

# THE Round Table

WINTER  
1990

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



# WHY THIS ISSUE?



This issue is about describing and commenting on the rituals which enable us to find the meaning held in our human experience. Maurice Nutt, CSSR, traces a path through a series of polarities: uniformity and universality . . . presider and leader . . . claiming and proclaiming . . . listening and witnessing . . . to sketch a vision of African-American ritual. Hazel Harrison describes the ritual of Kwanzaa. Jim Krings shares his discovery of the meaning of the sacramentality of tax resistance as an expression of the sacramental life of liturgy and ritual.

Can the voice of the victims of the violence of Central America be a prophetic voice calling us to conversion? It is a question Virginia Druhe raises drawing on her extensive Third World experience.

In a sensitive reflection on the rituals of hospitality, Ellen Rehg reminds us that the cry of the poor is first of all our own.

Some of the characteristics of communion: of table . . . of vision . . . of mission . . . of life . . . in confronting and struggling with the personal and social issues which compromise our human dignity come from the communal pen of Jim and Katrina Plato.

In Dry Salvages Eliot writes:

we had the experience, but we missed the meaning . . .

let us continue to create/celebrate the rituals which enable us to explore our experience . . . and find the meaning.

Departing from usual practice for reasons of solidarity with its mission and community member Mary Ann McGivern's long-time association with it, a letter of appeal for financial assistance for The St. Louis Economic Conversion Project is included in this issue of The Round Table. †

Front Cover by Jeff Finnegan

-Tom Nelson

## *the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community*

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# A THEOLOGY OF SACRAMENT

by  
Jim Krings

Early last April I was engaged in my annual decision making about tax resistance and I found myself unusually discouraged at the prospect. I was telling Mary Ann McGivern that it felt so futile to have seen no change emerge in government or internal revenue policies as a result of my own and others' actions. Continued tax resistance appeared far less effective and far more symbolic than I had previously believed.

Mary Ann said, "Well, you know, Jim, no matter what its impact on the IRS or government, refusing to pay taxes is a sacrament at its best. It is a sign that itself accomplishes what it signifies." "Huh?" I asked. She replied, "In the very act of refusing to pay, you are withholding war monies and resisting militarism."

The conversation crystallized then a whole series of reflections on tax resistance specifically and sacramental living generally. It reminded me of many moments in our lives that are sacramental because they involve intentional signs that effect what they signify. For example, many people take daily coffee breaks and, for some, it is only habit. For others, however, it is sacrament because its setting, conversation, and quiet are intended as a symbolic preparation for the way the person intends to return to work. And, in fact, the person's return to work is different because of the break.

Similarly, many people have guests for dinner and their hospitality can be impeccable. For others, however, the act is also a sacrament because the details of hospitality symbolize and effect one's intentions of welcome. In each case and in all sacramental living, symbolic actions effect what they signify, thereby opening a person to others and to God.

There are difficulties, however, with such small 's' sacraments namely, how individual and solitary they can seem. For example, there is no feast of tax resistance, commanding our attention. There are few common gatherings about it; nor is there any canon of

accepted readings around the theme. But, a sacrament requires a sign that, along with its meaning to me, also carries some intrinsic sense that can be understood by others without complex explanations. In other words, a sacrament needs a way for its particular symbol to bear universal import.

In fact, our Church's own sacramental history offers more than a clue to just such a connection. Our Sacraments are the meeting place of our own particularity and God's universal love. They combine word and sign in ways that are clear, understandable and



effective of what they represent. And, Jesus is their starting point. Jesus, that particular man of Nazareth, is indeed the Christ, God's anointed, bringing salvation to all peoples. Jesus Christ, himself the pivot point of the particular and the universal, is the Sacrament of all the sacraments of God's presence made flesh among us.

Jesus' incarnation demonstrates God's presence in the concreteness of our small 's' sacraments. At the same time, each large 'S' Sacrament is itself, in Christ, a Sign of all its small 's' expressions. Our seven Sacraments connect our sacraments, in their particularity, with God's ever present love. Meanwhile, our

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Jim Krings, diocesan priest and associate pastor at St. Cronan's, is a long time supporter of our work.



## SAINT LAURENCE

Ade Bethune

experience of the particular in our sacraments, i.e. their concrete joy, difficulty, poignancy, enables our Sacraments to have real substance beyond the ceremony. Jesus Christ provides an interfacing of our sacraments and our Sacraments, each complementing and fulfilling the other. In one, we find God in life's concrete particularity; in the other, our concrete lives have universal import with God and creation.

For example, baptism is the Sacrament of all the ways in which our bodies will be our way to God. It initiates one into a vision and community which transform one from a religion of the mind into an incarnational faith. Baptism proclaims and effects a new birth in which one's own body becomes the sign of and, in effect, remains God's preferred meeting place with us. It is the Sacrament of all the sacramental ways by which we find God indwelling and enfleshed among us.

Similarly, the Eucharist is the Sacrament of those sacraments of our lives in which food and drink are shared. It's the Sign of all the sacraments of feeding each other and being fed, of gatherings to be nourished and made welcome. It's the Sacrament of all those particular meals . . . after a wedding, after a funeral, with loved ones, with strangers . . . in which the very gathering and eating makes the moment holy. The Eucharist is the sign which can make food gatherings sacramental . . . realizing, of course, that it is our small

's' capacity to make any meal special that makes the Eucharist possible at all.

Further, one can find in Penance the Sacrament of all the sacraments of regret, apology, forgiveness, and conversion in our lives. All those sacramental moments in which people forgive and are forgiven, in which words and gestures express conversion, are at the heart of Penance's own signifying power. Penance blesses our willingness to forgive and be forgiven, effecting the very conversion to which its own words and gestures point. At the same time, it links one's concrete moments of reconciliation with all humanity's need for redemption.

With Matrimony and Holy Orders, the 's'/'S' relationship may be more obscure since they are Sacraments that not all people experience. Yet, each depicts sacramental living that occurs in all our lives. Matrimony can be seen as the Sacrament of our times of transforming and being transformed by another person. It would signify and effect the experience of a person mattering so much that choices are made to faithfully maintain and deepen that significance. Matrimony, thereby, would be the Sacrament of all our sacraments of friendship, community, neighborhood, and global belonging people mattering so much that our lives and our decisions change because of them. And, once again, isn't it our capacity for such particular sacramental moments with one another that grounds the Sacrament itself, calling a person beyond romance to genuine committed living?

Further, one could describe Holy Orders as the Sacrament of all our moments of leadership and service. It reflects our times of speaking truthfully and prophetically, of leading oneself and others to a fuller living of the Gospel. Holy Orders depicts the many ways that people of different perspectives seek to gather together around deeper values. It represents all those moments in which a person leads or serves another, enfleshing all those texts typically reserved to clergy but to which all our families and communities are called daily. And, it is our common capacity to lead and serve one another that makes the Sacrament of Holy Orders possible at all.

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**For our healing we have on our side one great force: the power of Creation, with good care, with kindly use, to heal itself.**

**Wendell Berry**  
***The Unsettling of America***

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Regarding the Anointing of the Sick, despite the recent movement away from an older name, it is simply and finally the Sacrament of all our letting go's. It is the Sacrament of the times when we come face to face with our mortality, with how little of our lives we really control. Focused as it is on serious illness, it signifies and effects one's confident reliance on God, the oil received in open hands. While humbly acknowledging all the other agents of healing, e.g. medicinal, surgical, emotional, etc., Anointing graphically claims God's simple presence as most central. Additionally, it is a Sacrament for the church who stands in God's presence with the person anointed, everyone made still in the expectation of God's unfolding presence. As such, it is the Sacrament of those many sacraments of staying faithfully with one another, the very fidelity itself, with its many gestures, effecting what it signifies.

