

THE Round Table

1985

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

WITNESSING FOR PEACE

IN NICARAGUA

Inside:

On The Road To Limay

by Virginia Druhe

The Kidnapping & The Meaning of Nonviolence

by Mary Dutcher



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WHY THIS ISSUE?



Witness for Peace is a nonviolent, direct-action undertaking by which North Americans visit and live among the people of Nicaragua, thereby creating a peace-making U.S. presence in an area where our government has brought conflict and suffering. Mary Dutcher from Karen House and Virginia Druhe from Cass House have served as long-term members of the Witness for Peace team in Nicaragua, and continue to do so.

When I think of Witness for Peace, personal images come to mind: Virginia, Mary, prayer, and working together. Always among the images I see the faces of those from St. Louis who have travelled and been part of Witness for Peace.

We had not originally planned on this topic for our fall issue. But this more pressing and timely topic was chosen as we became increasingly aware of so many dear friends in the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community who were involved with Central America and its people. This bond of concern was dramatically heightened this August as Mary and Virginia, along with the Witness for Peace team, were abducted by the Contras on the San Juan River. After their release, Kathy Barton, Joy Cunningham, and Pete Rick from our communities traveled to Nicaragua to visit them and the people of Nicaragua.

During that time not one day passed that my thoughts and prayers were not with our travelers as they made their way to Nicaragua; or with Mary and Virginia as they waited to receive them. Above all, tied to those thoughts and prayers was a concern for a country, a situation, a people my friends would become part of.

I am reminded of the extended community that creates the Catholic Worker in St. Louis. We live in hospitality houses, in surrounding communities, and in other countries. Unable to live at a Worker house, a person once commented to me: "It is good to be connected with you and the others, as my heart is where you and the people you serve live and work together."

Virginia, Mary, and Witness for Peace offer the same for me. So if I may selfishly feel the loss of Virginia and Mary here in St. Louis, I recognize it is a gift to be bonded with them in Nicaragua.

With this issue we look at Witness for Peace and celebrate the extension of our community. We reprint a letter from Virginia in which she shares her reflections on a journey to San Juan de Limay. Mary Dutcher presents her thoughts on the roots of nonviolence which sprung from the experience of the Contra capture. Kathy and Joy relate Virginia's feelings about the capture through an interview they conducted on their visit. We offer poetry of Nicaragua seen through the eyes of a Witness for Peace member, Mike Hamer. Though not a St. Louisan, he discovered us through The Round Table while in Managua. Mary Ann McGivern in the Little House column anticipates the pathos that we suspect our readers will feel in response to these articles. We invite you to respond to her reflections. Sr. Carol Donahue in "Round Table Talk" shares with us the workings of the Community Land Trust, an important project in our north side neighborhood. As always, we have the house articles, this time enhanced with photos of the houses and their community members. A reminder of old friends with an introduction to new faces.

We offer all of this to you, our extended community, wherever you may

-Barb Prosser

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ON THE ROAD TO LIMAY...

by Virginia Druhe

Just back from twenty-four hours in Limay. I have to try to write now all that I love about Nicaragua that was touched on this trip.

Leaving behind the flatness and drabness of Managua, in an hour you're at Sebaco. That's where the countryside really starts for me. The junction of the road to Nuevo Segovia and the road to Matagalpa. Hitchhikers of all sizes with all sorts of bags and boxes, more or less picnicking on the road, waiting for rides.

Sebaco. Onion town. Great fields of onion. The whole town smells of onion. Every vehicle that stops is instantly surrounded by kids selling onions. Big, white, fresh, cheap. Onions everywhere. Or you can go into the big dark barn and buy all sorts of vegetables. Big, fresh, cheap. Squash and tomato and melon and oranges and new corn and carrots — a paradise of fresh food. Outside is a hawking, market, festival atmosphere. Inside it's quite subdued. Quiet, gentle farmers are cleaning their vegetables and almost reverently selling them, as if they realize the dignity of their work and of the gift they give us in it. A process they would never cheapen by haggling or overpricing.

So, laden with vegetables for friends in the north, one goes on. The mountains are on the horizon in front now, dramatic volcanoes still in sight behind. Past

vast, rich green rice fields with flocks of pure white, long-necked egrets. Past Trinidad. A nod at the big hospital, a reminder of all the war wounded there. A nod to Memo, once at Limay, now in charge of the command post at Trinidad, who is never in when I stop because he's always out in the field.

Memo is, for me, a lovely embodiment of Nicaragua, though he is more angular than most. Painfully thin from an ulcer, a funny limp that puts a foolishness, a Charlie Chaplain roll to his gait — that after all denies the angularity. Beak nose, small dark eyes, skin pulled tight over high cheek bones, small lips, trim mustache. Small features that quickly break into a wide, wide smile with flashing white teeth and eyes that quickly dance. It is the tautness and spareness that is a lie. An overlay forced on him by his work, the situation. The fullness of Memo is the laughing, his love of music, the hymns he would walk around singing in a surprisingly good voice. One night he almost sheepishly, and then with increasing confidence told of his passion for a book called The Black Christ of Latin America. In the midnight silence and the soft breeze and the big silent shadow of the church of Limay he kept me company during vigilance duty. Every time, passing Trinidad, I give a nod of love and respect to this gentle, gentle soldier from this violent pacifist.

Virginia Druhe, a founding member of Karen House nine years ago, is sorely missed by the entire St. Louis Catholic Worker Community. As you might guess, we especially miss her keen spiritual insights.

It is, I think, the vulnerability of Nicaragua that so opens my heart. And the tender, awesome courage.

Then the vista opens to the great tablelands around Esteli. Every mountain suddenly cut short. A lovely passage of great, broad mesas on all sides, which always remind me of Sedalia, Colorado and the silence and peace of the 30 days I spent there.

Then Esteli. It's funny to say it, but there's something cosmopolitan about this provincial capital in Nicaragua. It bustles and overflows. It is also the locus of the fierce, fighting spirit of the insurrection. City bombed by Somoza, thrice fought for, finally won. City of triumphant dedication to revolution. Home of the Barredas, something of fire and culture in the air. I could love Esteli, but I never stay long. A meal, a night, but I'm always in a hurry. I don't tarry on my way to Limay.

Sheer walls of granite mass — the kind of size and mass and scope that inevitably speak to the human heart of God.

