good enough,



Original Artwork by Clancy O'Brien



**Mary Densmore's** favorite food to grow last year was okra for the beautiful flowers and delicious little okras. What will her favorite food be this year?

or just being reminded of how hard playing sports was growing up. I've seen this played out many times on the field: someone gets upset when things don't go their way or someone plays too aggressively out of frustration. And just like in our lives in community, on the soccer field in these moments we treat each other with compassion and gentleness, holding each other up in love knowing we get to do it all over again

next week.

Many of us consider this time a highlight of our week, a ritual that reminds us that Sunday is here, that life is good, that it is a gift to be in each other's lives. We get to create spaces in community where we come together not only to play our best, but I would say it's also a time to love our best. ✦

## Communities that Clarify Together, Stay Together

by Jerica Arents

Clarification of thought, as understood by Peter Maurin, was a process by which folks concerned with the common good – an entirely radical prescription for the world as we know it – would gather to struggle, to mold, to refine the ideas of our day in order to more faithfully engage in action. Here at the White Rose Catholic Worker, our bi-monthly formal Roundtable Discussions are ultimately quite simple: we start with a topic that we feel explores the “signs of the times” and then open our doors and invite those who enter to join a culture of authentic reflection and analysis. We foster an environment that values honesty, respect, and a hint of humor, when appropriate. And we've found that binary thinking and polarization tend to be de-escalated when the posture of those who arrive is oriented toward sincerity. Regardless of one's politics upon entering, we hope participants leave feeling more whole, more full, and more open to the complexities of the topic at hand.

But, thank goodness, clarification of thought is not relegated only to Friday evenings. This house seems to always be filled with a tension, a desire, to more deeply understand the acute realities of our time in history. How do we engage with the monumental structures of oppression and violence that we are embedded within? How do we use our time, our energy, our money, our love, to change that which we see around us?

Living in community, in itself, is a process of clarifying our relationship with violence. When we spend our days rubbing

shoulders with those who are different, when we share our work and time with others, we inevitably begin to let the totality of ourselves be seen. I've found that in times of stress, difficult memories of my past tend to creep in unannounced, my insecurities and losses join the conversation, and soon I am met with the violence within me, deep within each one of us.

Entering spaces of vulnerability and trust in community, we endeavor to hold the weight of our suffering selves and to clarify our histories of violence that have been hidden away from us for so long. “We have all known the long loneliness,” says Dorothy, but our triggers and traumas feel less overwhelming in the company of community.

The analysis of our internal struggles unavoidably turns us toward systemic violence. Our study always seems to circle back to Gandhi's satyagraha, or “truth-force,” a concept he spent his life relentlessly pursuing and writing about like a careful teacher in honor of generations of students beyond. And he asked each one of his fellow satyagrahis, students of the power

of nonviolence, to participate in their own “experiments with truth.” In response to our growing curiosity, the White Rose jumped into a nine-month nonviolence training last year hosted by Pace e Bene. The wisdom of our mentors has pushed us forward, teaching us that a healthy community is continually learning and challenging itself. In that spirit, we host nonviolence trainings in our home, mostly to student groups, and also around greater Chicago to share our own stories and experiments. And so, ad infinitum, I hear my housemates revealing

*We need Round-Table Discussions  
to keep trained minds from being academic.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
to keep untrained minds from being superficial.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
to learn from scholars  
how things would be,  
if they were as they should be.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
to learn from scholars  
how a path can be made  
from things as they are  
to things as they should be.*

Easy Essay: "Round Table Discussions" by Peter Maurin



Jerica Arents enjoys teaching, living at the White Rose Catholic Worker, and collecting eggs from the chicken coop.

and unpacking the never-ending layers of truth-force; this is not to say that we are experts, but only that nonviolence seems to beckon us on.

However, both Gandhi and Maurin would proffer that clarification cannot be the end. While education leads to liberation, action is an essential part of the equation. And so, with our feet firmly planted in community, we hope to approach the suffering of our neighbors and the world with creativity. John Paul Lederach's concept of "the moral imagination" reverberates between the walls of both our house and minds. True peacemaking, says Lederach, comes from a place of vulnerability, of the radical practice of recognizing the other's humanity. He speaks of a "third way" to approach violence that can be grasped only through vulnerability, which itself opens up space, both in

time and geography, to the possibilities of reconciliation. How can we experiment with relationship, curiosity, creativity, and risk to transform the violence that occurs inside us, between each other, and down through the systems and structures of voicelessness and destruction? Yes, we imagine a world much different than that in which we live, but our hope leads us to slowly act that world into being.

We attempt to invite others into this metaphysical process, drawing on the people who have stumbled upon us for innovation and newness. But we persistently circle back to critical inquiry and clarification, searching desperately for who we are, who God is, and the manners in which we are connected to each other and this gorgeous, life-giving planet we walk upon. ✚

# Combating Isolation and Marginalization in our Communities

by Braden Tobin

"We are all the oppressed, I groaned to myself, oppressed by the weight of our own bodies, our own needs, by the pressure of the needy and the poor around us." – Dorothy Day

Through living at the Catholic Worker, I have learned that one of the best ways to begin building a community that counteracts the "rotten system" is to name the things that make us feel most isolated. We can then begin to relate in ways which are counterintuitive to the conditioning of a capitalist society. To take this a step further would be to ask how a fellow community member is doing in regard to his or her unique marginalization. As much as we try to resist it, we all carry our conditioning with us. Despite choosing to live our lives radically, there are ways that we view one another through the lens of a society in which we were all raised, one that pits us against each other by making us all feel isolated by age, gender, sexuality, size, ethnicity, religion, etc. I have lived in community for only one year, so I decided to sit down with a couple of the St. Louis Catholic Worker's elder members to better grasp their wisdoms. The process of learning about the unique experi-

ences of community from Teka Childress and Carolyn Griffeth became perhaps the most profound answer to the question of how to best combat feelings of isolation in a community with a spectrum of ages and life experiences.

Being a new community member certainly poses its challenges. In many contexts of our lives, being "green" to a movement means having a lesser say in what goes on around us. As a newer community member, I have struggled with wondering how much value my opinion could possibly hold

in a community that has withstood decades of changes. I was surprised when I was asked to attend the next meeting immediately following my being invited to join the community. Feeling as though I had a say in the way that our house was running was vital to learning and experiencing trust. The fact that Karen House is eager to include the opinions and experiences of all members of the community helps to bridge the gap between the more seasoned and those members who are still a bit 'green.' The way in which these meetings are conducted is very important for creating a community



Chrissy and Carl - Photographer unknown

which is inclusive.

Oftentimes the experiences of being oppressed are the



**Braden Tobin** can be found, most days, on an endless pursuit for the perfect shelter dog, sleeping while taking house, or running into the sunset.

ones that are systemically ignored in greater society, but they are vital to the growth of each person within an intentional community. A practice that acknowledges and attempts to eliminate unjust power dynamics is consensus decision-making. Through this process, both Karen House and Kabat House communities are able to appreciate the different truths that we all bring, which are rooted in these personal experiences. As Teka put it, this process allows for “learning the central things that really matter and letting go of the stuff that doesn’t. [You] see that others might hold on to the truth that you haven’t seen yet.” Consensus creates a safe space in which people can use their voices in ways that other decision-making methods do not allow.

Another way that our communities build trust is by sharing before meetings. This allows for us to share a little bit about how we are doing in our every day lives. Teka describes the necessity of sharing “the moment of feeling closest to God – that we are all one. [It helps us] maintain a sense that we are all together – everybody.” This time of simply being together and listening to one another allows us to grow appreciation for each other, to realize that we actually are together. Sometimes it is more difficult to see the light in our own community than it is in the more marginalized of our society. Therefore, taking turns sharing personal accounts of our lives prior to the meetings helps to put us in a space where we are ready to listen and relate with one another.