And Confirmation? Of what moments is it the Sacrament? Of tax resistance perhaps? A number of Native American pre-adolescent rituals closely parallel an understanding of Confirmation that the Church has

proffered at various times in its history. As such, Confirmation would be the Sacrament of the sacraments of courage, strength, and responsibility in a person's life. It's the Sacrament of all those decisions to face life honestly and to live with integrity. Like Confirmation itself, each moment of courage, honesty, and integrity effects the very things it signifies.

Last April I did decide, once again, to refuse to pay some of my taxes. It was a sacrament that effected what my action signified and its courage, hope, and responsibility had roots in my Confirmation day. Furthermore, that tax resistance was a confirmation of and connection with the universal call to global peacemaking. My own particular action was joined, through Confirmation, to God's universal love for all peoples. Finally, my tax decision, including its potential for personal cost, gave concrete substance to the meaning of the Sacrament, fulfilling a fifth grade religious ceremonial with particular courage, integrity, and responsibility.



David Klein

# A WORKER'S BAPTISM

by  
Ellen Rehg

I remember Don, the grizzly-bearded, slow talking man who lived sort of around the backyard of Karen House. He slept on someone's cast-off mattress, which lay stained and torn atop an ever present pile of rubble by the back driveway. Because his behavior was unpredictable and often destructive, we did not let him into the house. When it was really cold, we let him sleep in the tiled space between our two front doors, where he would be warmer, but still locked out. We used to hand him a plate of food through the side door, but only invited him in to eat during holidays, like Thanksgiving and Christmas. This was our practice when I first came to Karen House, and I was aghast at this treatment. I firmly resolved that I would never hand him a plate of food through the door as if he were a dog instead of an ambassador of Christ.

Right. This resolution was about as firm as Peter's promise to Jesus that he would never deny him. Before too long, I was not only hurriedly shoving his plate of food at him through the door, but was also, in exasperation at his endless requests, refusing him his second cup of coffee or anything else beyond the perfunctory one plate of food.

My experience with Don represents to me a kind of baptism, not one of fire or water, but a baptism into the acceptance of my utter dependence on God for the grace to live a life of faith. That is, I was forced to accept the truth about who I am. John Calvin and Martin Luther identified baptism and the Lord's supper as the only two sacraments. Their choice reveals the centrality of these two rituals in everyday life. For not only do we eat everyday, but everyday we must be reminded of the truth of who we are. That is, we must renounce the lie of the fallen angel, the first individualist, who preferred to rule in hell rather than serve in heaven. "Ruling in hell" simply means worshiping the



SS. Perpetua & Felicitas

Ado Bethané

idol of yourself, thinking that you can do things on your own, without God. One can live this way, but believe me, it is hell. We all have to confront the reality of our limits, and life at Karen House quickly confronts us with these. We may have been lured into a false sense of holiness since we have this strong desire to serve the poor. But in the transition from the ideal life that this desire enjoys in our imagination to the real life assault on one's time and patience at Karen House, we face the poverty of our own inner resources. Some of us have to let go of things running smoothly, some of us have to let go of every need being perfectly addressed, some of us have to let go of the desire to always look good to other people, and many of us have to let go of the desire to single-handedly erase all injustice from the earth. This baptism into the reality of life in a shelter marks the genuine initiation of a community member into the community.

This purification of a false sense of who we are clears the way for the genuine communal practice of holiness. Holiness is not so much in what we accomplish but in what we try. Once we enter a community of faith and acknowledge our need for God and each

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Ellen Rehg, Karen House community member, wants anyone who understands Flannery O'Connor to let her know.

other, our eyes are opened to the sacramental presence of God in our daily encounters.

Often these sacramental moments are embedded within the rituals of everyday life. A ritual can be understood as a set of actions that formalize the elements of a story we tell about who we are. When these stories represent the basic truths of our human condition, our rituals are sacramental.

One of the truths of the human condition is the need for coffee in the morning - just kidding! But what is it about the smell of coffee brewing, and the early morning, bleary-eyed huddle around the percolator, coffee cups cradled in our hands, that is so comforting? The silent communion of early risers with their coffee must reveal something of the sacred. For some at Karen House, this is one of the nicest moments of the day.

As any housetaker knows, the early morning silence is quickly punctuated by the incessant ringing of bells. The most common ritual involved in taking house is answering the door and the telephone. Virginia has mentioned that often when she opens the door for someone, she experiences the welcoming gesture that Jesus extends to all of us. Removing the barriers and letting the stranger into our home symbolizes the sacramental action by which God draws us more closely together. We are not strangers in the eyes of God, yet we are all in need.

A very old ritual was the practice of returning a portion of the fruits of human labor back to God, in the form of sacrificing an animal, or offering up some of the produce of the soil. In this practice, the truth we are expressing is that of our dependence upon and gratitude to God, who has given us all the good things we have. Every time we offer a sandwich or a plate of food to someone who comes to the door, we are repeating this offertory. We are returning the work of

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## "Holiness is not so much in what we accomplish but in what we try."

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human hands to God, who comes to us in the form of the hungry and the homeless.

Those who accept our offerings remind us of how much we rely on each other for our daily bread. The truth is that our lives are literally in each other's hands. I did not grow the food I eat, nor fetch the water I drink, nor fashion the utensils I use. When I eat at Karen House, I haven't even cooked! Sharing a meal together expresses this interdependence. Guests, community members, and volunteers alike take turns planning, preparing or serving the meal. Together we make up the body of Christ, equal in our common need to be nourished, yet different in what we bring to the feast.

Of course, we rely on each other not only for the food we eat, but also for solidarity, for our spirits need to be sustained as well as our bodies. Dinner time at Karen House often provides both. When I eat at Karen House, I usually try to set a good example by waiting at the end of the line to be served. However, I often end up craning my neck so noticeably, to keep an eye on how much food is left, with such a look of consternation on my face, that invariably a guest will graciously insist that I move up in front of her in line. Once again the miracle of the loaves and fishes occurs in our midst.

This is why we know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. To share bread together reveals our sisterhood and brotherhood in Jesus and prefigures the banquet to which we are all called, where we are already all present. †



# WHEN GOD IS YOUR EVERYTHING

## Ritual and the African-American Culture

by  
Maurice J. Nutt, CSSR

While I was in the seminary I studied all the documents on liturgy and worship and evangelization, and all I kept saying was, "Boy, all those bishops and cardinals were talking about black folks!" When I read the documents of Vatican II I said, "This isn't anything new to me, it's what I've been raised with in my cultural heritage." They talk about building up the church as the People of God, but, in my experience of the black church, the church has always been the people. When the documents say the church is the Body of Christ, that's the African-American experience of being church and family.

Liturgy calls us not only to have a natural high in Jesus and feel good in church, but it calls us to go out and witness to the world and to our community and to become active politically and socially. If we really live what we celebrate, we evangelize — we bring people to the church and the church out to the world. God is carried outside the church building.

That's shown all through the deep spirituality of African-American people. When we were brought into this land, like being in exile in Babylon, we had to cry out to God in a foreign place. I think that's something we haven't lost. We have deep roots in calling on God and believing in God. There are very few atheistic black people. I don't care who you are, if you're black, you believe in God.

And that's something we bring to church with us, and we ritualize it. We don't come to church to know God, we come to share God because God is within each of our households, and each of our hearts and our lives. We come to celebrate the fact that God is.