On the road to Limay, one passes the crosses. Twenty-three in all. Blue. Each with a name. When the public bus passes everyone stops and remembers, pointing them out to their neighbor. Each one a name. Each one a death. So silent they stand there, in that wide open, always windy mountaintop. The crosses were placed there by sixty North American women. No one remembers that. It doesn't seem to matter. The crosses were placed in memory of those killed on the road by contra attacks in December and January of this year. Twenty-three deaths. Twenty-one civilians.

There is a funny peace there. It was done; it is remembered. The dead are buried and remembered. It is as it should be. They gave their lives. In spite of oneself there is a joy and pride. There

"It is, I think, the vulnerability of Nicaragua that so opens my heart. And the tender awesome courage."

So again one leaves behind the long trail of hitchhikers, taking what few one can. I always believe that here, at Esteli, is where the people become more beautiful. The eyes, the shy smiles. How to describe that look? The faces and manners that are so expressive of the beauty of this place for me. It is manners. A mannered people. Dignity and restraint and humility and proud service offered in every glance.

Just a few minutes then, and the turn onto El Pino, the gravel road, the last hour into Limay. Dotted with plank houses with tile roofs, cows on the road, chickens and kids here and there in the increasingly gorgeous landscape. On other trips everything, everything in sight was brown. But now it is the time of the rains so the trip in is a trip into an ever richer, deeper forest green, and into ever more massive, more breathtaking mountains.

were twenty-three ordinary people who found it in themselves to risk and finally give their lives for their people. One has to feel joy in that. Joy in the nine road construction workers who knew the risk they were running in constructing that white, new road to Limay. They ran the risk, accepted the cost, gave the full. Likewise, the man who ran the reforestation program in Limay. Or Freddy, a student and voluntary police, his body found three days later. Horribly tortured.

And so on. The telephone linemen, five of them, burned alive in their truck. Ouch! The joy so quickly turns to sharp pain. Further on the tractor drivers, the coffee picker, the technicians from the department of natural resources. Ouch, ouch. Here it is always harder still. Thank goodness it's a flat area in the road and one passes quickly. I've heard too many stories of the generosity of the

men killed here, have seen too much pain in the eyes of one man's widow. She is so young. Two children. No anger in her eyes, but some terrible question. That same awful question in the eyes of the high school English teacher as one day she suddenly began to tell me about Chombo, the 17 year old. They had been in a volunteer coffee brigade together. Chombo was on his way back into town. The day he was killed she and a friend had talked in the fields about how good he was and how much they loved him.

Another woman, with that same horrible question in her eyes, had been forced into a ditch that morning by the contra. With her two children. She told me of the young man who had half his face blown off but didn't die. Who screamed and screamed screams she cannot forget, but who didn't die and who the contra would not kill. It was Chombo. She does not know that. Thanks be to God, his friend does not know that. Only I know that because I have seen the picture of his body in the casket with half his face bandaged. I wonder, do my eyes now carry that question? I think so, because sometimes when I look at these hills, at these people — these people who are so beautiful, so brown, so noble on their horses — sometimes what I see is that question.

I had thought to go on. Twenty-four hours I had in Limay. I had thought I could tell it all, but I see now it would take a small book to write of it. The barrio nuevo is poor and proud, built by refugees from the contra attacks over the past two years. There one finds the new preschool and the new children's dining room. It is a young, alive place. There one finds Maxima and Tranquilino. There one finds Emilia. A returned contra leader has just given information. Emilia's 16 year old daughter is in a camp in Honduras. Raped repeatedly. Maxima and Tranquilino's two oldest sons, he says, are almost certainly dead. The youngest may be in Honduras, but they should hold no hope of seeing him again. Smiles and waves as we pass.

Quick landing in town. Quick hello to the folks in the highway department office. The road crew is now working on the road out the other side of town. Lack of repair parts is hampering the work some. Quick stop at the clinic, where a new annex is under construction, to say hello to the Mexican doctor and Brazilian



It is a happy thing, a joyous thing to think of the love to come, the love of God which awaits us, the fulfillment where we will know as we are known. when all our talents, energies, abilities will be utilized, and developed, when we will be truly loved.
Dorothy Day

nurses who work here in pure love of the people and the opportunity to serve them. We'll have dinner together. Settle the journalists who brought me up into the brand new motel, run by a true capitalist in spirit, who has little interest in the revolution but who finds he can live with it, and is visibly prospering.

Dinner, then an interview with the local representative of the Frente Sandinista. He is glad to help out with the journalists. They are glad to receive his help. I like him. He's a bit reserved and serious, but periodically breaks into a warm smile. He says the war has stolen his youth. He is 32 and looks 40. He gives me a piece of news I had not known. The battle near town on March 1st had started as an ambush on him and three other friends of mine. Stab. I await with dread the day it happens. When someone whose eyes and laugh and touch I have known is massacred. I simultaneously hold my

The measure of courage in carrying the cross is the measure of our love

ST. TERESA OF AVILA



breath, catch my breath, lose my breath, and go on. Stab. Jolt. Buried. Where does it go? The fear, the pain, the dread, the apprehension, the anger. The pain. The pure pain. Stab, jolt, buried. On guard. And then the pain rises up and oozes out in long, rolling wet sobs. A few times. I wonder sometimes what the pain is doing to me down in there where I'm not looking.

So the journalists are happy to go off to bed and I run out to see if I can catch some friends before 9 o'clock when every door closes and every light goes out and the whole town spontaneously and instantaneously goes to bed. I do. I pick up the key to the convent from Santos and have a long visit with Transito, Freddy's mom. They are celebrating the 6 month anniversary of his death — the day he was kidnapped, the day the body was found, the day of the burial. With a certain calm now she tells me how the study of the gospel of Mark that her base community is doing just now is a real comfort to her.

Some silent, dark hours in the empty house. Night in the patio. Hours of dawn.

Can I go on? I am worn out. I could not possibly relate all of the day. Rosa. Dear, dear Rosa, who is so much a

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companion, so close she is a sister. There is no space between us. Mother of four, my age. There is an intense combination of life and fear of death in her. No, I can't write it all. Let me go very quickly. Very, very quickly as she tells me how close the contra came to blowing up the stands at the rodeo last month when the town celebrated St. John the Baptist. That she was in the stands and 800 others and Julie. How her husband called her down and the contra had planted four claymore mines under the stands and they were connecting the wires when they were stopped by the police. The contra were going to blow up 800 laughing civilians. All of my friends there. Luis and Leonel and Santos and Despaciano and Petrona and Beatrice... They were all there, at the rodeo, in those stands, at the height of the festival.