Despite sharing in the identity of the Catholic Worker, some of the difficulties of witnessing a community grow and change over time have to do with the evolving attitudes of its community members. Both Teka and Carolyn have seen a shift away from the Catholic Worker tradition. The shift is sometimes due to a lack of knowledge, differing opinions or interpretations of the tradition, or a difference in tactics during community organizing. Also, a rising number of members don’t share the same faith. In order to compensate for this, it is important for the two communities to include conversations about the tradition of the Catholic Worker. For Karen House, this means taking turns sharing a particular tenet or history of the Catholic Worker tradition in order to keep us grounded in the philosophy of the Worker. Once a month, someone takes on a topic and shares readings and information about it, whether it is personalism, appropriate technology, or the history of the Worker’s stance on war. These conversations allow us to discern our own unique place in, and understanding of, the Catholic Worker movement at any particular time, ac-

ording to who is in community. As Carolyn said, the Catholic Worker may be an old philosophy, but many of the things that are built into the movement are quite radical.

Beyond learning about the philosophy behind the Catholic Worker, an openness of both young and old community members to each other and the stories that we carry allows for intimacy and understanding. According to Carolyn, “Older people require the openness to ask younger people about their dreams and aspirations, while younger people need to have the humility to learn the value in the stories of the old-timers.” It has been much easier to function in community as a newcomer through hearing the stories of the history of Karen House, the people who have come before us, and the effect that different guests have had on long-term community members. Not only should older people be open to understand the dreams of the young people, but oftentimes, this involves participating in those things as well.

One uniting principle that makes us Catholic Workers is our resistance to the understanding that we are simply doing isolated acts of charity.

When confronted with a social problem – from the woes of international wars to the plight of homelessness – our first response is to ask “How can I take personal responsibility for feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and for instructing the ignorant and comforting the afflicted?” This sense of personal responsibility and personalism unites us all in the work, regardless of life stage or experience. If we are to take personal accountability for one another, we must understand the struggles of one another, and how each of us experiences the world differently. In order to form a community that is true and nourishing, not only for ourselves, but also for those to whom we open our doors, it is important to truly value where each of us are in our lives. In summing up, Carolyn said to me, “We get so sucked into the energy of people who are like us. That’s how so much separation occurs. I think that’s what the Catholic Worker is all about. It’s resistance to that, and being open to all people.”



The Feast - Carol Bradsen

1. McKanan, Dan. [The Catholic Worker After Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation](#), 217

# Tradition and Movement

by Teka Childress

I've been rather amazed that after 79 years the Catholic Worker movement still seems to be thriving. I attribute this to a combination of factors. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin gave us an inspiring vision and example. Further, their vision was both elucidated in their writings, and practiced in their lives. Over the years, the members of the movement have continued to clarify and live out this vision. Because of its goodness and clarity, and because it was written down, passed on, further clarified and lived out, the philosophy that they developed has continued in many of its essential aspects. And because it is lived out in a decentralized movement, it has been able to grow and change, to answer the needs of the times and remain alive and inspiring, rather than being choked out by institutions. There has been an amazing interplay then, of the passing down of the vision and its being embodied by its members. Following are just a few practices that different communities have adopted in order to share and make real the vision and life of the Catholic Worker.

I will start with the practices I know best, those from St. Louis. The Karen House community has adopted a practice called "Tradition." I was thinking that this practice began at the beginning of time, or at least, the beginning of Karen House time, but then the longer I thought about it, the more I became pretty certain it was the suggestion of Mark Scheu, our first

practiced "Tradition" in a variety of different ways. Someone might share a reading on a current topic and then we would do a clarification of thought about that issue in light of our philosophy, very much in the way we do in The Round Table. We might look at the topic both in theoretical terms, and in terms of what it means for our lives. We've also taken turns having a community member research a particular tenet of our philosophy, such as Personalism. The community member would then read writings that inspired Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and other materials they found and make a presentation to the rest of us. One of the most satisfying times we did this was about two or three years ago. We went through each of the Catholic Worker tenets, and community members, both old and new, took turns presenting. It was really nice to teach each other. When we did this, we each learned new things and thought of old ideas in a new way. This tradition of doing "Tradition" has been a great practice, teaching us the philosophy of our movement while inspiring us to live it better. Additionally it has been a helpful way for new community members to learn about and understand the depth and breadth of the movement.

The Karen House community also has a practice called the "Welcome Wagon." I believe this practice was suggested by our second great Karen House theoretician, Jenny Truax. The name may suggest we provide cakes for our new members, but instead, this practice provides our new community members with a rich diet of the Catholic Worker philosophy and practice, along with two community members with whom they can discuss the philosophy and their experiences. In addition to being given information about the Catholic Worker philosophy, the new community member is also provided with details about the various practices we have adopted at Karen House, such as the use of consensus at our community meetings. We also share about the chores that it takes to keep the house going and how each community member takes responsibility for various ones. We began this after noting that new members have sometimes found it difficult to know how to join in. People often mistake the decentralization of Karen House for its having no organization. This is not so, it is simply that its shape is a decentralized one that depends more on personal responsibility rather than a coercive hierarchical structure. I would argue it is no more inefficient than a very tightly organized hierarchical structure that can be broken down by one inefficient or corrupt leader.



Catholic Worker Sugar Creek gathering, 2010

great Karen House theoretician. Mark felt a strong desire that we not go off track in our philosophy. The tradition of "Tradition" has involved taking time each month at one of our weekly meetings to address some aspect of our philosophy. We have



**Teka Childress** looks out at her garden each day and is overwhelmed by how beautiful the earth is and wonders how it took her 50 years to realize this.

# MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

To build a new society, we need to work together in positive, creative ways. We all know that group meetings can be frustrating – whether it is an intentional community meeting, a PTA meeting, or a work meeting, people often leave unheard or resentful. The consensus process offers a non-hierarchical model that promotes active listening, group participation, and equality of voices.

Some helpful, and not-so-helpful comments from group members...



The toilet is ALWAYS broken! This is just how it's going to be...Forever.

I think I saw a kid throw his army gun into it.

Well, that's where toy guns should go. We should thank him...Or maybe call the plumber?...

I could try to clear the toy gun out of the toilet muck. Sounds like a great day in the life of a new Catholic Worker!

This one time I called the plumber and he didn't show up. We shouldn't bother...

Hey, this isn't my fault!... why is everyone looking at ME?!

2. OPEN DISCUSSION- BRING OUT A DIVERSITY OF IDEAS, CONCERNS AND PERSPECTIVES.

3. NOTE POINTS OF AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT, ACKNOWLEDGE ANY UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THEM.

1. ISSUE PRESENTED BY FACILITATOR OR DESIGNATED PERSON.

4. SYNTHESIZE POSITIVE PROPOSALS

Our facilitator uses amazing communication skills of *super-hero* magnitude!

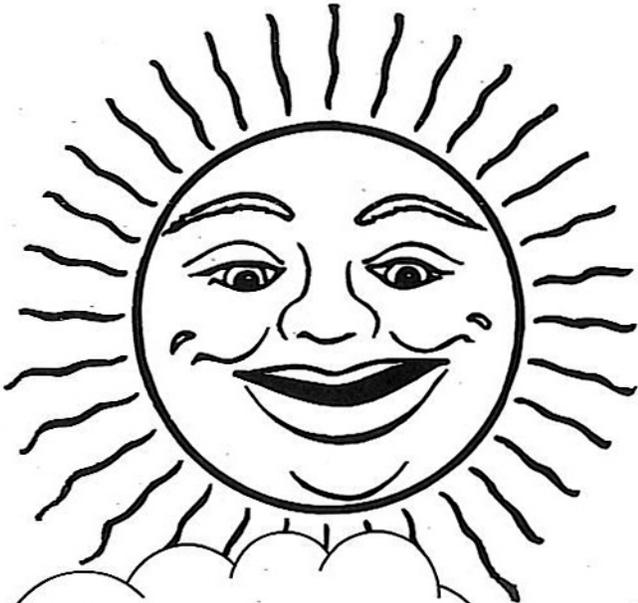


So, the toilet is broken again. What do we need to decide tonight?

Could we hear from folks who haven't spoken yet?