That is in the whole sense of family and family crosses over into church. Church is where family is at

its best. We know we're family out there, but when we're in God's house we know we're connected even more so, through the family of God. That is expressed in our life as a church.

I often say that Catholicism is wrapped in culture. You cannot come as a Catholic to celebrate the Eucharist or celebrate the Word of God without bringing who you are to that celebration. Who you are gives meaning to the whole act of Eucharist.

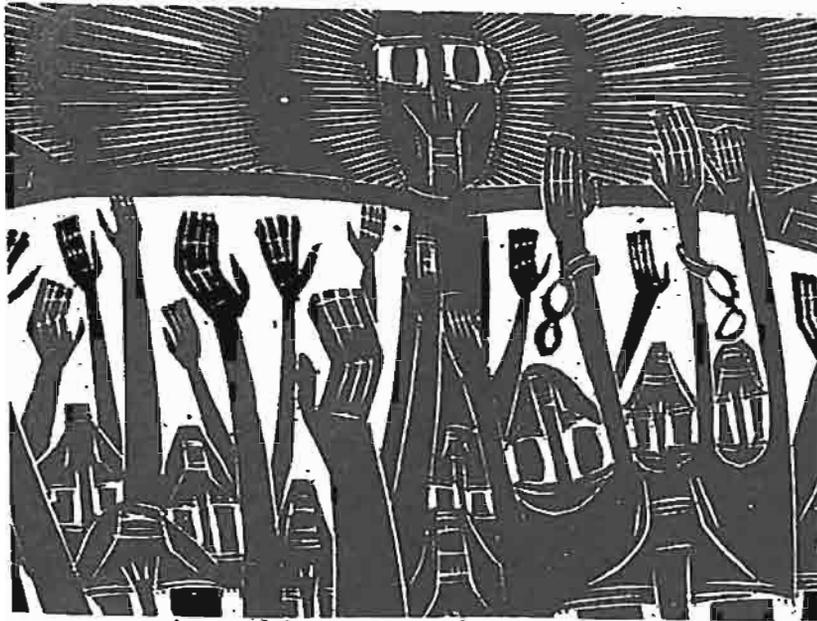
Ritual is about taking the elements of the Mass and making them your own. It is time for us to come and bring the richness of our African-American culture to the celebration. No longer do we leave our blackness on the church doorstep. When we come in we bring our whole selves — the selves that say that we can sing and shout, clap our hands. We can sway. We have vibrant colors. We give witness and testimony, we tell the story. All this is very much part of our oral tradition as African-American people.

My dream is to even further adapt things that speak to our people. If liturgy is the art of sharing in the people of God and building and celebrating the gifts of God as we are, then we should come as ourselves and ritualize it in a way that speaks to us, that speaks to our needs and our culture and our language. I see the black Catholic church really moving in that direction.

The Catholic church is certainly universal, yet we're not uniformed. That's the part I don't think is really stressed enough. We used to say universality so much that we all had to celebrate in Latin to be unified. I think unification comes in the fact that we have many gifts to bring. We each bring our unique culture and language and song and music and dance and dress to worship. I don't think that takes away from our univer-

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sality because we say the same words, essentially, but we dress it in a different way. That's what makes universality exciting.

There is something else that is unique about African- American ritualizing: it's the fact that we have many presiders. There is no sense that the priest is the only one running the show. There is a sense that the leadership role changes. For example, when some of our choir members sing a song they say, "The Lord gave me a song to sing today. I have a song in my heart." And then he or she gets up and begins to minister. While he or she is singing, she is the leader of the assembly, he is the presider.

It is the same when somebody proclaims the Word. One lady in particular in our parish really proclaims so well that you need not give a sermon after she has proclaimed the Word. And that's leadership. There's no sense among us that she's showing off. It's a sense that she is rooted in that Word. She has embodied the Word and given it to the people fresh and new, as if it's the first time it has ever been heard. For us there is no such thing as a lector reading — a lector proclaims. A lector claims the Word of God and then proclaims the Word of God. That's one of our unique ritual gifts as African-Americans.

We hope to embody, witness and testify more in our prayers of the faithful. We have a sense of coming forth and telling what the Lord has done for me today. It is a ritual of proclaiming and saying the Lord has really been good to me, and I'm going to share my faith and my struggle, and I come to you asking you to pray with me and to help me out in my struggle with your love, encouragement, support and prayers.

Karen House Catholic Worker [www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)

I commonly say that it's the three H's that make African- American liturgy unique: good homilies, good hymns, and good hospitality. You have to have good singing. Singing lifts up the name of Jesus and lifts up the soul and makes you feel revived. I don't feel revived if I come to a church that doesn't have good music or if I come to a church where I see sad faces. In a good liturgy you can lay your burdens down and just pick up the joy of the community and celebrate.

In preaching, the Word must be sent forth. The Word is important to our black community. It isn't just a conversational style. It isn't, "You know, I saw a movie the other day and it really reminded me..." We're not so concerned with what the preacher has to say, but with what does the Word of God say. First tell us what the Word is saying and then tell us what does that Word call us to do.

In the black community the preaching event is not only being preached at. It's supposed to evoke a process in which you preach your own sermon. That's what the call and response dynamic is. When you're preaching, people respond with "Amen!" or, "Tell the story, preacher!" or, "Break it on down!" People are preaching their own sermon. They're saying, "You're on the right track, amen to you!" "You're speaking to my heart this morning." "I'm a witness to what you're saying." It's not that you're preaching a sermon, but I'm with you, preaching along with you.

In this parish and in the black community in general many are poor and they come here needing to be revived and to feel the presence of God. It's not an obligation, I come to be nourished and fed by the Eucharist and the lives of each and every person celebrating. So a whole sense of community takes place that

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you see as soon as people come to church. There is hospitality and warmth. People are not going to let you go by without giving you big hug. You feel like you're with a big family. I feel the unity when I go to church. No one stands alone and no one is a stranger. You bring your hurts and your financial woes, or your personal depressions to church. It's a place where there is nothing to be ashamed of. You bring all that and you share it with people because they really care and want to know.

Many liturgists say the sign of peace should not be a conversation, just a passing of the peace of Christ. But that is interpreted differently among African-Americans. I want to give you my life by hugging you. I want to ask how you're doing, how's your husband...I heard your boy is sick. That's important because the peace of Christ says, "I'm concerned about your life and I need to know, and I want to know and give some kind of encouragement or prayer." That is what takes place in the African-American expression.