Let me go very, very fast. Elsa had her baby and Leonel has a wonderful way with words and I brought some beautiful stone carvings from the artist's cooperative. One is really exquisite. A large abstract. Really quite arresting. We named it "Metamorphosis of a Revolutionary" after Padre Guadalupe Carney's autobiography. Guadalupe worked in Limay before he went back to Honduras and was murdered by the CIA. He wrote the biography there in Limay, in a little house that belongs to

Tanita's family. Tanita is well, though she looks tired.

"Metamorphosis of a Revolutionary."

I think I'm past it. I think I've gotten past the rodeo again. Where did it go? Stab. Panic. Buried. Metamorphosis of a revolutionary.

I am back in Managua, the journey unfinished. I am so in love with this place and these endangered people, without knowing where they are taking me. The work is unfinished, untitled. Something about love.

The metamorphosis of a revolutionary.



Virginia Druhe

WE ARE NOT TAX EXEMPT

All gifts to the Catholic Worker go to a common fund which is used to meet the daily expenses of our work.

Gifts to our work are not tax-deductible. As a community, we have never sought tax-exempt status since we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience which come at a personal sacrifice, without governmental approval, regulation or reward. We believe it would be a misuse of our limited resources of time and personnel (as well as a violation of our understanding of the meaning of community) to create the organizational structure required, and to maintain the paper-work necessary for obtaining tax-deductible status. Also, since much of what we do might be considered "political," in the sense that we strive to question, challenge and confront our present society and many of its structures and values, some would deem us technically ineligible for tax-deductible, charitable status.

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THE KIDNAPPING AND THE

MEANING OF NONVIOLENCE

by Mary Dutcher

The kidnapping by the contras revealed to me some spiritual truths. Perforce these insights are personal. Probably all fifty-two of us on the boat had their own unique experiences in those twenty-nine hours.

For me, the crisis point came before we ever left Managua, two days before we set foot on the boat. It was late on the night of August 4th when we were contacted by an Associated Press reporter, asking us for our reactions to Eden Pastora's threats that he had ordered his men to fire on us if we made the trip. The reality of the danger became intensely real for me, as did the reality of our responsibility (as Witness for Peace) not to do anything foolhardy or irresponsible out of some false sense of bravado.

So I was really feeling fear and a lack of confidence as Sharon and Ed (Witness for Peace coordinators in Managua) and I discussed how best to proceed. Early in the course of that conversation, Ed reiterated one of the principles which has always been foundational for Witness for Peace: that we must be willing to take the same risks for peace that people have always been willing to take for war. I suddenly knew the truth of that principle in a new and more profound way, and felt an immediate deep inner peace that did not leave me for the duration of the experience.

Because of this sense of peace, which was shared by virtually all members of the Witness for Peace delegation, I experienced the extraordinary event of the kidnapping as a series of ordinary, almost routine, little events. And that, too, strikes me as a profound spiritual truth: that the extraordinary is often ordinary — and, conversely, that the ordinary, could we but see, is many times shot through with the extraordinary. You've got to figure out a way to brush your teeth even when you're kidnapped out in the jungle; and, conversely, there was something extraordinarily beautiful in the gathering of friends of Witness for Peace at our house in Managua during the time of our being held, friends who came to do really ordinary things like cook or clean or shop or just sit in silent vigil.

Also, using very ordinary means of Christian nonviolence, these "extraordinary" contra monsters were revealed to us as rather ordinary, and indeed likeable, human men. Israel, twenty-four, one of our captors to whom I became especially close, must have lent his hand to keep me from falling at least 15 or 20 times on those steep, slippery, muddy trails. He sincerely believes he is fighting communism, and has lived the harsh life of the jungle for three years and been seriously wounded in the living out of that belief. Others of our captors did not strike me as wholesome or as sincere, but the truth of Israel — what a provocative phrase! — cannot be denied or evaded.

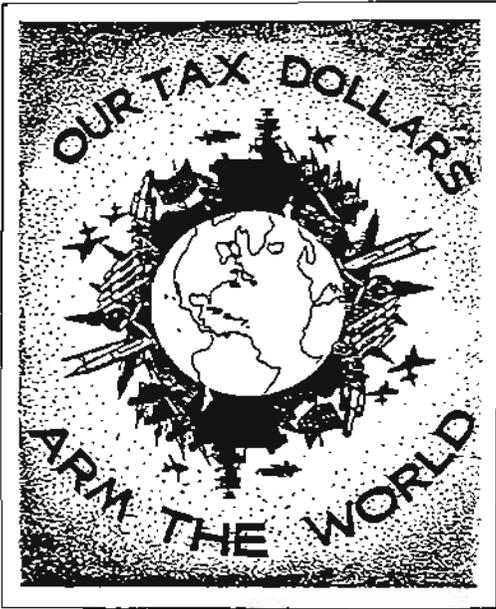
Mary Dutcher, absent from Karen House since joining Witness for Peace two years ago, is presently recuperating from hepatitis. She intends to return to Nicaragua in November.

Nor need it be. It is strong evidence for the validity of nonviolence, for there was certainly that of God in Israel. Then a pertinent, revealing question presents itself: if, instead of ordering our release, the order we were all waiting for during those twenty-nine hours had been the opposite, i.e. to shoot us, would Israel have followed that order? Probably — with great sorrow and in the belief that he was somehow fighting communism thereby. He wouldn't have been fighting communism very effectively, of course. But I suspect that most of the deaths that happen in human aggression are marked by inefficiency, wastefulness and lack of clarity. In turn, it causes me to wonder how many times I have dismissed people — written them off — because they were involved in a stupid or malevolent ideology. This dismissal may be a form of spiritually "killing" them. At least it effectively cuts off communication and so paves the way for escalation and violence.

as perpetrators — cogs in the vast systems of national security that prevail. I can remember clearly the moment when my and our deep inner peace was shattered.



