

THE Round Table

Summer
2016

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

Islam:

living faith under fire

Why This Issue?

We are back! It has been a while since our issue on “hope” came out, and we are so excited to share this next issue with you. It has been several months in the making, and we hope it will show! We are so thankful for our writers and all of their thoughtfulness and insight into the topic of this issue.

Discrimination against Muslims in America is certainly not new. Since 9/11 in particular, Muslim people and communities have been the target of countless hate crimes. Muslim people are often discriminated against in their workplaces and schools, are treated with a high level of skepticism, and are expected to account for the activities of violent extremists who claim Islam as their religion. The yoke falls heavier on Muslims in America.

So many non-Muslim Americans equate groups such as ISIL with Islam in general without recognizing that extremist, militant factions do not represent the religion as a whole. For Christians in particular, it should be noted that the Ku Klux Klan was and is made up primarily of people who identify as Christian. Yet, Christians as a whole are not equated with this group nor are they expected to prove their dissociation or disapproval of this group.

At this time in particular, we feel that it is important to elevate the voices of Muslim people who are speaking out against anti-Muslim rhetoric and Islamophobia in our country. The Presidential race has shown that these sentiments are not latent or hidden beneath the surface but rather are active, State-sanctioned, and form a rallying cry for so many who are uninformed and motivated by hate and fear. While Trump is an extreme example and a beacon of hate, the support that he has garnered from so many Americans is an indication of where we are as a country. In the articles that follow, a variety of writers will discuss their work to dispel myths about Islam and to highlight the beauty of the Muslim faith.

In Saba Fatima’s article, she discusses the problematic ways in which Islam is often interpreted through a Western lens. She addresses how the media and general public discuss Islam in terms of dichotomies such as “the good Muslim and the bad Muslim” that fail to capture the complexity of how Islam is expressed.

Ramah Kudaimi’s piece addresses the relationship between anti-Muslim sentiments today and US foreign policy. By linking US militarism directed at majority Muslim countries with the rise of Islamophobia, Ramah interprets anti-Muslim sentiments as State-backed and supported rather than simply being an issue of personal prejudice. While she addresses the hate espoused by Trump, she asks how we got this point where a Presidential candidate could benefit from being expressly anti-Muslim.

In Aminah Yossef’s article, you will find reflections on the experience of being a Muslim woman on a college campus. She discusses how hijab is not only a way of dress but a way of life and a reminder of her faith. While her experience with organizing Hijab Awareness Day helped increase awareness on her campus, she addresses how wearing hijab has been a reason for judgement at other points in her life.

Greg Fister interviewed Mustafa Abdullah, Lead Organizer with ACLU in St. Louis. Greg included Mustafa’s responses to a variety of questions regarding his experience with Islamophobia and the affect it has on Muslim people and communities. Mustafa also addresses how American political rhetoric and legislation continue to further marginalize Muslim communities in America.

After sitting down for an interview with Faizan Syed, Sean Ferguson writes about the Syrian refugee crisis. He discusses what the journey is really like for refugees, in addition to outlining the “Bring Them Here Campaign” that has sought to bring Syrian refugees to the STL area.

I would also encourage you to read “From Karen House” by Colleen Kelly. Colleen provides a personal reflection on her journey through some of the changes Karen House has been undergoing in the last several months. And last, Joe Kruse from the Minneapolis CW talks about the intersections of the Catholic Worker with the Black Lives Matter movement in his reflection, “A Peter-Predicted Transition”.

Unfortunately, we weren’t able to include an article from a Black Muslim. This reflects a hole in our issue, and points toward a valuable direction for further learning and relationship building. Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy this issue. Take time with the articles, sit with them, and see what you can learn from all our great writers!

Cover: Jenny Truax, Background image:
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The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106 or visit our website: www.karenhousecw.org. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Colleen Kelly, Sarah Nash, Greg Fister, Jason Ebinger, and Sean Ferguson. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Resisting a Look in the Mirror

by Saba Fatima

The Existential Crisis

Muslims exist both as people self-identified with faith, and as legitimate political agents within pluralist nation-states. Existing as a composite of both, we feel we are seen as a problem.

The Muslim ummah (nation) is enveloped in an existential crisis. In the age of globalization and interconnectivity, it is evident that Muslims do not share a common race, heritage, nationality, culture, dress, and more importantly, Muslims differ in their theological interpretations, political views, and loyalties. Yet, Muslims are discussed in homogenous terms.