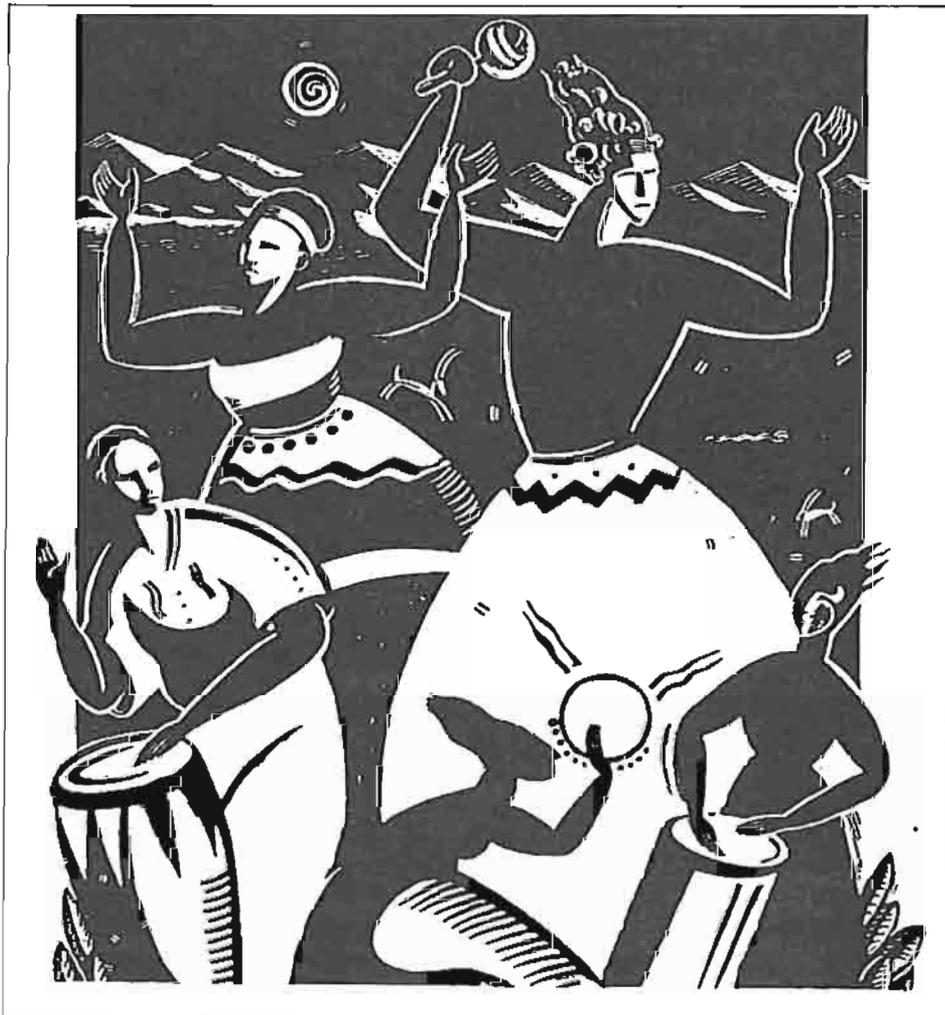
Another celebration that is being adapted into the African-American expression of Catholicism is Kwanzaa, which is usually celebrated December 26 through January 1. Kwanzaa is a uniquely African-

American celebration. It's taken from the rituals of African tribes and the customs of America as far as leadership and ownership values. It focuses on the whole community trying to promote unity, but it's also about trying to instill these virtues and values in our children, so that they may carry them on. Liturgy is supposed to express unity. We come together as the body of Christ. As black Catholics, we are united by the principles expressed in Kwanzaa and we are united further by the Catholic faith.

A real, pervasive feeling flows through the blood veins of African-American people that God is wonderful. God is part of our whole substance. I feel in the African-American culture that there is a sense that God's name is a household name. You hear your mother singing spirituals, you hear your mother say, "Lord, have mercy!" or, "God, give me strength!" or, "God don't like ugly, now!" You hear God's name constantly mentioned in the household.

An elder of the community once told me when I was a little boy, "Baby, when you don't have anything, God is your everything." There is a strong sense among African-Americans that God is our everything.

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# A CELEBRATION OF KWANZAA

by  
Hazel Harrison

The festival of Kwanzaa was created and shaped by Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga, a Professor of Black Studies at California State University of Los Angeles and Long Beach. This festival consists of a gathering of families and friends who share stories, music, food, and symbolic rather than expensive gifts to celebrate the blessings of the Creator and each other.

Kwanzaa, which means "First Fruits," is celebrated from December 26 through January 1 to coincide with the harvest celebration in Africa. Kwanzaa is not a religious celebration and is not intended to take the place of Christmas. It is a uniquely African-American ritual celebration of identity, purpose and direction.

Kwanzaa has its traditional symbols:

**MKEKA** — a straw mat placed on the floor or a low table. It is the foundation; all other items are placed on it.

**KINARA** — a candleholder for the seven candles which symbolize the Seven African Unity Principles, Nguzo Saba.

**KIKOMBE** — this cup symbolizes unity, Umoja, and is used to pour a libation in memory of the spirits of our ancestors who join us.

**MINHINDI** — these ears of corn represent our children, our seed, our future, our hope. They are placed near the kinara.

**ZAWADI** — gifts made by members of the family as tokens of love and friendship and concern for one another.

**MISHUMAA** — candles which are placed into the kinara

The richness of Kwanzaa is in each day celebrating one of the Nguzo Saba, the Seven African Unity Principles. By calling to mind these values we

challenge, reinforce and re-commit ourselves to living out these values in our daily lives. The Nguzo Saba are:

**UMOJA** — unity; to reflect on our African past and how we might become more unified spiritually, socially and mentally as a family, community, nation and race.

**KUJICHAGULIA** — self-determination; to define, name and create ourselves and a better world for ourselves instead of being spoken for by others.

**UJIMA** — collective work and responsibility; to build and maintain our community; to make the problems of our sisters and brothers our own and solve them together.

**UJAMAA** — cooperative economics; to build and maintain our own stores and other businesses and to share the profits earned from them. This is a good time for the whole family to participate in the family finances, deciding together how much to spend and on what. Trying to find a job for a family can also be a consciousness raiser.

**NIA** — purpose; to make our collective purpose the building of our families and communities in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

**KUUMBA** — creativity; to apply our creative talents, to leave our communities more beautiful than when we inherited them, to find ways to heal and nourish the African-American nation.

**IMANI** — faith; to believe with all our hearts in our God, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, our people, and the righteousness and victory in our struggles.

Kwanzaa is not just a week of celebration, but a time of reflection on our spiritual and social value system. We do not have the sense of Kwanzaa being mythical, or a mystique that is over and above us. KWANZAA IS US.

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Hazel Harrison is the director of the St. Charles Lwanga Center in St. Louis.

# The Wheel

by  
Wendell Berry

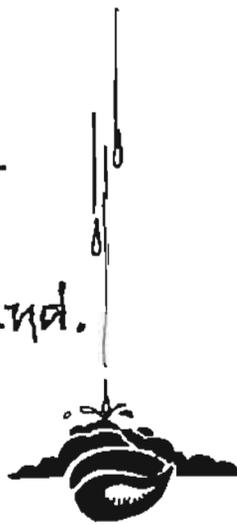
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first strokes of the fiddle bow  
nerves rise from their seats.  
The dance begins to shape itself  
in a crowd, as the couples join,  
couples join couples, their movement  
never lightening their feet.

They move in the ancient circle  
of the dance. The dance and the song  
call each other into being. Soon  
they are one—rapt in a single  
rapture, so that even the night  
has its clarity and time is the wheel  
that brings it round.

In this rapture the dead return.  
Sorrow is gone from them.  
They are light. They step  
into the steps of the living  
and turn with them in the dance  
in the sweet enclosure  
of the song, and timeless  
is the wheel that brings it round.



## of sacraments . . . ritual . . . liturgy and human experience

*Dorothy Day, excerpted from By Little By Little, ed. by Robert Ellsberg, Knopf, 1983.*

Sometimes our hearts are heavy with the tragedy of the world, the horrible news from Vietnam, Brazil, Biafra, the Israeli-Arab war. And here it is Advent and Christmas time again, and with it the juxtaposition of joy and sorrow, the blackness of nights, brightness of dawn. What saves us from despair is a phrase we read in The Life of Jesus of Daniel-Rops, 'getting on with the business of living.' What did the women do after the Crucifixion? The men were in the upper room mourning and praying, and the women, by their very nature, 'had to go on with the business of living.' They prepared the spices, purchased the linen clothes for the burial, kept the Sabbath, and hastened to the tomb on Sunday morning. Their very work gave them insights as to 'time,' and doubtless there was a hint of the peace and joy of the Resurrection to temper their grief.