Merrin Harper



It was at the time of our "mini-detention" by the Costa Rican civil guards about three hours after our release. We needed to hurry so that we could arrive at our destination that same day, darkness making the voyage dangerous or even impossible past a certain point. We had to decide whether to defy their order to wait for a U.S. official. Eventually, they allowed us to proceed. During that time of tension and indecision we were also treated to a Costa Rican radio broadcast reporting that we had had motor problems which accounted for our disappearance.

It has become almost hackneyed in some circles to liken the present situation in our country to that of World War II Germany, and indeed this experience has left me with a new appreciation of how it was that after the war so many German people said that they knew nothing of the existence of the concentration camps. Seeing the great misinformation systems swing into action after our release, leaving a trail of obfuscation and confusion in their wake, has helped me appreciate anew Jacques Maritain's conclusion that the great problem of modern times is that Power is considered more important than Truth. Truth is distorted to serve power.

Indeed, such ordinary people get caught up in the extraordinarily monstrous enterprise of modern war. They are caught as victims because civilians are so commonly targeted in modern warfare (you, dear reader, are only moments away from a possible nuclear holocaust). Terrorism has become the modern form of conventional warfare. And civilians are also involved

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Yet another foundational principle of nonviolence has been verified here: Speak Truth to Power. We must seek to serve Truth rather than Power in our lives, which is no easy feat on a day to day level. We are tempted, on the one hand, to grab power for ourselves or our cause in a thousand small ways; or, on the other hand, like the good Germans, to close our eyes to the evil that is being done by our acquiescence.

What is going on in Nicaragua — the terrorism that is being directed and financed by our government — is a spiritual and moral crisis for our country. For us who already know that and who are committed to nonviolence, what do we need to do, or perhaps more accurately, what more do we need to do? Certainly we need to pray and discern God's specific will for each one of us. If we are well grounded spiritually, whatever other steps we take will be that much more effective.

“What is going on in Nicaragua—
the terrorism that is being
directed and financed by our
government—is a spiritual and
moral crisis for our country.”

Miguel D'Escoto, the Maryknoll priest who is Nicaragua's Minister of Foreign Affairs, has already offered us a good example in his recent thirty-day fast and call for a Gospel Insurrection for Peace, in defense of Life and against Terrorism. Each one of us can find a way to participate in this ongoing effort. I know one friend who has begun attending daily Mass as his participation.

As a movement, however, I suspect we are called to examine our attitudes toward our opponents. Jesus and Gandhi call us to an attitude of loving respect. Gandhi points out that they are often our best critics. Jesus says to love them. Miguel D'Escoto once reminded a group of U.S.

citizens that their work for peace would bear no fruit if it were not based in love for their country.

Sometimes, when confronted by the evil of our country's nuclear weapons, our bloody and oppressive policies in Central America, our government's general arrogance and hardness of heart with regard to the poor the world over, I am strongly tempted to despair. I am even tempted to a perverse delight in the destruction that I know lies in wait if we do not turn from our sins. Perhaps this is a temptation for others as well. I suspect it is a reaction to the deep anger and pain we feel at the suffering and injustice. But it is not the attitude of Christ nor of nonviolence. Christ wept over the impending destruction of Jerusalem; he did not look forward to it with glee.

I would be filled with great sorrow if I heard that Israel had been killed. I wonder how I'll feel when I hear that President Reagan has died. I hope we will all achieve the largeness of heart demonstrated by Daniel Ortega, President of Nicaragua, when he sent President Reagan a card expressing hope for a speedy recovery after the cancer operation; that whatever the difficulties between governments, he wished him well personally.

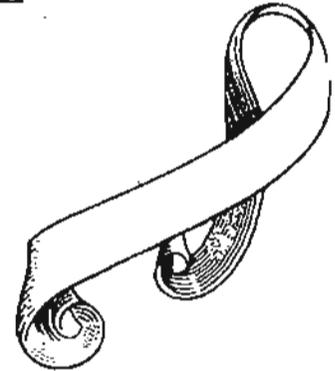
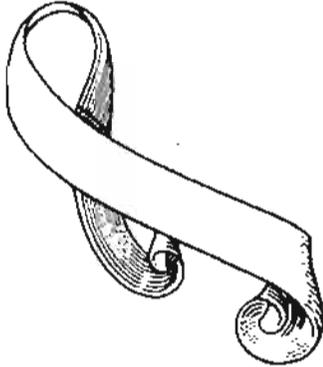
I have learned much about nonviolence from courageous, bleeding little Nicaragua, especially about how to suffer without hating. The U.S. and Nicaragua seem to share an especially intense spiritual destiny in these times, and I hope we U.S. peacemakers learn how to respond to the need to stop the continued suffering in Nicaragua at the earliest possible moment.



Mary Dutcher

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FROM MARY'S JOURNAL



(Freddy was riding with Sr. Nancy Donovan the day after Christmas when she was kidnapped. His brutally tortured body was found a few days later. Mary was at his wake and funeral.)

July 12

Today is your six month anniversary, Freddy; it was a shock to come upon it in the paper and remember so vividly your wake and funeral, Dr. Luis describing your tortured body, the awe-inspiring words of your mother about the need to forswear vengeance as they lowered your body into the ground, how there wasn't even a casket at your wake because so many people had been killed that month in Limay, how some people in our delegation slipped and called it Mylai...Virginia told me your mother is gradually less sad -- I'm sure, just from her words at your grave site, that she must have deep inner resources of grace to draw upon.

Today I'm aware more than ever that there are no short cuts: the only way is that of authentic love. I feel that my love is puny when I witness the sacrifices and unself-conscious generosity of so many Nicaraguans. I am very humbled and must, like St. Theresa, once again remind Jesus that I am totally helpless to do any good thing without His grace.



KAREN HOUSE



Back Row: Joe Angert, Mark Scheu, Lee Carter, Myrrah and Ellen Rehg,
Harriette Baggett
Front Row: Clare Bussjaeger, Teka Childress, Ann Manganaro, Pat Coy,
Delores Gerchman

LITTLE HOUSE

Lynn (B.J.) Stewart, Elijah Sutton, Mary Ann McGivern



CASS HOUSE

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Back Row: Zack Davisson, Tommy Askew, Tim Pekarek
Middle Row: Audrey Tankins, Emmet McAulife, Carol Donahue, C.PPS.
Front Row: Jeffrey Tankins, Mary Fitzgerald, Stanley Hackney

Missing:
Barb Prosser, Kathy Barton, Joy Cunningham



"Making Peace Where There Is War"

Virginia Druhe was interviewed for The Round Table by Kathy Barton and Joy Cunningham in Nicaragua on August 25th.