Could you talk more about what you meant-do you have a different idea than calling the plumber?

I'm feeling some tension around this issue. Should we take a five-minute break...or is there an underlying issue about our toilet that we should address?



Those two options sound reasonable to me...

We should make the kid do it. Ha! That reminds me—this one time when I was a kid, my mom made me....

I could try to fix it, then call the plumber if I don't succeed?

A group of us talked before the meeting and WE think we should...

I used to be in charge of maintenance, and I can't believe we would waste our money on a plumber!

I'd be happy to follow up! This decision is so wise and well-thought out! I feel so listened to and empowered!

5. EVALUATE THE DIFFERENT PROPOSALS UNTIL ONE IDEA SEEMS BEST.

7. ESTABLISH HOW THE DECISION WILL BE IMPLEMENTED.

SYNTHESIZE POSSIBLE PROPOSALS.

6. FACILITATOR EXPLICITLY ASKS, "DO WE HAVE CONSENSUS?"

8. RESTATE THE ENTIRE DECISION FOR THE NOTETAKER.

Do we agree that we should do something about the toilet? I've heard a few proposals - call the plumber or try to snake it ourselves. Are there any others?

Are folks comfortable with the proposal of trying to fix it, and then calling the plumber?

I'm seeing lots of nods. Do we have consensus?

Timmy, you'll follow up on this? When can you do it?

So, Timmy will try to fix the toilet, and call the plumber if he's unsuccessful within a week.

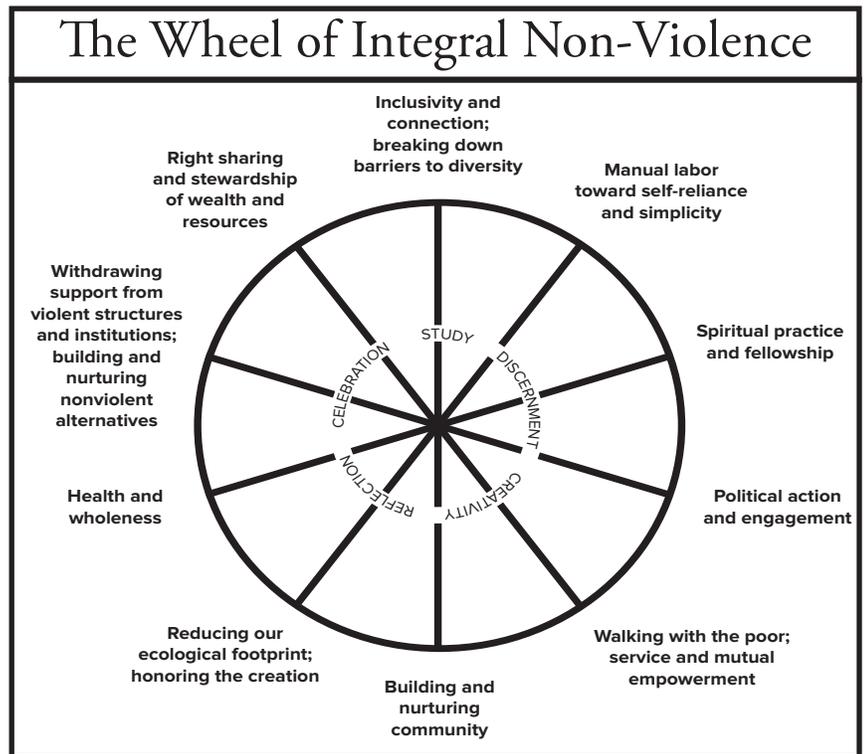
ion could te an out ould

The St. Louis Catholic Worker Community has also adopted a new practice. Following the encouragement and inspiration of Carolyn Griffeth, members of the St. Louis Catholic Worker from both sides of North Florissant, (members of Kabat House, the Farm House, the Good Thief, the Castle, TC House, Grace House, Little House and Karen House) have gathered one Sunday a month to discuss and share elements of the Wheel of Integral Non-violence, a concept based on Gandhi's philosophy that was created by Chris Moore-Backman. We look at these elements of nonviolence which connect very closely with our Catholic Worker philosophy and we discuss our struggles and plans with regard to them. We sometimes use a practice shared with us by Ethan Hughes at the Possibility Alliance, of making commitments toward change and action in a particular area. People announce their commitment to start a practice or to do something in that area and then share their successes or struggles with others. This practice allows for individuals to really grapple with certain things with which they struggle and make real choices for change.

Several Catholic Worker communities have found a new practice that is very old, that of forming covenants in order to deeply live out the Catholic Worker life they have chosen. The Cherith Brook community in Kansas City gathers for an annual retreat to examine their community's life and covenant and to re-form and commit to it each year. The New Hope Farm Community, being inspired by the Cherith Brook's practice decided to draw up their own covenant. Eric Anglada from their community pointed out that living on Catholic Worker farms had been one of the more neglected elements of the Catholic Worker and so creating a covenant has helped them in the ongoing clarification of their practices. They have adopted seven basic principles that well mirror the tenets of the Catholic Worker: Community, Spirituality, Radical Simplicity, Hospitality, Creation Care, Nonviolence and Clarification of Thought. They begin their covenant with the following introduction:

"As a Catholic Worker farm community rooted in the vision of our founders Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day and guided by our faith in a loving God, we seek to transform ourselves and society by living lives filled with joy, a joy that ripples out to every person we encounter and into the world. We seek to steward, celebrate and share the abundance of God's creation in such a way that we as a community, and all on earth, might flourish together in justice and peace. And so we humbly profess the following beliefs and commit to these actions." The community proceeds from this introduction to offer a statement about each principle followed by intended commitments of action or practices for each of the principles.

This practice of making a covenant is another example of a way to make real and actual visions and commitments. It is so easy, especially in the United States' culture of consumerism and individualism, to wander far from where we wish to be. Living in communities where we are accountable and share all of our strengths and weaknesses can provide us with ways to be the people and communities we desire to be, and it can



Source: Chris Moore-Backman

keep us true to our values so that the radical vision is not watered down. The Cherith Brook and the New Hope Farm communities, one, urban, the other, rural, give life to the Catholic Worker vision and movement.

Words and visions mean little without practice. Dorothy Day wrote, "I have long since come to believe that people never mean half of what they say, and it is best to disregard their talk and judge only their actions." It is indeed our shared work and lives which make our shared vision most real. Catholic Workers around the globe still follow the example of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and carry on with much faith. They continue to do the works of mercy and offer hospitality, to live lives of nonviolence (and everything this means). They still do manual labor, both because they believe in its dignity and because they know our lives depend on it. They continue to bring about the green revolution by starting and continuing their work on farms, urban and rural. They still accept voluntary poverty as necessary for life, for mercy and for justice. They continue to see that each person embodies the divine. And, they continue to attempt these things in a way that opposes the destructive centralizing of state and corporate power and wealth. When I think of the many ways this vision is still lived out by Catholic Workers, I am as inspired as I was on my first day at Karen House.

Having extolled some of the goodness of the Catholic Worker's vision and its embodiment, I want to say honestly that there are still many areas of struggle and it is likely there always have been. The movement is just that, a movement, and a work in progress. And, yet for all its imperfections and the imperfections of its members, it is a lovely thing. I shall always be grateful that I happened upon it. It is a vision and life with much beauty and it is worthy of being shared and kept alive. ✚

# A Life More Abundant

by James Meinert

Life in community is something people opt for for a variety of reasons – shared work, shared vision, personal growth, shared resistance, religious vocation, etc. But a lot of folks find that community is too hard – the people that had inspired you now annoy you and you are starting to react in ways that fall just short of the old Golden Rule. Jesus is quoted in the book of John as saying, “I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly,” but sometimes life in community can start feeling overwhelming and detrimental rather than abundant. So now what do you do, give up on community? Well a separate option some of us in the St. Louis Catholic Worker community have chosen is to go deeper into ourselves, striving for self-knowledge and personal transformation, in hopes that our communities can grow into something life-giving and supportive. We have found two tools helpful in this journey: the Enneagram and co-counseling.