(December 1969)

...All volunteers who come, priests and lay people, nuns and college students, have worked on that line and felt the satisfaction of manual labor, beginning to do without, themselves, to share with others, and a more intense desire to change the social order that leaves men hungry and homeless. The work is as basic as bread. To sit down several times a day together is community and growth in the knowledge of Christ. 'They knew Him in the breaking of bread.'

(December 1969)

How to lift the heart to God, our first beginning and last end, except to say with the soldier about to go into battle 'Lord, I'll have no time to think of Thee but do Thou think of me.' Of course, there is a grace at meals, a hasty grace, what with Sue trying to climb out of her high chair onto the table. Becky used to fold her hands and look holy at the age of eighteen months but now she does nothing. If you invite her participation, she says, 'I won't.' If you catch Sue in a quiet, unhungry mood, she will be docile and fold her hands. But rarely. She is usually hungry and when she starts to eat she starts to hum, which is thanks too.

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The Round Table

But there is that lull in the morning before the mailman comes when I can take out the missal and read the Epistle and Gospel for the day and the Collect, which is always pertinent.

What do I talk to myself about? When I am truly alone, with no babies around, as when I am alone in church, I pray. I say the rosary, I read my Psalms. And there is time. At home, kneeling by my bed or, in the bitter cold, lying in bed my prayers are brief, half conscious, and the planning, the considering, the figuring of ways of 'making ends meet' goes on. Until I catch myself and turn to God again.

'All these things shall be added unto you.' 'He knoweth that ye have need of these things.' St. Teresa of Avila says we should not trouble Our Lord with such petty trifles. We should ask great things of Him.

So I pray for Russia, for our own country, for our fellow men, our fellow workers, for the sick, the starving, the dying, the dead.

(January 1948)

We had hard baked potatoes for supper, and overspiced cabbage. I'm in favor of becoming a vegetarian only if the vegetables are cooked right. (What a hard job cooking is here! But the human warmth in the dining room covers up a multitude of sins.) Another food grievance: onions chopped up in a fruit salad, plus spices and herbs! A sacrilege to treat foods in this way. Food should be treated with respect, since Our Lord left Himself to us in the guise of food. His disciples knew Him in the breaking of bread.

(February 1949)

. . . One of the greatest evils of the day is the sense of futility. Young people say, 'What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we can only lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform these actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

(September 1957)

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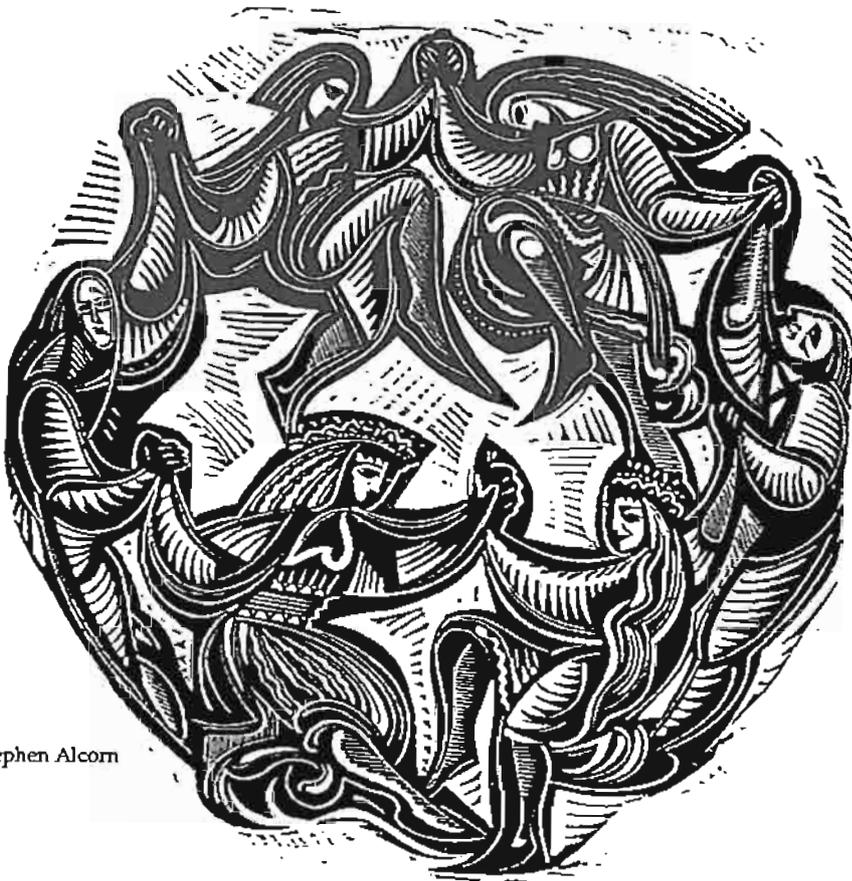
Photo by Bob Fitch, Courtesy of Marquette University Archives

... We do what we can, and the whole field of all the Works of Mercy is open to us. There is a saying, 'Do what you are doing.' If you are a student, study, prepare, in order to give to others, and keep alive in yourself the vision of a new social order. All work, whether building, increasing food production, running credit unions, working in factories which produce for true human needs, working the smallest of industries, the handicrafts all these things can come under the heading of the Works of Mercy, which are the opposite of the works of war.  
(February 1969)

... The grace of hope, this consciousness that there is in every person 'that which is of God,' comes and goes in a rhythm like that of the sea. The Spirit blows where it listeth, and we travel through deserts and much darkness and doubt. We can only make that act of faith, 'Lord, I believe, because I want to believe.' We must remember that faith, like love, is an act of the will, an act of preference. God speaks. He answers these cries in the darkness as He always did. He is incarnate today in the poor, in the bread we break together. We know Him and each other in the breaking of bread.  
(May 1978)

'The only way to have more time,' says Father Lacouture, 'is to sow time.' In other words, to throw it away. Just as one throws wheat into the ground to get more wheat. It must have seemed madness to throw that first wheat away but more wheat sprang up a hundredfold.

So each day, start out by saying, there is plenty of time. And so to discard time, to throw it to the winds, to disregard all the work there is to do, and go sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour, to divest oneself of these accursed occupations all in order to reap time, for those things which are necessary. Press day is a very good day for that.  
(February 1941) †



Stephen Alcom

the dance

---

wendell berry

i would have each couple turn,  
join and unjoin, be lost  
in the greater turning  
of other couples, woven  
in the circle of a dance,  
the song of long time flowing  
over them, so they may return,  
turn again in to themselves  
out of desire greater than their own,  
belonging to all, to each,  
to the dance, and to the song  
that moves them through the night.

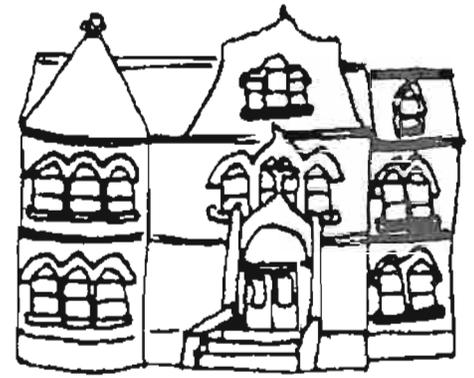
what is fidelity? to what  
does it hold? the point  
of departure, or the turning road  
that is departure and absence  
and the way home? what we are  
and what we were once

are far estranged. for those  
who would not change, time  
is infidelity. but we are married  
until death. by silence, so,  
i learn my song. i earn

my sunny fields by absence, once  
and to come. and i love you  
as i love the dance that brings you  
out of the multitude  
in which you come and go.  
love changes, and in change is true.