RT: In retrospect what do you think the positive effects of the kidnapping were?

V: For me one of the most powerful aspects of our time on the Rio San Juan was that we prayed for peace and exchanged words of friendship with representatives of all three armed forces that operated on the river. For me that was an experience of very concretely making peace where there is war. It reaffirmed and deepened my hope that we do know how to make peace and that even the most ordinary of us can make peace in this world.

On a more political level the events surrounding the kidnapping unmasked the truth of the contra war on the border beyond anything that we would have dared hope. Pastora's threat before we had ever left the shore revealed the arrogance and brutality of the ARDE leadership so clearly. The fact that we were held in Costa Rican territory for twenty-nine hours and no effort was made by the Costa Rican government to locate us or assure our safety again brought to light more fully than we had ever hoped the active support that Costa Rica offers to the Contra forces. The stunning lack of response of the Reagan Administration revealed its complete lack of concern for the effects of this war on civilian populations.

One of the primary goals of nonviolent action is to bring more clearly to light the root injustice of conflict. We had hoped that the presence of Christians praying for peace on that river would in a small way call world attention to the urgent need for demilitarization in the zone. Pastora's threat and the kidnapping

accomplished that work with an impact beyond our actions alone. Another very important positive aspect of the kidnapping was that those of us on the boat in a small way, and our friends and family and coworkers in a much larger way, now understand much more intimately the impact of this war in the hearts and daily lives of millions of Nicaraguans. I believe that our small experience can transform us into people of greater compassion and greater commitment to the struggle for justice and liberation in Nicaragua and Central America.

Finally, it was exciting to be in such a situation and realize that our nonviolence training had in fact been valid, had prepared us well and did help us significantly reduce the level of violence in the situation.



RT: What would be the negative effects of the kidnapping?

V: I was very surprised when I was finally safely back in Managua to find that rather than feeling relieved or grateful or even excited by the "success" of the action I felt only very empty and lonely and used for a period of several days. There was a similar experience of abandonment, and of course exhaustion for us as a community. I cannot really explain that negative impact though it reminds me of the post-partum blues that women experience after the

birth of a child. It was painful, and clearly a negative experience.

The other negative effect that I cannot help noticing is the intense multiplication of lies surrounding the kidnapping. I cannot judge the effect of that on either those lying or on we who are lied about, but I am certain that there is one and I do not dismiss it lightly.

RT: How do you think this incident will influence the attitudes of the people of the United States?

V: I believe the reporting of the kidnapping has increased U.S. public awareness of the reality of civilian suffering and death in Nicaragua, and highlights that as a very direct result of U.S. government support of contra forces. It is very sad that a twenty-nine hour kidnapping of forty North Americans is given such notice when a thirty-day fast of nine Nicaraguan mothers on behalf of their children kidnapped for over ten months is ignored in the U.S. press. The presence of nine Nicaraguan crew members and a six month old Nicaraguan baby, who were with us throughout the entire kidnapping, is also consistently ignored in the U.S. media. The racism of that kind of world view is overwhelming. I believe our kidnapping has made some North Americans a bit more sensitive to the sufferings of others. I also know that some of our families rose to new heights of political activity and public relation skills. Those changes of consciousness have great impact over time.

RT: Has the incident on the River affected the level of contra activity in the zone or in Nicaragua?

V: So far as I can tell the month of August has been one of the most difficult that the people of Nicaragua have suffered since I have been here. Several rural communities have been completely destroyed. Eight mothers were deliberately murdered by contra forces for going to visit their sons in military service. Dozens of communities live under the immediate threat of ambush or attack while combat goes on in surrounding hills. The recent increase in U.S. support for the contra has clearly strengthened and emboldened their attacks. At this point



the contra seem to still feel quite confident on ongoing U.S. support. Our kidnapping will only affect contra activity if it can motivate the people of the United States to demand a change in U.S. policy in Central America.

RT: What responsibility do you think we as Christians have in the United States to respond to the crisis in Central America?

V: I believe we must admit to ourselves that we are responsible for the actions of our government. We must accept that we are not powerless to act meaningfully in that context. We must believe that the spirit of God wants to and can use us to heal the pain of others. We must believe and act as though peace is a gift that God wants to and can give us, even, and perhaps most especially, in these situations of great pain. We must be willing to be instruments of peace, then we must be intelligent in planning how to make peace. We must be patient when the work is tedious or unglamorous. We must be free to be bold when the moment for that comes.



Graphics on these pages by Eileen Tidwell, a guest at Karen House.

...Nonviolent means of resistance to evil deserve much more study and consideration than they have thus far received...

— Paragraph 222 of U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral on War and Peace

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THE NEW JERUSALEM

by Mike Hamer

Jesus Benavides was a farmer who
loved to work with wood.
But he went to work for the phone company
and two months later was
murdered by contra
at "Loma Atravesada,"
the place where one crosses the mountains,
where the sun bakes
browns, wheatstraws, twisted garlands of green.
Sylvia,
seamstress and mother of eleven
planted the cross
where Jesus died, and
howled a cry of pain
carried by hot, Nicaraguan winds
across the Americas--
a wail that stretched hearts
and flooded eye sockets
leaving muddied tracks.

When I was young,
I went to the Lenten Stations of the Cross
with my father and mother on late winter Friday nights
after we had milked the cows
and had some supper.
I never dreamed that I would someday
be in a new Jerusalem
where the way of Jesus' death
would be re-enacted,
where I would know what
it feels like
at the foot of a cross.

Mike Hamer, from the Carolinas, recently returned from a six-month stint with Witness for Peace. He was seriously injured in a diving accident upon his return. Please pray for him.

R

Virginia's essay, "On The Road To Limay," has left me thinking for weeks. She's in love with Nicaragua and in love with the Nicaraguans and I'm jealous. I'm jealous of the beauty she sees, the human warmth she's surrounded by, the inexorable path her feet are set on.

Oh, I'm not seriously jealous — maybe not really even envious. I don't want to destroy her love or take it for myself. But juxtaposing her present life to mine, how nice it would be if Sauget, Illinois, smelled of onions instead of chemicals.