The Enneagram is a system of identifying people in nine main groups, and within each group, an attempt is made to flesh out the behaviors and patterns that those people have in common. For those who have never considered that perhaps some of their decisions or behaviors are not unique to them but patterned in a way that can be

easily identified, the Enneagram can come as quite a surprise. People have been introduced to the idea, read about the grouping that they supposedly belong to and finished quite shook up. Some will even say that it felt like someone

else had gotten inside their head. Many Enneagram books also recommend ways of monitoring those behaviors that create tension in a relationship and encourage different behaviors that will make one’s life much easier. This information is gleaned from peoples’ lives who identify with a certain group and have taken

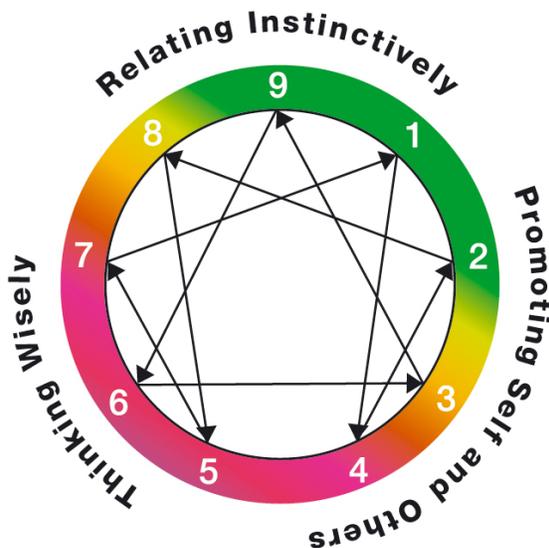
the time and self-reflection to see what helps make things go better. Another helpful aspect is that one may never realize the amount of fear, or anger that is motivating their decisions until they begin to reflect on the roots of them.

The insights one may have from the Enneagram can lead to a greater self-appreciation and effort for self transformation but also to a better understanding of those close in one’s life. The Enneagram can shed light on questions like, “Why doesn’t she clean up after herself?” “Why doesn’t he defend himself?” “Why is she always telling me how to live?” or “Why is he always trying to help others?” With a little understanding can come compassion and patience with another person’s patterns of behavior.

In my own life, studying the Enneagram has been insightful (though I haven’t always identified with one group or another). It has helped me to see the ways that I strive to avoid pain, ways that I act like I “have it together,” or how I try to use charm to disarm people. Not all of the patterns of my life that I was able to identify because of the Enneagram are necessarily bad traits. It has been important for me to recognize that our society rewards and encourages certain traits and discourages others. However, I don’t just want to be accepted in our society; rather I want to be free, live fully, and live abundantly.

Co-counseling (referred to interchangeably here as Re-evaluation Counseling, or RC) tries to help us do just that and move beyond understanding our own and others’ patterns of behavior and towards a method of liberating ourselves from the conditioning of our society. RC is both a practice and a gathering of ideas and beliefs about humans and the world based on the collected thinking of people using the practice. Co-counseling derives its methods from observations that when we experience hurt in our lives, our minds naturally want to process those experiences and the emotions that come along with them. If we don’t process them then we can get ‘stuck,’ and the experience and accompanying emotions can get stuck in our minds. But the ‘stuckness’ isn’t permanent and the experiences and emotions can still be processed. The internal, mental, and emotional processing is accompanied by more recognizable external processes such as crying, laughing, shaking, yawning, and talking. Folks using co-counseling often organize themselves to get together in small groups, usually two to four people where they will take turns getting to process whatever hurts they still carry while receiving the loving attention and caring listening from others.

The practice of co-counseling has been very helpful for some of us choosing to live in intentional communities. One of the insights of RC is that very few of the things or people that we



Enneagram image - Ennearoutes.com



**James Meinert** has recently started keeping bees with his partner. He loves it so much he will wake in the middle of the night thinking of bees and waits expectantly for the time he gets to open the hive each week.

feel upset by are actually what is upsetting us, and more often the issue is an old hurt that we are carrying and something in the present has triggered it or 're-stimulated' the old hurt.

For example, we all know someone we've lived with who bothers us or gets on our nerves, and generally in our culture we try to avoid that person or at least avoid the situations that trigger those feelings of annoyance. Well, it's possible that we don't have to settle for a life of avoiding others but get to be



Image from [www.michelinemason.com](http://www.michelinemason.com)

close to and love those we encounter easily. So what to do? In Co-counseling the idea is to figure out who or what that person reminds you of, find the charged feelings around those people or experiences and then process them in the present. When we were little, there were countless experiences where we were forced by parents or teachers to do something we didn't want to do, which is a shame, but even worse is that from very early on our bodies' natural healing process (marked by the crying, trembling, yawning, laughing, or talking) was shut down – people interrupted our crying or trembling and probably punished us if they went along with “throwing a fit.” So now as adults many hurtful things from our personal lives and our oppressive societies are keeping us from having the free and full life we could.

From the time we are born, and probably even before, we are shaped by our society, culture, family, and the people and institutions we live in. We encounter many hardships and make many decisions in order to survive and keep living. These decisions may be something like, “I have to take care of myself because people won't be there for me,” or “I have to always do what is right because making a mistake could cost me my life,” or “I have to avoid disturbing the status quo or I will be punished.” When we were very young, these were important choices we made to survive and make it in a world filled with difficulty. However, our lives as adults can often become directed by these early choices, to the point where we are no longer living freely. Maybe the enneagram or co-counseling can help you start taking steps towards a life free of personal and societal constraints – a life lived more abundantly. ✦

# Long Live the Circle!

by Ben Schartman

Our society has given us a particular model of justice and conflict resolution. This model is founded upon moral ideas of 'right' and 'wrong,' 'good' and 'bad.' This system frames the transgressor as a 'bad' person who needs to be coerced into acting in a 'good' way through punishment. This way of looking at things is seriously flawed and we can see the success of this system in the prison industry, packed as it is with the poor and persons of color.

As opposed to this retributive system of justice, many stateless societies operate with a needs-based paradigm. This paradigm sees violence as social harm done to a community and focuses on the needs of the survivor to heal and the need of the offender to become a healthy person who can relate with the broader community. “When members of the Navajo community try to explain why people do harm to themselves or others, they say that those responsible for harm behave that

way because they have become disconnected from the world around them, from the people they live with and work with. They say that that person ‘acts as if he has no relatives.’”<sup>1</sup>

Some indigenous communities have held onto their practices of restorative justice and in the last couple decades these restorative practices (and practices similar to them) have begun to be adopted by other groups seeking to live in community. One such group of people is our friends at the Possibility Alliance. The Possibility Alliance has adopted and adapted a practice called Restorative Circles. This process was developed by Dominic Barter in cooperation with others within the context of intense police/gang violence in the Brazilian favelas of the mid 1990's.

This practice runs very counter to our society's method of dealing with conflict, which is usually to ignore it, or if that becomes impossible, to judge and find fault with one participant



**Ben Schartman** has recently become fascinated with chess, and has been staying up late just about every night watching chess strategy videos online.

in the conflict. Instead the philosophy and practice of Restorative Circles asks us to move towards rather than away from the conflict. It also sees that conflict happens within a community, and that this community is both intimately affected by conflict



Hands by Anastasiya Maksymenko

and also responsible for providing the conditions in which conflict could happen in the first place. Within a Restorative Circle there are three parties (given unique names to describe the unique perspective of this practice): the author of the act, the receiver of the act and the conflict community. In the words of the Dominic Barter: “[T]hose present at the gathering form a circle. This simplest, most ancient of social patterns describes an intention—to recognize the other, to share meaning, to invite truth-telling. Guided by precise questions drawn on the wall for all to see, the participants edge forward in that most counter-intuitive of social discourses: dialogue.”<sup>2</sup>

What arises from this guided dialogue is often both a mutual understanding where before there was enmity and also from this new understanding, precise actions to be taken to repair what was damaged in the conflict. The concrete action plan makes real the newly acquired mutual understanding. It also replaces the conflictual event in the memory of the community with a restorative event that acts as a new reference point for a more healthy way that things could be in the life of the community.