# FROM KAREN HOUSE

by  
Jim & Katrina Plato



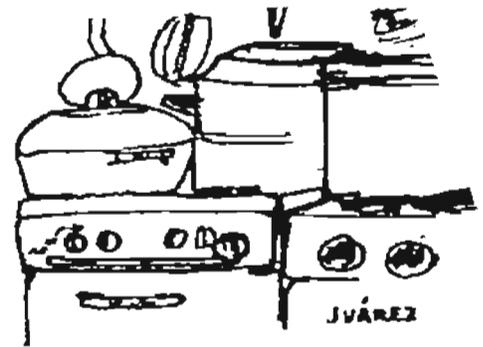
Since we are writing this article together, we decided to share some thoughts on married life in a Catholic Worker House. It's never dull, often humorous, ever challenging and a very satisfying way of living our commitment. One afternoon we discussed the pros and cons of living in the House. Teka reminded us of the subtle connections to the guests we would miss out on if we weren't here day to day, like wiping toilet seats. It's never dull eating supper with a dining room full of excited children, yelling over the din, "How's your day been?" It's often humorous being ribbed by the guests about being married. Several of the guests like to emphasize our marriage by loudly pronouncing a "Mr." or "Mrs." before our names. Guests joke with us that they ought to be able to bring their boyfriends to their rooms since we live together.

On a more serious note, several of the guests have made comments comparing our marriage with their experience of relationships. Many of the guests have come from verbally and physically abusive men or families. They note Jim's sensitive nature and our brotherly/sisterly affection. They want to know when we are going to have kids or why we don't already have some. When we were engaged, guests would ask Katrina if she was pregnant. Their questions provide opportunity for us to share about family planning and the importance of friendship, communication and commitment. We hope our marriage can be a healthy example of God's love and grace in a relationship for the guests who haven't seen experiences of this.

One of the most difficult challenges of being married in a Worker house is the constant temptation to allow the work and pace of the house to fill our days, therefore not leaving time to be alone together. In our society, work often replaces the time couples spend with each other. This tendency is even more tempting when a couple both live and work in the same place. If there's not a guest that needs to be taken somewhere or a cook doesn't show, then there's always a donation that needs to be picked up. We make a great team cooking together and on occasion we pick up a furniture donation together. In late October we went to pick up a substantial donation. Upon arriving at the apartment, we met the father and brother of the man who had lived there. He had recently died of lung cancer in his mid-thirties. His father asked several times if his

son's belongings would be put to good use. We assured him that we could use the chairs in our dining room and that the men who come to our door would be grateful for the shoes and shirts. The father asked about who stayed at Karen House and why. He was giving his son's belongings to "the poor" but as he became aware of who "the poor" were, he became defensive and angry that there were poor. He stressed from his working class background how important it was to contribute something worthwhile to society. He was a bit disturbed that Jim didn't have a "job" (which pays) and that we lived in the House. We left grateful for what he had given.

The simple graces that come from doing the work of the House is why we are each here. For now it is sad to imagine living away from this work and the chattering of the House. It is our natural and heartfelt response to remain here.



We can't end without mentioning Ann's visit in November. It was timely in light of the escalating violence in El Salvador. Her Round Table Talk reminded us clearly how the Cross is very much lived-out in some parts of the world today. The clarity that comes from these talks challenges us out of our complacency to risk making more radical choices. These talks also give us some intuition of how much it will cost us to live the Gospel. This can only be done within the support and nurturing of community for we live in a society that fosters avoidance of confrontation and pain whenever possible.

**Katrina and Jim Plato** are community members residing at Karen House in the nuptial bliss of newlyweds. They are expecting their first child.

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# FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

by  
Virginia Druhe

I write these words in November, the week after San Salvador's neighborhoods have been bombed by its own Air Force and six Jesuits and two women have been brutally assassinated. I was in El Salvador in October with a group of church people from St. Louis — but everything we knew then has been transformed by this past week, quite literally. Three of the neighborhoods we visited have been heavily bombed. Churches we visited are now destroyed or filled with hundreds of refugees. The lives of the people we met have been changed forever by this week. They are homeless or wounded, or have lost a loved one, received death threats, been killed, been beaten, gone into hiding.

Central America faces political and military crises of immense proportions. By the time you read these words in January or February, other unimaginable transformations will have occurred in Salvador and the rest of Central America. Nicaragua will have had its elections. Our fifth "covert" plan to overthrow General Noriega in Panama may well have been carried out. Increasing torture in Guatemala may have become dramatically visible in the U.S.

So what can one say now about Central America that will have any meaning in two months? We can be sure that in these two months several hundred civilian lives will be lost: seven hundred civilians have been killed in Nicaragua alone since April when Congress renewed "humanitarian" aid to the contra. We can know that these deaths are inflicted almost entirely by armed forces funded and trained by the U.S. government under a policy that is ironically named "low-intensity conflict." We can know that until U.S. policy changes the killing will continue.

The crisis in Salvador is immense, but we here in the U.S. face a moral and spiritual crisis of equal proportions. As much as I pray for the people of Salvador in these days, I pray more for my own people. The public rush of our government to resupply an Air Force that has spent its supply of 500 lb. bombs on its own population is a most stark revelation of who

we have become in our passivity. To the extent that we have, as a people and especially as a church, been shaken from passivity and comfort into active response, we are a people that has learned repentance, learned to love in word and deed.

Perhaps, too, I pray more for us because with awe I have recognized that, in a crucial way, it is our response that makes the suffering of Central Americans redemptive — or not. If we let it touch us and change us and move us to action, we give meaning to their suffering, make it a source of new life, participate in the creation of life from death.

I have seen our small promises to act and speak-out bring life into the eyes of mothers of the disappeared whose faces were filled with death and suffering. It seems absurd that the people of North America would be signs of redemption and resurrection for the people of Central America, yet I know that is the case. These dear people who have given so many of us priceless gifts of faith and hope and joy, who have shown us what it is to live and how to die, now wait with patience and love for us to return their gift of life.

We will either let this senseless and innocent suffering touch us — or not. We will either finally, as a people, admit that these events reveal our government's foreign policy routinely and deliberately makes use of torture, repression, and makes military targets of civilians — or we will not, and we will create our own judgement against ourselves. We will either allow ourselves to be shaken from our passivity and comfort into action for justice, or we will not.