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

How nice if I knew so clearly who the enemy was and didn't bear such a continuous conscious burden of being the enemy myself. How nice if I had the help of a twenty-four hour path to travel that made it impossible for me to be lazy or distracted or deterred by fear of criticism or failure or looking foolish.

The grief of the deaths in Nicaragua is overwhelming. I don't mean to belittle the sorrow or the shock of experiencing each death. Fear for one's own life and for every other life must burden all who live there. No one seeks such a cross; and being forced to bear it is ugly, may bring out some ugliness. But in so far as Nicaraguans and their friends bear this cross together, they create the uncommon beauty Virginia sees and writes about and loves.

Here in the United States we do not grieve together over the hungry, the naked, the prisoners on death row. While a people with a common enemy would readily agree that killings by that enemy are evil, we have no national consensus on the nature of evil. Some bear the mental burden of knowing their taxes pay for war in Nicaragua or for abortion or for established sexism and racism — or for welfare cheats, communist professors, social security. Although I feel burdened by the suffering our foreign and domestic



policies generate, I feel somewhat dishonest, carrying an esoteric, intellectualized cross while there's beer in the refrigerator, an automobile parked outside, and airplane tickets to New York on the mantle. Two hours to fly a thousand miles. The hour I spend in car and subway to and from the airports I'll cover close to as many miles as Virginia does in twenty-four. Not so picturesque, but comfortable. Our comfort is one more barrier to our experience of grief.

I testified the other day before a Missouri legislative committee on homelessness, presenting a case study of one family I've known all the years I've been at the Worker. The mother, like Virginia's friend Rosa, is just my age. I listed the child abuse and condemned

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., who continues to walk her dogs through the neighborhood early each morning, recently had yet another play produced in a local theatrical contest.

K

buildings and illness they've been through; the jail, street, army, and group home where they live now; and what's become of some of the grandchildren. As I spoke, my voice trembled. I put it off to nervousness; but in fact I trembled because, as I heard myself clinically detail the suffering of one family, I knew I love them and grieve over their suffering. But their enemy, the filthy, rotten capitalist system, is the system I'm immersed in and benefit from every day of my life.

That's the bottom line, the reason Virginia's letter gets to me — because my work is here; modest work with a few families, at the typewriter, at a few corporate meetings, once in a while in front of General Dynamics — and I want to do this work. But in so far as I don't experience a national community of grief over wrongs we all see, I don't rejoice in our nation either. It is hard to set myself to work day after day, and Virginia writes as if her work, not easy in itself, propels her through the day. She's in love with her present life while I'm at a point where doggedness is required. Indeed, I dreamed about a sick old dog doggedly but faithfully dragging himself home. That dog is a part of me.

I suspect the dogged dog is in most of you readers as well — or I'd never have the nerve to write all this. We must encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, stand together to hold our ground (what little we have), resisting evil. We must suffer, bear up under the impasse of evil our society has reached, just as Witness for Peace suffers the impasse of war in Nicaragua.

I'm glad Virginia's suffering sparkles with rapture, even while I long for it myself. In lieu of rapture, those of us at home must settle for each other. There's hope in such a settlement.



"We urge much more vigorous and creative response to the needs of the developing countries . . . Meeting these needs is an essential element for a peaceful world."

—American Bishops' Peace Pastoral, 1983



THE LORD'S SUPPER 1951

Catholic Worker Sheep Ranch Farm has Advent Sets for sale. A set consists of three purple candles and one pink candle, 9 inches long by 1 1/2 inches in diameter; a wood base, a simple prayer leaflet, and cedar greens from our Sierra foothills. They cost \$23 postpaid; \$25 for orders sent east of the Mississippi. Write them at P.O. Box 53, Sheep Ranch, CA 95250; or call (209)728-2193.

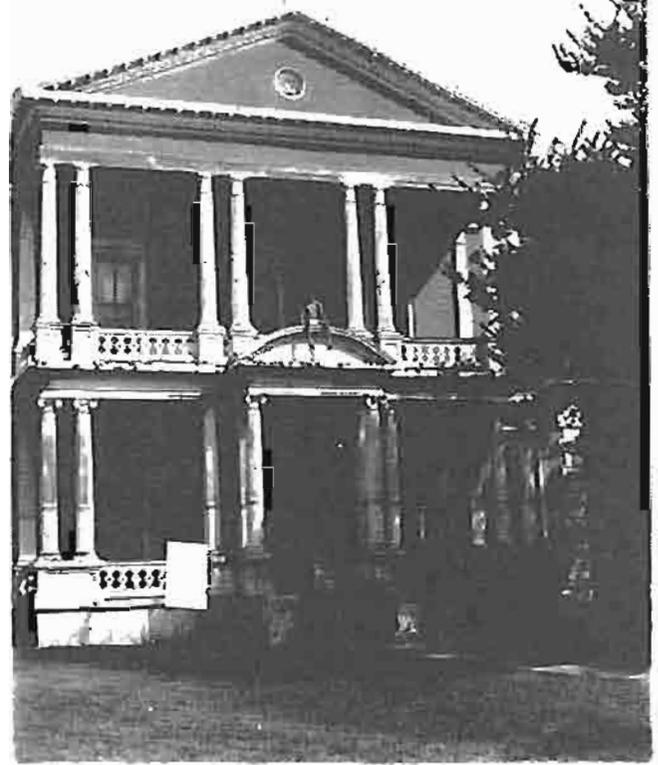
FROM CASS HOUSE

by Tim Petarek

After having Cass House closed in mid-July for cleaning and remodeling, the women's shelter reopened in the second week of September and the men's side and soup line on October first. Cass is a huge old house and home (at least on a temporary basis) for fifty to sixty folks. Our seven week summer hiatus was really more like the doldrums, as our live-in volunteer community spreads out pretty thin in this building. It felt like living in a hermitage. I've never wanted to live in a hermitage! I know that all of us were quite ready for some new faces on opening day.

And what an opening day! Tommy had the first house shift of the day, and within minutes of his arriving downstairs we had two families at the door. At the end of the first week we had at least twenty-five kids of all shapes and sizes in the house. Some mornings after breakfast the dining room fairly resembled Dresden. Even if it is a little crowded and noisy, it does feel like home again.