The effects of Restorative Circles at the Possibility Alliance have been described by Ethan, one of the members there, as nothing short of miraculous. In a phone interview with me, he described how the process gets to the root of tension and conflict and ends up creating an atmosphere and culture where that conflict will not be able to take root in the future. In the past two and a half years the community at the Possibility Alliance has had seven circles, but according to Ethan the need for circles has more recently diminished. Ethan reflected that the intelligence gained from the circle process is diffusing through

the culture of their community and helping to address earlier the tensions that unaddressed eventually lead to conflict and discord.

I’d like to end this article with an inspiring quote from Dominic Barter: “The meaning of the word circle for me is not how you arrange the chairs but how we share both responsibility and power. Every time you put an authority figure in that kind of environment – not in the sense of someone whose experience I recognize and value, but in the sense of someone who has structural power over me — it’s no longer a circle and it’s no longer possible for us to dialogue. I think of dialogue as being a conversation between equals whose ending is unknown.”<sup>3</sup> Down with structural and hierarchical power! Long live the circle! ✦

Citations:

- (1) From the chapter on crime in Peter Gelderloos’s book *Anarchy Works*, which can be found at <http://www.ramshackleglory.com/anarchyworks.pdf>
- (2) and (3) Both come from the press section of the Restorative Circles website: <http://www.restorativecircles.org/pages/press-55> please read through this website for more of a description on the method of Restorative Circles

## RESOURCE BOX

### Nonviolent Communication

*A big part of getting along is improving our communication skills. Nonviolent communication (NVC) asks us to act with both honesty (so we understand our own needs) and empathy (so we can sense the others’ needs). NVC includes these main components:*

- **Observation:** We notice concrete things and actions, without judging them. “When I see that \_\_\_”
- **Feeling:** We state the feeling these observations procure in us. “...I feel \_\_\_”
- **Needs:** Everyone has needs; state them without judgement. “...because my need for \_\_\_ is not met.”
- **Request:** Ask for concrete actions that can reasonably be carried out, or for help with discovering an appropriate response. “Would you be willing to \_\_\_?”

Using this format can be simple: “When I see the sink is full of dishes, I feel frustrated because I have a need to live in a space that is relatively clean. Would you be willing to do some of the dishes, help me create a dish washing schedule, or maybe brainstorm a solution?”

#### More information:

[cnvc.org](http://cnvc.org) (Center for Nonviolent Communication)  
[ayahuasca-wasi.com/english/articles/NVC.pdf](http://ayahuasca-wasi.com/english/articles/NVC.pdf) (excerpts from several NVC books in one document)

# TEN BEATTITUDES OF COMMUNITY LIVING

Because of the hurt we have all experienced, we must be very deliberate about making sure our communities are places of healing, rather than of further wounding. These practices can help communities move towards health and healing.

- 1. Nourish a healthy relationship with everyone in community.** There is a real violence to proximity without intimacy. People entering community life expect and deserve to be known and loved, just as every child in a household deserves to be delighted in by their parents and not just ignored. This doesn't mean going out for coffee once a week with each community member, but it does mean clearing up anything that stands between you and another.
- 2. Never withdraw from any relationship—if you live in community together, this is not even an option.** Instead, when you have an issue with someone, draw closer to them in order to prevent reducing them to your 'story' about them, and to reconnect with the fullness of who they are. If a relationship in community is abusive the whole community should engage in correcting the situation. We must not tolerate any community member being treated with anything other than complete respect by another.
- 3. Speak the truth in love.** Love demands that we challenge one another. Refusing to challenge someone is a way of failing to fully love them and a sign that you are not committed to his or her growth, or your growth in relationship. If you are angry, wait to speak until you can speak the truth in a loving way that can be received.
- 4. Commit not to speak negatively about anyone in community.** Nothing builds communal trust more than this practice, which also demands that we wrestle with our own demons. You can relay events (Jack forgot to do the food run) but leave out your interpretation (Jack is irresponsible). St. John of the Cross wrote: "Never listen to those who speak of the weakness of another. If someone comes to complain about someone, you can ask that person with humility not to say anything."
- 5. Admit mistakes and ask for forgiveness even when your error hasn't been noticed.** This creates a culture of forgiveness and models humility.
- 6. Seek reconciliation in a conflict by first speaking to that person directly.** Try beginning the conversation by taking full responsibility for the way you have failed in the situation. If you meet an impasse, say, "Is there someone that we can talk to about this together?"
- 7. Encourage one another, as the Christian community has been called to in Scripture.** Point out each others abundant giftedness. No one gets enough words of affirmation and appreciation.
- 8. Create sharing times.** For example, invite individuals to share the dreams and goals they are working on (related or unrelated to community projects) and receive enthusiastic support. Similarly, create times to share one's grief and struggle.
- 9. Know the ways others are marginalized.** Chances are most everyone in our communities feels left-out or marginalized in some way, maybe because they are the only parent or single person, or they are of a different racial or class background or sexual orientation, or they have a disability or chronic illness. Resist the temptation to compare these experiences of marginalization (my struggle is greater than yours) and instead seek to fully include everyone. Intentionally cultivate significant relationships with folks across barriers of race, class, age, and sexual orientation.
- 10. Have patience with yourself and others as you move toward liberation.** We all come to community carrying beliefs, values, and habits that have been ingrained in us both by the culture and by our past experiences. For example, most of us have to wrestle with internalized sexism and racism, as well as values and habits acquired from being raised on the 'winning' side of global capitalism. With compassion for yourself and others, study these forms of oppression and support one another in making steps toward liberation.

Taken from Thriving Community Life Workshop  
by Carolyn Griffeth: [belovedcommunitybook@gmail.com](mailto:belovedcommunitybook@gmail.com)

# For Where Your Treasure Is, There Your Heart Will Be Also: Economic Models

by Sarah Latham

All of us, as children, were told in some way or another not to tell anyone how much money we make. When conversations involving our tax bracket or home value come up, we all get a little tense. Capitalism involves, after all, a competitive market. How can we truly compete with one another if we are sharing all of our business with everyone? Capitalism wants us all to believe that in our most primal moments, we only care and need to care for ourselves and our families. If we are working to meet the needs of everyone in our communities, however, we don't feel as isolated and self-conscious, and then we don't need to go out and buy more things to keep us distracted from the fact that we are missing loving connections. Capitalism causes us to distrust other people because we fear that our needs will not be met. So we need to hold on to what we've got. We fear that others will try to take it from us because their needs are not being met. In this way and many others, capitalism works to isolate us and causes us to distrust other people.

According to Marshall Sahlins, within exchange systems globally there appears to be a continuum of trade practices. On one end is generalized reciprocity, in which an individual offers gifts of goods or services with no expectation of a gift in return. This implies that the giver simply wants to give the gift. This is also one way of describing a gift economy (which I will discuss further in a moment). Balanced reciprocity, or direct exchange, lies in the middle. At the other end of the spectrum is negative reciprocity, in which it is attempted to get something for nothing with impunity. I would argue that this is another way to describe capitalism. If we are all striving to get the most bang for our buck, (forgive my somewhat violent reference) then we are not taking into consideration the needs of our larger community. However, when choosing to gift our resources, graciously receive gifts, and resist feeling superior/inferior because of these exchanges, we are also building interconnected, loving, sustainable relationships. For this article I had the opportunity

to interview Catholic Workers from two outstanding communities exemplifying the struggles and joys of living radically: John from the White Rose community in Chicago, who so beautifully stated, "God has given us gifts, we can choose to gift them to others instead of to commodify them." Also, Ross from the Catholic Worker in Bloomington, Indiana, stressed that "developing a culture of interdependency promotes our consciousness and awareness."