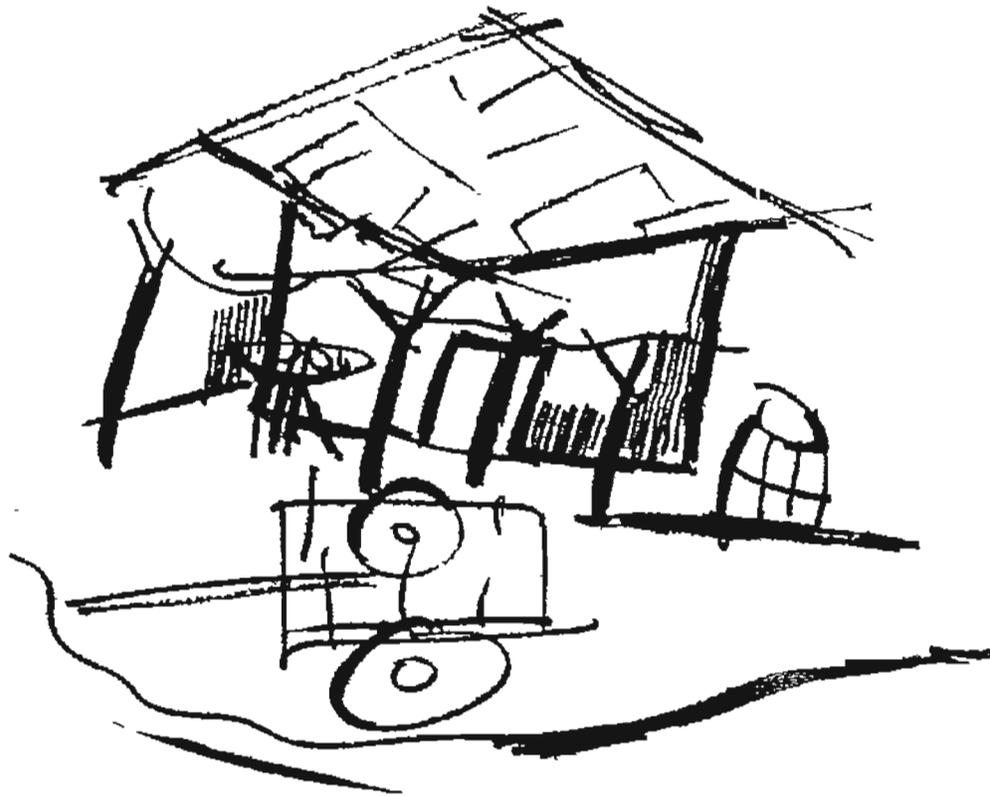
It is we, far more than the people of Central America, who need prayer. I can only pray that we will learn from the example they provide us at such a high cost and know that in their generosity, the churches of Central America pray with us and for us.

In October we had the privilege of meeting at the University of Central America with Jesuit Fr. John Cortina. He is a theologian and engineer who studied at St. Louis University in the 1950's. He is man of joy

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Virginia Druhe, Karen House community member, has been very busy with media work on Central American issues.

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and humor and great love of the poor. He is one of two surviving members of the Jesuit community at the university.

After a long conversation, I said to Fr. Cortina that I am always struck by the contrast between the poor of Central America who are so dignified and articulate and committed to each other in the struggle to create a just society, and the poor of the United States (in which I include the vast majority of us) who are so scattered and hopeless and convinced of our own powerlessness. I asked him what he thought was the basic conversion that the people he knew had experienced that empowered them, and that we still needed. He answered very simply, "I think that through the base communities of the church many people here have heard and accepted the basic call of the Gospel to live our lives for others."

I have thought often about those simple words. How accurately they diagnose our sickness. We are so often imprisoned in our sense of individual identity. We often do not even recognize the Gospel call to common life, the joy of living a life that has been given to others — to our community, family, our people. That is the life and joy that awaits us if we hear and

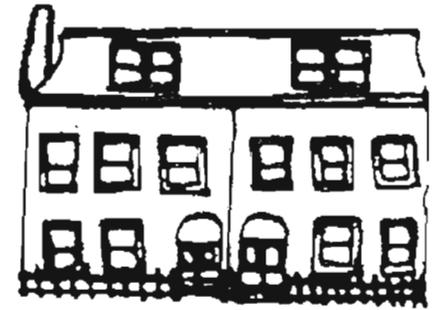
respond to the call of the Gospel, which the people of Central America incarnate for us in their crucifixion.

On that trip we also had the pleasure of meeting Bishop Alas of the northern diocese of Chalatenango. He spoke to us of conditions in that poor and war-torn area. He told us of the work of the diocese in health care, education and job training. He went on to say, "Of course, this is not the normal work of the church. We respond because of the urgency of need. It makes it very easy for us to incarnate the Word; we are not without joy." And indeed, there was a smile of great joy and peace on his face as he spoke. Then he added, "We are called subversives and are repressed for our commitment to our people. We are in a privileged place."

I think his words have meaning for us and the conversion we are called to in the church of the United States. I believe it can be said of us: Direct political action is not the normal work of the church. We respond because of the urgency of need. Because that makes it very easy for us to incarnate the Word, we will not be without joy. We may be called subversives and even be persecuted for our action. We will be in a privileged place.

# FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by  
Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



The Little House experienced a series of break-ins in November. First, one Friday when Fleetwood was visiting over at BJ's, we accidentally left the back kitchen door unlocked. Someone apparently jumped the fence, tried the door, and walked away with our microwave and a space heater that Elija had just brought from the apartment complex where he works. Virginia came home to hear someone leaving through the back door. We don't think the burglar went upstairs because Mary Ann's computer and Elijah's stereo were untouched. Nothing was trashed.

Late Saturday afternoon someone got into the back yard a second time, took Myrrah's bicycle from the yard, discovered we don't lock the basements, and took Karin's bicycle and Pat's circular saw. Then said person must have climbed the outside post of the back porch to the second floor where they handed Pat's bicycle down to a partner. All the house doors, including the second floor porch doors, were locked this time.

Fleetwood was called home from BJ's that evening. A few days later Pat reinforced the locks on the house and put new deadbolts on my kitchen door and the connecting door from Ellen's to his and Karin's apartment.

The next weekend, Virginia came home late on Friday night to find Ellen's door wide open. A burglar had taken a crowbar and opened the front door, taken her television, crowbarred open the new deadbolt to Karin and Pat's and taken their television, and attempted but failed to pry open Ellen's kitchen door. The burglar exited by a side window.

The house was not trashed in any way. Lights were not turned on. Probably Karin and Pat's computer and stereo were not seen. Ruby was home on the other side with Fleetwood who barked furiously and acted very upset. Ruby came down from her room on the third floor to see what was wrong and Fleetwood quieted. So perhaps he and Ruby scared the intruders off.

We called the police each time. The third time, the officer suggested that he would ostentatiously bring new boxes into the house, set a trap, and shoot whoever

broke in. He also said robberies go way up this time of year because folks need presents for Christmas. He held a curious combination of understanding and final solution.

Karin, Ellen, Pat and Mary Ann had a meeting about security. Pat served apple crunch and spiced tea which made us feel very secure. Perhaps, we suggested, someone could simply serve comfort foods to would-be thieves.

Pat had met with Butch, a neighborhood locksmith, and reported that while, if someone really wants to break in, nothing can stop them, there are deterrents. But Butch said the best deterrent is a one-inch deadbolt, and we saw what a crowbar had done to those. Window locks, screens down, heat lights, alarms, new doors, locked fence gates, and iron gates on the doors were the options. What would we choose, we wondered, if money were no object.



Miriam Theresa MacGillis, OP

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., a long time advocate of economic conversion planning is especially busy these days given the increased interest in the topic.

Well, we qualified, if money were an object, but we could afford what we needed, then what would we want. Finally we gratefully accepted Pat's offer to install and repair all window and door locks and to research the cost of lights and gates. Mary Ann would research cost of new doors, doors that would promote security and end drafts.

We put off fence repair because we don't want to deter anyone's escape — we are grateful we haven't met our unannounced guests. We considered a second dog. We wondered if gates or window bars would create the illusion that we have valuables inside; but we do have more valuables inside than most of our neighbors. That is no illusion. The bikes have been the worst loss so far. Our microwave was quickly replaced by another that came in donations, replaced so quickly that I'm reminded again how many things our whole society has, how rich we all are.