Arriving in time to help organize the mayhem of reopening were two women new to our live-in community. Joan French is a Saint Louis University student and part-time teacher who previously was rooted in Springfield, Missouri. Laraine Seabrook, a native New Yorker "slowing down in St. Louis," has been a friend to our community for quite a while. To both of them we are grateful and glad you are here.



Often the house seems drearier with Janet and Mike moved on to Chicago. They provided their share of a large area of daily colloquy that seems lost. By the letters that we have received it sounds like things are well with them. Mike is getting into the routine at the University of Chicago and Janet beginning a new job at a Montessori school.

If any of our readers happen to have any beds, box springs, or mattresses that are in decent condition, please bring them to us. We need donations to help us survive another St. Louis winter: blankets, pillows, canned goods and the like are always needed and appreciated. If you have any ideas on how you can help out down here, give us a call. To everyone who has pitched in lately, thanks, we love ya.



Tim Petarek forsook his native Joplin, Missouri for the good graces of life at Cass House. He recently participated in a Pledge of Resistance act of civil disobedience at Senator Danforth's office.

FROM KAREN HOUSE

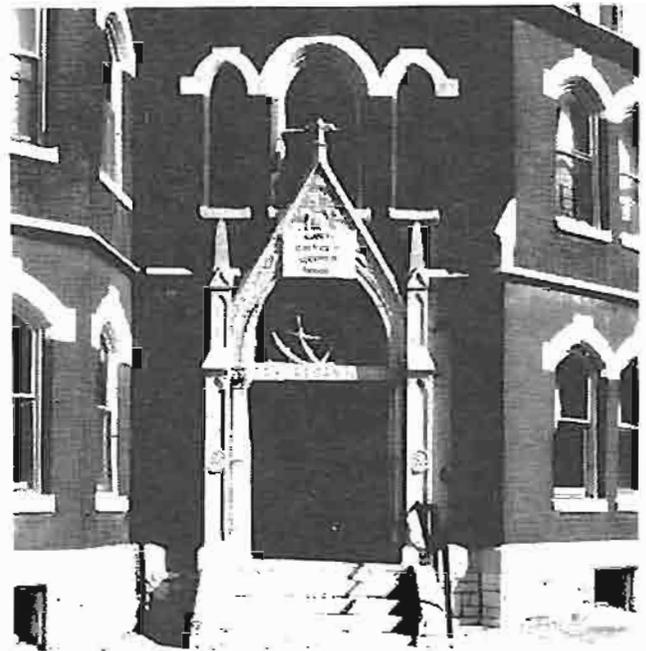
M

by Harriette Lane Baggett

Every Catholic Worker house must struggle with the tension between adhering to principles of personal responsibility and helping individuals in need. We at Karen House certainly know that struggle, and the ambivalence which characterizes it. The tension is not a simple bipolar one. There are pulls created by the need for a modicum of peace in the house on the one hand and, on the other, the rights of even the most outrageous knocker at the door to be treated with the respect due every human being. There are pulls within



our own community. We have our softies (who would unquestioningly yield to every demand) and our toughies. The toughies put a lot of stock in tough love, which emphasizes a more long range view. And we all play both roles at different times, veering from our natural bent. Our hope is that we balance each other out — and I think we do. I think so because we have survived eight years now. If the softies prevailed every time we would all suffer from the well known burn-out. If the toughies always called the shots Karen House would be little more than an overnight referral agency for the socially acceptable down on their luck. But the combination gives us a realistic idealism which enables us to survive as a place with a heart. Everyone knows you need a heart to survive.



So we are actually starting our ninth year as a house of hospitality. As Catholic Worker houses go we are now senior citizens, or at least upper middle aged. I think it is that balance in the community, between the softies and the toughies, that has enabled us to be open to the spirit of truth which is somewhere in the middle. Probably, if we must locate the spirit somewhere, it is in the respect and openness that the toughies have for the softies and vice versa. That respect is nothing other than love. We may differ vehemently on how to respond to a given situation in the life of a guest, but somehow in our common love of the guest and our love for each other our community is prevented from collapsing internally from our differences. This is nothing but the grace of God, for God is love.

Force is as pitiless to those who possess it as to those it victimizes: the second it crushes; the first it intoxicates.

—Simone Weil

Harriette Lane Baggett, Karen House Community member, has been busy with work on the Women's Ordination Conference recently held in St. Louis.

But even our internal dynamic could not keep us going by itself. We need the money, time and energy from our supporters to prevent our collapsing from the external pressures of bills, demands from the needy, and life in a very old building. Yet our far-flung supporters have never failed. They have never failed because they too are open to the spirit of truth which always seems to turn out to be love. The truth our supporters are caught by is the abandonment by society at large of those on its economic fringes. Women and children especially are suffering from the budget cuts of our "elected-by-a-land-slide" government, which ironically calls itself "pro-life." The truth our supporters are aware of is the injustice, the callousness of society at large.

M

Truth, justice, love — all are one. And we call that one God. The struggles of life in a Catholic Worker community may seem ambivalent when you are in the midst of them, but when you step back and think about them, they can add up to the only real clarity possible in this life. That clarity results from the recognition that we are limited creatures of God, whose grace allows us all working together to receive what we long for — God's own self. For God is present in the respect we have for each other and for our guests. God is present also in the trust our supporters have in us and that we have in them. Respect and trust are expressions of love and God is love.

So come celebrate with us if you can at mass on Tuesday nights at 9 o'clock. If you can't, be with us in spirit — in love — in God.

"Deliver us, Lord, from the fear of the enemy." That is one of the lines in the Psalms, and we are not asking God to deliver us from enemies, but from the fear of them. Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love them.

There is plenty to do, for each one of us, working in our own hearts, changing our own attitudes, in our own neighborhoods. If the Just man falls seven times daily, we each one of us fall more than that in thought, words, and deed. Prayer and fasting, taking up our own cross daily and following Him, doing penance, these are the hard words of the Gospel.

... Since there is no time with God, we are all one, all one body, Chinese, Russians, Vietnamese, and He has commanded us to love one another.

"A new commandment I give, that you love others As I have loved you," not to the defending of your life, but to the laying down of your life.

A hard saying.

"Love is indeed a harsh and dreadful thing" to ask of us, of each one of us, but it is the only answer.