The White Rose community in Chicago offers an inspiring example of an income sharing community. With their incomes put into a "shared purse," they pay all of the bills and manage to meet the

needs of the house. The White Rose is committed to finding and using a more life-giving economic model. This past May they invited us all to participate in a "weekend without capitalism" – a three day act of non-cooperation, where we refuse to participate in the political and economic structures that oppress our sisters and brothers..." They urged us to take time off work, to use alternative transportation, and to resist purchasing and consuming goods from which the state profits. They asked us instead to practice the works of mercy, to engage in community building practices, and to audaciously be peacemakers.

The White Rose Community also participates regularly in Gift Circles. Gift Circles involve a group of people gath-

ering together to share openly both a few things they need gifted to them and a few gifts they could share without expecting anything in return. Gift Circles are just one way of promoting a gift economy.



Original Artwork by: Frits Ahlefeldt-Laurvig



**Sarah Latham** is promoting the gift economy by giving free (decent) hair cuts, making and sharing delicious treats, and helping herself to the belongings of her fellow community members!

It's a new and different way of thinking; the love and labor put into a gift are more valuable to the receiver than the arbitrary monetary value of the object or service. This basic belief encourages us to cherish the human connection more than the gift itself. Maybe we would all be better off if we gave and received a bit more freely.

Another Catholic Worker community that has adopted an income sharing model is in Bloomington, Indiana. This group of six adults and two children receives no regular support from outside donations. The community formed just four years ago, and is now working on obtaining a third house, so in the words of Ross, "It's working." Almost everything they do is funded by the paid work of the community members. They do send out appeals to friends and family to assist with paying the operations cost, but everyone living in community works part time. When a new person is interested in moving in, they explain that that person will be expected to contribute half of any income to the community bank account (with lots of exceptions for personal debts and such).

The Bloomington community recently had a financial visioning meeting to discuss how the current system was working and how it could be changed for the better. According to Ross, these conversations have been very hard and long, with much opposition to change. For them, working outside of the house provides a connection to the greater community, which in turn brings a more sustainable community life. However, it can limit the energy of the community for the work of the house. Ross noted, "It limits our availability for the works of mercy, direct nonviolent actions, and community process."

Here at Karen House, we have a community bank account in which folks in the community who have an outside income can contribute an amount they choose. It can look like \$35 a month up to \$150. From this account we pay for things like retreats, phone bills, tithes and magazine subscriptions. Since we are a community that lives in an urban setting, and have many members employed in income gaining work outside of the house, we are able to tithe both to justice and personal causes. This might include sharing with financially struggling communities doing the agricultural work in rural settings, or resistance work that is so central to the Movement.

Another unique opportunity our communal bank account provides is that Karen House community members can choose to opt out of working outside of the house and receive a stipend to cover their basic needs. This person is often considered "full time at the house," and is able to devote more time and energy to thinking about and doing the "work of the Worker." Through years of working on a sustainable economic model, we have learned that within an income sharing system, transparency and intentionality are very important. It is imperative for us to revisit the budget conversation often and be honest with each other about how we are feeling and what changes we would like to see.

Currently I am receiving the stipend from our shared account. I am from lower/working class household, and like most of our readers (I assume) have engaged in paid work since shortly after turning 16. It has been a radical shift in my way of life and in the way that I perceive productivity. Patience with oneself and each other can be one of the hardest aspects. We all come from a life where we are told my money is MINE and I can do whatever I want with it. For me, income sharing has meant a new and more meaningful dependence on those I call community. In my ongoing struggle to adopt

the tenant of voluntary poverty and my attempt to feel less isolated from the world around me, nothing has brought me further than the sharing I've done with my community.

In the words of John from the White Rose, "It's a change in mentality. All that we have is communal. We're taking care of each other." ✦

*We are all longing to go home  
to some place we have never been,  
a place half-remembered  
and half-envisioned  
we can only catch glimpses of  
from time to time.*

*Community.*

*Somewhere, there are people  
to whom we can speak with passion  
without having the words  
catch in our throats.*

*Somewhere a circle of hands  
will open to receive us,  
eyes will light up as we enter,  
voices will celebrate with us  
whenever we come into  
our own power.*

*Community means strength that joins  
our strength  
to do the work that needs to be done.*

*A circle of healing.  
A circle of friends.*

*Arms to hold us when we falter.*

*Someplace where  
we can be free.*

*- Starhawk*



# From Kabat House

by John Nolan

Kabat House began with a single building, where Carolyn, Tery and and Gana lived with several friends. Over the years the community has expanded, and now includes four houses, and many new faces. Now we are so many – such a mesh of people, shared space, and projects – that it is difficult to say exactly where Kabat House begins and where it ends. It seems more accurate now to call ourselves the Monroe Street community.

Given our numbers, and our varied motives and endeavors, it often feels like we are only very loosely tied together. The proliferation of our alliances has somewhat blurred our once reliable categories of ‘community,’ ‘guest,’ and ‘consensus.’ Are we a house of hospitality for immigrants, a group home for mental illness, or a free space for middle class dropouts? We lack a unifying religion or spiritual practice. Our politics are disperse. We haven’t all committed to Gandhi’s spiritual nonviolence, and we don’t have a single opinion on whether to vote for Obama, or not vote at all. However, the advantages to our free-form version of intentional community are great: relative ideological freedom, and the space to try new ways of living and interacting.

Here are a few examples of what we’ve been up to. In order to keep the first floor of Kabat House clear, we built a bike shed in the back yard. We have also done away with the nuisance of cutting the grass by completely covering that area with mulch. I highly recommend putting a blanket of wood chips over any section of grass that isn’t frequently used as recreational space. You can even use the time that you saved by not mowing to make garden beds.

Although many of us cringe at having a TV in the house, Kabat House has movie nights once a week. Jason is doing a great job at making this activity run consistently, and it is a nice time to just sit together and ‘veg out.’

We installed a waterless toilet in the basement. The waterless toilet employs a composting system to safely treat waste with very little work input, and it doesn’t destroy river ecosystems. Taking responsibility for our own waste in this small way is certainly a symbolic gesture in terms of water pollution, but it is energizing to know that our waste won’t pollute the Mississippi.

Many of us are learning to play chess now, and there

is usually someone playing every night. The game breaks down age and language barriers quite nicely.

Lastly, our house computer recently crashed, and now we question whether to replace it or to simply drop our internet service. The issue is far from settled, but I am excited by our communal desire to systematically reduce our consumption of mass culture. The internet is a direct feed for pornography consumption, state and business propaganda, addictive gaming, and instant buying. It is a tool for government surveillance. It wastes our time. On the

other hand, the internet can be useful and entertaining, and discontinuing service to the house might be unfair to those of us who don’t have other means of access. Whatever we decide, I am happy that we are trying to limit the influences of mass culture and high technologies on our lives.

These little collaborations, along with the countless other conspiracies, dreams, schemes, and coincidences

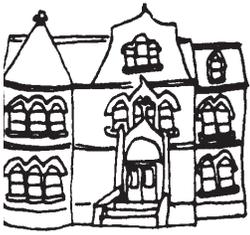
make up the foundation of community for me. They are our daily bread. Taken as a whole, our communal projects cannot be dismissed as mere aesthetic preferences or an assortment of hobbies. Instead they can provide a certain amount of respite from the eternal grind of wage labor and the isolation of Capitalism. The sharing of resources and mutual aid in community allows us to blow off wage labor, in favor of self-directed activity. For the first time, we can actually consider the costs of having a job, for ourselves and for those we care about. Here we reconstruct the virtue of voluntary poverty as a relevant political tool. It may allow us some leverage with our bosses or eliminate the necessity of having a career. We might even gain enough distance from the agonizing drone of mass culture to finally think. This is the space that we are trying to make at Kabat House, and on Monroe Street, for the sake of ourselves and our guests, and for bringing connection and spontaneity into our lives. ✦



Original Artwork by: Anonymous



**John Nolan** was born at 10:37 pm, and continues to believe that the eleventh hour suits him best.



# From Karen House

by Armani Owens and Daniel Ryskiewich

My name is Armani and I live in Karen House. I wanted to explain why I like/love Karen House. I like the activities that the community puts together. Since I've been here there's been an Easter egg hunt from Beth, a Karen House talent show from Sarah, a zoo outing from Daniel and JP, and camping from Tim, Mary, and James. I like the community members/Housetakers because they're so polite; they always seem to break a smile on their faces. They're very energetic, and have a passion for love and peace. I like how they give people shelter and hope. By giving people somewhere to stay, Karen House shows that just because you're homeless it's not the end of life. Also, I like how they let the homeless stay for as long as needed until they're ready to be set out in the world with love and hope and faith. I adore how they have Mass every Tuesday night because it gives me the opportunity not only to get closer to the Holy One, but to get closer to others as well. And how can I forget about the community itself! Everyone is so generous; there are donations of hygiene items, clothing, food, etc. And it's not like they want something in return, but the truth is that when they give something to the poor it won't be long until they are blessed. So I say 'thank you' to the community not just for what they've done, but also for caring for those in need.