Over the twelve years the Worker has been in this neighborhood, Karen House has experienced maybe five

spates of small thievery, generally purse snatchings and car break-ins. The Little House has had none. Mostly, if anyone got in, there wasn't anything to take (this time too the robbers turned their noses up at our black-and-white tv and just took the color sets). And Fleetwood has probably been more of a deterrent than we credited him for.

But these recent events force us to think again why we live here. The neighborhood is old and poor and cannot support much crime. We want to be poor with the poor and now what little support there is for crime around here comes from our accumulations.

We want for ourselves what we want for the whole world, simple, safe, healthy living. We don't want crime to be part of anyone else's life experience; nor do we want it for ourselves. Karin said at the end of the meeting, with utter clarity, "It never occurred to me to move away. I only want to take sensible precautions. I want to live here." +

## FROM OUR MAILBAG



Dear Friends,

It was with sadness and anguish for the terrible things we are doing to the people of El Salvador that I participated in the demonstration at Hillel on Thursday, November 30 1989. I felt fortunate to be in St. Louis on a visit and to be able to demonstrate my solidarity with you. If it has not already been said, however, I feel compelled to make one comment concerning the location of the demonstration.

Granted that we were there to criticize the presence of a State Department representative, some of us and perhaps more of the passers-by may have misconstrued our presence as being condemnatory of Hillel. Many of you know, as do I, of the commitment and support that the staff of Hillel has give us over the years in our efforts to help the people of Central America; it has been the collection point on several occasions for the shipment of goods to Nicaragua; the very successful Ben Linder memorial meeting was held there; the Sanctuary meeting organized by Bobbi Silverblatt and friends (including Jean, Angie and Dan)

was held there; Mary Dutcher spoke to a large group at Hillel under the auspices of the Community Support Group; and other activities that I was not directly involved in. In sum, Hillel has been consistently helpful, effective and generous in initiating and cooperating with activities which support the people of Central America.

Regina and I are always inspired by the commitment and persistence of our friends in St. Louis. We keep in touch with you through the newsletters and magazines which you continue to send us. We bring you warm greetings from the groups and individuals here who join you in our continuing efforts to stop the murderous U.S. supported repression of the Salvadorean people.

Peace and Love,  
Dan Bolef  
Irwin, PA

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Dear Friends,

I receive The Round Table and feel this paper is very important. Please use this donation for The Round Table.

Thanks,  
Patty Haskins  
Oklahoma City, OK

Dear Friends in Christ

Just this past week an issue of The Round Table was loaned to me by someone who knew that I was reading the autobiography of Dorothy. That is coincidence enough, but that same week another close friend sent a letter on the back of a xerox copy of the above picture (cf. Fritz Eichenberg's Christ of the Bread/Soup Line) originally run in the Catholic Worker in the sixties.

Now it was more than coincidence and I felt that I should write your community and let you know that there are many people finally 'discovering' Dorothy and what she said years ago! Which means that the work that you do is being noticed and appreciated more and more by those outside of your physical contact.

I would like to keep current on your work and the ideas of Dorothy being put into practical use by receiving The Round Table. I will share the newsletter with the members of our Catholic Discussion Group and use it in our pilgrimage.

If you can send me The Round Table on a regular basis, I would be very grateful. In the warp and weave of this fabric of creation, I remain your brother,  
Jerry Robben 161517  
Pacific, MO 63069

Dear Friends,

Every time I receive The Round Table I remark 'What a good issue!' The summer '89 issue is wonderful! I started reading it this morning and read 'til my ride to Mass arrived. I send my commendation and thanks! Catholic Workers, especially those like ours who are fostering or doing civil disobedience, are important.

I rarely send money. What I send now is but a token). I would like to have one or two more copies to send to prisoners (one is at Sandstone. . . is Karl Kabat, OMI on your mailing list?)

I love Mark Schéu's Catholic Worker parody and would like to hear he and Pat sing it (so would the local community).

Peace,  
Lucille Evans  
Milwaukee, WI

Dear Friends,

Your last two issues of The Round Table were excellent. Congratulations on making us aware of the injustices around us. The issue on capital punishment was very helpful in making me finally see the evil of the death penalty. It was especially the article written by the mother of her murdered daughter that touched me. I have often wanted to write you and let you know how much I appreciate your publication. I read it from cover to cover. Please keep me on your mailing list. The enclosed check comes from a fund set up by our employees to be used for the needy and I have the privilege of dispensing the funds. We try to send you some as often as we can. God bless you in your good works.

Fraternally yours in the Healing Christ,  
John Grider, CFA  
St. Louis, MO



by Mark Scheu

Forgive me this note of despair. If I was a psalmist I would compose a lamentation, but I can only speak in more prosaic terms. Of late I have been sick at heart. I despair on account of the society in which we live, and on account of the rule under which we exist.

Our society is profoundly, spiritually ill. The signs are everywhere. We live as atomized individuals with the goal of maximization of self. Interpersonal relations have become competitive, not supportive. The family is not merely "dysfunctional," it is virtually nonfunctional — the average household has one and two-tenths children! Children are a liability because they are seen not as unique sources of support and delight, but as sources of consumption. The family is no longer value-forming. Such values, for what they are, are extracted from the media, the school, the psychiatrist. The hyperviolence of children's play I see on the streets develops into the real violence of adults' failure to relate.

The other cause for despair is the state, that is the political beast under whose sway we exist. We are citizens of a national security state, of an empire. Its foreign policy is driven by what Noam Chomsky terms the "fifth freedom" — the freedom to rob and exploit. The U.S. is actively engaged, though often through surrogate forces, in a war against the poor, in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola, the Philippines, and so on. The Gospel calls us to solidarity with the poor, but our nation is waging war against them. What irony for a "Christian" nation whose motto is "One nation, under God,...with liberty and justice for all"!

And so I despair because I fear it is impossible to avoid contamination by a morbid society or complicity in immoral national policies. As William Stringfellow expressed years ago, those who know Christ are "aliens in a strange land." We are exiles in Babylon.

Recently I recognized my despair in the fascination two seemingly unrelated films exercise over me — "Brazil" and "Barfly". I have realized that they both feature individuals trapped in oppressive, dehumanizing societies; one finds escape and solace in fantasy, the other in alcohol. Two rather pitiful characters, yet I respect both more than their contemporaries. Each in desperation has found a way — admittedly unhealthy

and self-destructive — to preserve some integrity, some dignity, some sense of self-determination in the face of such an overwhelming and corrupt reality. I sometimes despair in doing better than they. Can I find a path of meaningful resistance and then summon the courage to follow it?

I can only return to the Psalms:  
How long, O God? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day long? †



Mark Scheu, Karen House community member, has been taking to the trails lately with a new interest in hiking.

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## Deo Gratias

Thank you dear friends! This holiday season brought an outpouring of support for our work. Thanks to all who helped in any way; we can't do this work without you.

## Catholic Worker Speakers

No, not the kind for your stereo, but the kind that come to give talks to your group about the Catholic Worker Movement, the gospel vision of our founders Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, and about our work with the poor.

Community members also offer to speak on such related topics as Central America, pacifism and nonviolence, women in the church, and other topics.

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## Some things we need:

- **Plumbing Services** for our beautiful old converted convent. The plumbing here requires such frequent attention we could use help with it.
- **Lamps and Chests of Drawers**
- **Laying Linoleum and Tile:** Some of our floors are crying out for new covers. Help cut the noise pollution at Karen House.

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Margaret Boyer, Pat Coy, Virginia Druhe, Jeff Finnegan, Bill Miller, Tom Nelson, Katrina Plato, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

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# THE ROUND TABLE

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