Dorothy Day

"On Pilgrimage," January, 1967

WORLD PEACE PRAYER

LEAD ME FROM DEATH
to LIFE, from FALSEHOOD to TRUTH

LEAD ME FROM HATE
to LOVE, from WAR to PEACE

LEAD ME FROM DESPAIR
to HOPE, from FEAR to TRUST

Letters

THE PLEDGE OF RESISTANCE

If the United States invades, bombs, sends combat troops, or otherwise significantly escalates its intervention in Nicaragua or El Salvador, I pledge to join with others to engage in acts of nonviolent direct action at U.S. federal facilities, including U.S. federal buildings, military installations, congressional offices, offices of the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, and other appropriate places. I pledge to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience in order to prevent or halt the death and destruction which such military action would cause for the people of Central America.

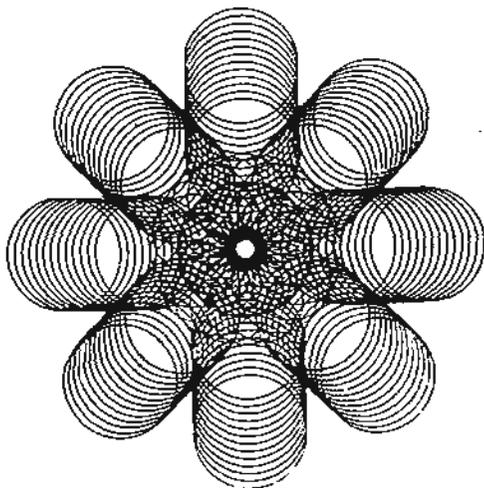
Name (Print) _____
Signature _____
Address _____
City/State _____ Zip _____
Tel _____ Do you need nonviolence training? _____

Send to St. Louis Pledge of Resistance,
438 N. Skinker St., St. Louis, MO 63130,
or call 725-2393.

THE PLEDGE OF WITNESS AND SUPPORT

If the United States invades, bombs, sends combat troops, or otherwise significantly escalates its intervention in Nicaragua or El Salvador, I pledge to join others in protesting that military action by nonviolently vigiling at U.S. federal facilities and other appropriate places. I also pledge to support those who engage in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience in order to prevent or halt further death and destruction in Central America.

Name (Print) _____
Signature _____
Address _____
City/State _____ Zip _____
Tel _____ Do you need nonviolence training? _____



Round

by Carol Donahue, C.PPS.

The Community Land Trust of St. Louis is a nonprofit organization chartered in the State of Missouri. We were formed after learning of plans for the redevelopment of our near North St. Louis neighborhood. Our goal is to prevent the displacement of low income families during the renewal process.

We were incorporated in order to provide access to land and decent housing for low income people; to develop an economic base in and for our local community; and to provide education, community service and support for development throughout the community.

We are a democratically structured corporation with an open membership. We provide access to housing at affordable rates and keep it affordable for future users. We are striving to provide long term security for those who occupy our units. Tenant representatives are members of the Land Trust Board of Directors.

Chuck Matthei of the Institute for Community Economics has been working with the Community Land Trust of St. Louis on the land trust concept. We plan to hold the land in perpetuity, leasing it to those who wish to use it, but we acquire buildings on the land with the intention of selling them, over a period of time, to the persons occupying them who wish to purchase them.

Presently, the sale of units while the Trust continues to own the land is not an option because the legality of the concept has not been resolved. Once the option for selling the units has been cleared, tenants who have met the appropriate criteria during their first year as renters will be offered the option to purchase their units. If a tenant fails to meet the low income standard or fails to responsibly deal with the property, they will be given a notice of termination of tenancy and new tenants will be found for the property.

RTT

Table Talk

Once a tenant passes the one year trial period and purchases the unit, they and their ancestors may live there as long as they choose. There is a 99 year lease granted and it is inheritable. If they leave, they may take out of the agreement financially only that which they have put into it. We also hope to work out a similar option agreement with "home owners" from the neighborhood who wish to become a part of the Community Land Trust.



"Our goal is to prevent the displacement of low income families..."

When a tenant purchases a unit, the Community Land Trust will have first option for repurchasing the housing. In order to insure that our purpose of being for low income persons is met, we want to be sure that someone who has benefitted from the program does not sell the property for a quick profit and then move on. When an individual wishes to sell a unit, they are insured that they will get back their initial investment, an adjustment for "sweat equity" and an allowance for inflation. However, any appreciation in the value of the property which is due to the improvement of the neighborhood in general is retained by the Land Trust.

Initially, we have purchased three buildings which have made five units available to persons wishing to remain in our neighborhood at rental prices which they are able to afford. The five families living in the units are composed of twenty-one individuals, sixteen of whom had previously lived at either Cass or Karen Houses.

Our goal for the year ahead is to purchase and make available five additional units of housing for very low and low income families. We have a waiting list of people wanting and needing Land Trust units, and we want to meet these immediate needs. To accomplish our purposes we will need the support and help of many of our neighbors and friends. If you are interested in getting involved or just want to learn more about the land trust concept, please call me at Cass House. We urge you to join us in working for justice in housing.



Carol Donahue, C.PPS., long-standing member of the Cass House Community, also works at St. Nicholas parish.

Dorothy Day



The Round Table Journal

LITURGY & DESSERT POTLUCK

5 Year Anniversary of Dorothy Day's Death

Tuesday, Nov. 26, 7:30pm

Karen House, 1840 Hogan

November 29th is the five year anniversary of Dorothy Day's death. We invite you to come help us give thanks and celebrate the life of our co-founder. We have moved our regular Tuesday night 9:00 liturgy at Karen House to 7:30 on November 26th. The liturgy and the desert pot luck that follows are the best way to give thanks for one who loved the liturgy and the small, good things of life. Come, help us celebrate!

Karen House Needs Refrigerator!

We at Karen House are slowly winning our war against the cockroaches in the food storage room (It seems that our pacifism does, after all, have some limits!). But we need another refrigerator so food can be properly stored. Can you help?

If you're moving, please save us

time and money by SENDING

US YOUR NEW ADDRESS!!!

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Although subscriptions are free, donations are gladly accepted to help us continue in this work. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO 63106. People working on this issue include: Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, Tom Rick, Patrick Coy, Mark Scheu, Joe Angert, and Zack Davisson.

THE ROUND TABLE

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