I also remember one time, when me and a housetaker named Louie; he's studying to be a priest. So, it was a Saturday and also movie night. Anyway we were looking for a movie and I called every single movie dumb or boring. And there it was sitting on top of Titanic. It was a yoga video, and I said, "Hey let's do yoga!" And Louie said, "Ok, we can try, but if it doesn't work out then we have to watch 'Prince of Egypt'." So we headed to the living room and popped the movie in the VCR, and we began with the child's pose. It was so painful! But Louie learned that yoga is like life; it's all about balance. And I learned to never do yoga again! But despite the hilarious/painful days with Karen House I learned just the sum of how a Catholic Worker works. And how they are getting their daily energy from love, faith, and hope for the poor. These are reasons why I simply love Karen House and all they've done for the poor. ✝

The first time I came to the door at Karen House was a blazing hot evening last July. I was led there mostly by reading books about the Catholic Worker Movement, and it wasn't long before I hoped that I could be a part of it. I remember being so nervous walking up the front steps and ringing the doorbell for the first time. It was a big step to actually go to a house of hospitality and leave my safe, ideal vision of the Catholic Worker behind. I felt exhilarated to actually be taking steps toward this dream I had and scared that I was getting myself into a lot more than I knew. It's summertime again, and Karen House is my home now. It's hard to believe that everything's happened so quickly! It took a lot of deliberation before I decided to visit Karen House that first day, but I haven't looked back since.

Living here has given me so many blessings, and it seems to me now that one of the best gifts Karen House offers is friendship. Having so many people living in a house together is a source of tension, but it's also a source of companionship. In our recent talent show, it was beautiful to see a few guests who had only been here a day or two singing along with everyone and telling jokes. Celebrating our togetherness is so important, and I think it's at the heart of Karen House's hospitality. The words *pax intransitibus*, 'Peace to everyone who comes inside,' are etched over the Karen House front door. I hope that everyone who comes here also finds friendship. ✝



Photo by: Unknown



**Armani Owens** likes to help **Daniel Ryskiewich** out while he's on house, but they often end up shooting hair-bands at each-other.



# Catholic Worker Thought & Action

## *Hospitality*

by Megan Heeney and Katie Cushwa

### The Ants Come Marching In

This weekend when we discovered a line of ants marching through our back door, we began to regret our recent dramatization of [Charlotte's Web](#). This classic novel came along with a conversation about respect for animal life (particularly insects). We explained to the girls that their recent cracker crumbs had in fact been an inadvertant invitation for ant hospitality.

We have been lucky over the past few months to have our goddaughters living with us. They are four year-old twins and a six year-old. The five of us live together at the Green Bee, which Tony H and Julie J lovingly built over the last decade. We moved into the house, which is two blocks away from Karen House, a year ago this month. It has been quite an adjustment leaving the busy atmosphere of hospitality at Karen House. Moving out we found the solitude of two rather enjoyable, after leaving the noise of 35 people in Karen House. When our goddaughters joined us this October, we were thrilled with the life they added to our household.



Photo by: Katie Cushwa

Jerricka, who is four, has a propensity to invite people into our yard and house (walk by anytime she is outside and you will experience a taste of her enthusiastic invit-

ing, starting with the phrase 'I know you'). Once the guests are in our house she has an audacious desire to invite them for a meal or snack. She is quite the young Catholic Worker. Jerriona, who is in Kindergarten, often invites guests over for dinner immediately after we have cooked a meal for five. She makes sure the meal is spread around and there is always room for more at the table. She gladly scoots up additional stools. Jerrinee, age four, is quite ready to entertain once our guests have settled in for a meal (which is also exactly when she feels a grand tour is appropriate).

We have been overjoyed to discover that hospitality is an innate part of our human existence, starting at a very young age. We want people in our lives, we want to eat with others and learn about them and enjoy their presence. Even if we didn't plan to have guests over, the girls make sure that the house stays full. Whether they are asking Annjie and Jenny's dogs over for a play date, inviting the six tutors from Wednesdays at Karen House for dinner or begging Armani from Karen House to stop and chat on her way to her school bus, they have assured us that our house will be a bustle of activity. When they have a babysitter they are keen to ask them to stay over in our guest loft, just so they don't have to walk or bike home at night, and especially so they can play with them in the morning (babysitters beware- it may never end).

We have discovered that as we grow up we make hospitality into a complex idea. Should we invite people in? Is there enough food to go around? Did we clean up enough? Are we prepared? Jerriona, Jerricka and Jerrinee don't ask if we are prepared. They simply ask do you want to come in? Did you know how excited we are that you are alive and that you want to be near us? We are hoping and praying that their eagerness for sharing and intimacy leads us to deepen our commitments to hospitality and community. They help us see that we don't need to worry about logistics but simply invite our neighbors more fully into our lives. With this openness to hospitality we can always be like Jerricka, overjoyed to say I know you. ✚



**Katie Cushwa and Megan Heeney** are shocked at how many "clubhouses" can be discovered in their backyard.



# From the Mail Bag

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Dear Roundtable,

I appreciated the latest issue about the Occupy movement. It seems to me that the Roundtable offers a practice of concrete analysis of current social movements and discussion of how we can effectively engage with them that is sorely needed within the Catholic Worker.

I particularly appreciated "Reclaiming Our Spaces" which highlighted the possibility of building and maintaining autonomy from the State and its complex systems of violence and domination. It highlighted concrete moments of struggle, such as the street battles and occupations in Oaxaca in 2006, as visions of the way ruptures of the norm can lead to moments of liberation and experimentation.

Also interesting to me was "Nonviolence, Catholic Worker Style: Misunderstood, Irrelevant, or Revolutionary?" Although there is so much I could say about this article, I want to highlight one sentence that was particularly refreshing to me: "Our attitudes and disposition toward the fist of the state, especially the military and police, come into play here...As pacifists...we oppose these two institutions and their basis in coercion and violence."

Although this may appear common sense, in my experience of more than six years of involvement with the Catholic Worker, it appears that within the nonviolent movement a firm opposition to the police and the State power they wield is extremely rare. I believe that this absence, the lack of analytical clarity it is rooted in, and the practical implications it has for action in the real world, are the most potent roadblocks to the development of a truly oppositional nonviolent movement.

The examples are everywhere: "Peace Police" (nonviolent protesters who snitch to the police about acts of property destruction during protests); the tradition of legitimizing State power by doing actions and then waiting to be arrested; proponents of nonviolence who obscure the role of the police, prison guards and other agents of the State by pointing out that "we all maintain the system;" allegedly nonviolent communities who lack a firm commitment to not calling the police. There exists everywhere an unwillingness to recognize the State for what it is and to maintain a clear opposition to it and the violence inherent in its existence.

For the nonviolent movement to be relevant and effective in combating violence and domination in the world, it must adopt an analysis of State power that leads to the recognition that calling the police is totally at odds with a commitment to nonviolence.

The concrete reality is that introducing the police into a crisis

puts us all at risk. We've seen it a thousand times: the police respond to a domestic violence call and end up handcuffing and locking up the survivor, they intervene in a scuffle and beat and bloody both parties worse than they ever would have done to each other, they respond to a sexual assault and rape the survivor again, they are good-naturedly called to help someone in need, and that person is then arrested on an outstanding warrant, beaten for saying the wrong thing, or deported due to their "immigration status."

The theoretical background to this is that in the U.S. the interlocking systems of State, capitalism, and the innumerable apparatuses\* they wield, together create the most comprehensive and powerful system of organized violence, domination and control the world has ever seen. Their violence should be our focus first because no other manifestations of violence in our world come close to rivaling these systems. And second because together they represent the crystallization of all forms of domination into our lives. In other words, without these systems we may imagine the freedom to autonomously organize ourselves in a way that allows us to resist violence and domination. But their existence ensures that we will never have the capacity to move freely or to openly experiment with solutions to these problems.

There are some inspiring examples of opposition to the police within the Catholic Worker. Some communities are committed to not calling the police because of the immigration status of their guests or because of their first-hand experiences of police violence. Some refuse the presence of weapons in their houses and drop-in centers, which manifests in their attempting to prevent police from entering. I'm looking forward to these currents deepening, and our critical reflection on these topics remaining rigorous.

In love and solidarity,

-A Friend

\* the tools they use control us in our daily lives, such as the way they divide us and pit us against each other based on their invented and forced race and gender categories and the daily horrors of racism and sexism that result.



# From the Mail Bag

## *Author's Response*

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Hello, friend!

I want to respond to your thoughtful letter and thank you for sending it. In the last Round Table article on nonviolence, I referred to the complex issue of dealing with state power as expressed through the police and military: "As pacifists – people committed to reducing violence and killing – we oppose these two institutions and their basis in coercion and violence. At the same time, as personalists, we believe that the people participating in these institutions are just as deserving of love and mercy, just as blessed and significant, as we are." Our Round Table committee met to discuss your letter, and I'd like to share some of their ideas, along with my own thoughts on how the Karen House community – a community firmly rooted in pacifism – has wrestled with this question.

I found your letter on state violence to be clear and helpful, a great reminder to those of us promoting nonviolence. It's a wise idea for people and groups that work for social justice to be very intentional about their dependence on, and association with, the police (along with the moral and pragmatic consequences that result from these choices).

John Zerzan, an intellectual in the anarcho-primitivist movement, notes that "...[P]eople say, 'Abolish the cops.' But in this kind of society, you can't just do that. How are you going to go help vulnerable people if they're being attacked? You need to create a healthy community before you can get there. ...You talk about smashing the state and getting rid of capitalism, but if you want to keep this level of complexity [of modern mass society], you can't have that. The only way you can have it is to get rid of modern mass society."

It seems true that the mass (unhealthy) society we live in is based on groups dominating each other at every level (multinational corporations, gangs, sweatshops, racism, etc.) and would not necessarily change with the abolition of the police state. On the other hand, the military and police are certainly a lynchpin of control and domination, acting as the fist of the state and the corporations that control it. Within both of these truths, creating small (healthy) communities based on mutual aid, strong relationships, and restoration remains a compelling strategy toward resisting domination.

As Catholic Workers who are sharing our lives with both our homeless guests and those with privilege who support our work, we're constantly navigating the murky water of envisioning a new society while in the shell of the old. We live in the inner city's harsh reality of violence. The lack of resources at our disposal is astonishing, really. We simply don't have a local peace force to call during a dangerous situation. At Karen House, we avoid the knee-jerk response of calling the police for many of the reasons you outline,

but at times our commitment to protect vulnerable people in our house necessitates calling 911 (when we call 911, both the police and the ambulance typically respond.) Teka described such a situation to me, which happened a few months ago:

"I felt this [predicament] keenly recently when a man was at our door who I knew. I knew he was at serious risk of hurting himself. He was upset... and said he was going to take his life that night. He began to hit himself with rocks and ran off. I followed him in a car and tried to talk with him. He continued to state the same thing. I had called 911 hoping for an ambulance to take him to the hospital. The police came. Would it have been better to let it go?"

We don't pretend to have all the answers to these complex questions. Nonviolence is a journey and not a destination, and there is no objective list of actions or beliefs that proves or disproves our commitment to it; with humility we do our best, grounded by our ideals within each circumstance. We wholeheartedly disagree with the violence and coercion which provide the basis of the police force. And simultaneously, we deeply believe that we are more than our worst sin and capable of redemption - the rapist, the police officer beating someone, the war profiteer, the murderer, me, and you.

When we ignore the whole person and reduce someone to one aspect of their personality, characteristic, group or bad choice, we create division - an "us versus them" mentality. This creates winners and losers, and feeds the cycle of violence and oppression. We feel it is important to resist reducing people simply to their job, or role they are fulfilling; this is the basis of the "-isms" in the world.

So where do we go from here? As pacifists, we want to publicly renounce the violence of capitalism and the coercion of the police and military upon which it depends. We want to defy the sentiment that nonviolence has been domesticated and co-opted by doing resistance that is inclusive and creative. As personalists, we want to build communities that resist domination and seek responses to violence that model restoration and healing. As anarchists, we want to take personal responsibility to address injustice and to build relationships across traditional lines of division.

Thanks again for your letter; it has sparked much conversation in our community. As we seek to build a kinder world and infuse our movements with integrity and creativity, we hope others will continue these vital conversations.

-Jenny Truax

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House  
1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106

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## The St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

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1840 Hogan  
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Ella Dixon "Little" House  
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St. Louis, MO. 63106  
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Carl Kabat House  
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Teka Childress House  
1875 Madison  
St. Louis, MO. 63106  
314-588-9901

[www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)

### Karen House Needs

- Diapers (size 3 and 4)
- Cooks to cook dinner (call us for details)
- Canned goods, low-cal ranch dressing, dish soap

We are closing the house for a month of cleaning and repairs on September 12th and could use your help! See page two for details.

### 3rd Annual 'Growing Roots' Session

New Hope Catholic Worker Farm & Agronomic University  
Sept. 10—14th (right before Sugar Creek!)  
Theme: The Technological Question

Our lives are saturated by technology. And yet, generally speaking, we spend little time discerning technology's impact on our lives. Through reading and discussion, skill sharing and farm labor, silence and conviviality we'll consider a number of critical questions centered on technology. More info or to register: call Eric 563-556-0987. Space is limited.

### Midwest Catholic Worker Gathering: Sept. 14-16

Join our caravan to Sugar Creek, in Iowa for a weekend with Catholic Workers from all over the Midwest!

### Support Our Sisters!

Our community is disappointed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy's recent crackdown on nuns, and its misuse of power to diminish the voice of women. We stand in solidarity with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and value the prophetic witness and commitment of women religious. More info: [nunjustice.org](http://nunjustice.org), [catholicactionnetwork.org](http://catholicactionnetwork.org)

### Catholic Worker Gathering at the Possibility Alliance

Saturday, Oct. 12th at 10am- Monday, Oct. 14  
The Possibility Alliance is an inspiring electricity- and petroleum-free intentional community in Northern Missouri.

This is a great opportunity to see this amazing community, build connections and share their witness of radical simplicity and nonviolence. The gathering also coincides with an optional wild plants and insects workshop.

Call the Possibility Alliance (660-332-4094) or Carolyn from Kabat House (314-588-8351) for the details and to register.

### Seeking Articles

We are seeking articles for the upcoming book, Recipes for the Beloved Community



The object of the book is to gather "recipes" for what works in community (similar to this issue of the RoundTable) from within the Catholic Worker movement and other similar community traditions. Its focus will be both practical (the nuts and bolts of community life) and inspirational.

To contribute your insights or ideas, contact Jenny or Carolyn at [belovedcommunitybook@gmail.com](mailto:belovedcommunitybook@gmail.com) or 314-588-8351

### Congratulations, TC and Sarah!

Former community member TC Parsons and Sarah Steele are getting married - warmest wishes for your life together!



### **We welcome your donations and participation!**

As Catholic Workers, our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax-exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close personal relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.

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!