There are many dynamics at play in this “Muslim Problem”: military action by the United States and its allies in Muslim majority countries in the name of liberty and democracy; terror at the hands of extremist groups entrenched in brutal practices in the name of furthering the ‘way of G-d’; the potential threat of jihadists targeting civilian populations within the United States and even more so, elsewhere around the world; the threat of anti-Muslim racist attitudes making all Muslims potential terrorist suspects and making Muslim-Americans into perpetual outsiders; sectarian conflicts; puppet governments influenced heavily by money... the list goes on. Here, I focus briefly on two different frameworks that are detrimental to examining the Muslim problem.

Good Muslim/Bad Muslim

In order to make sense of the current global political atmosphere, many people have tried to differentiate between good Muslims and the “bad guys”. Former President George W. Bush, in speeches after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks on September 11, 2001 differentiated between the peace-loving Muslims and terrorists. In his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush identified the people of Iran as friends, but differentiated them from the oppressive regime which rules that country. Liberal media coverage of Islam post-9/11 emphasizes the peaceful nature of true Islam differentiating it apart from the extremists, the fundamentalists, the jihadis, the people who hate freedom, and the ones who

hate the American way of life. Separating the good from the bad has been helpful in many respects, particularly in preventing a blind hatred of all Muslims as a monolithic community.

However, Mahmood Mamdani, in Good Muslim, Bad Muslim (2004), highlights the problematic trend within Western political discourse of categorizing peaceful Muslims separately from the fanatics. It leaves many Muslims in an awkward position since the caricatures of the “good” and the “bad” Muslim are ones constructed within an alien framework. The “good” Muslim in the American public’s imagination is one that is “moderate” in their beliefs and practices, where “moderate” is defined in opposition to religious. In contrast then, the “bad” Muslim becomes one who is a visibly practicing Muslim, one whose faith is apparent when they regularly take time out of their daily routine to pray, wear overtly “Islamic garb” dress, wear a hijab or sports a beard, turn down invitations to the local bar after work, or more significantly, someone who disagrees with our country’s foreign policy. And if any Muslim can be perceived as a potential terrorist, then “good” Muslims must prove their decency and their modernity by proving their secular identity.

What often ends up happening is that Muslims not only have to disassociate from the philosophy and tactics of terrorists, but we also must align ourselves to existing U.S. foreign policy because politics is framed within a false dichotomy of good/bad Muslims. We are often in fear that someone will view our thoughts and actions as corresponding to the “bad” Muslim. God forbid that we feel pain (or anger) at the desperate humanitarian plight of Muslims in Iraq or Afghanistan who were killed indiscriminately or humiliated daily in U.S. operated prison sites, or at the drone attacks that intensified in early 2009 in Pakistan, because this may cast doubt on our commitment to “liberal”, “moderate” values. This dichotomy affirms and sustains the flawed underlying assumption involved in the formation of the “bad” Muslim – i.e. that the “bad” Muslim is a composite of the political resistor and the religious Muslim.



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But I think that is very important that Americans look carefully at the ways that Muslims may bear similarity to our imagination of the 'bad.' It may reveal to us an image, an aspect of our American identity, that we are not used to seeing (Lugones 2003). The mere fact that there is a historical arc of antagonistic and strained relationships between the United States of America and Muslim majority countries makes it inevitable that the perception of the United States will be, at best tainted.

Many Muslims recognize that the groundwork for the Taliban was laid out in the early 1980s under President Reagan's support of, who he then termed 'freedom fighters,' in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Muslims saw the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians due to economic sanctions in the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton eras; and even more Iraqi deaths during the George W. Bush years. They remember Bill Clinton's veto against lifting the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims during their genocide in the war in former Yugoslavia, and the coverage of Israeli civilian and military deaths with little or no mention of the disproportionate amount of Israel's human-rights infractions upon Palestinians. Many Muslims can see the unrelenting military and economic support of Israel, even in the face of continual advancement of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories which are illegal under international law. Muslims can also see the implicit support that the United States offered to the Bahraini monarchy to crush their peaceful uprising during the Arab Spring, as the Bharani government executed demonstrators and imprisoned doctors for treating injured protestors; the openly warm support of the Saudi monarchy even as they bomb rebels in Yemen, as they deny human rights to minority Shia Muslims and to women, and propagate their ultra-conservative political strand of Wahabi Islam. Many Muslims remember the 30 years of support for President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, until it became clear that his government would be overthrown. The United States' support of these oppressive regimes with terrible human rights records in Muslim majority countries is seen as U.S. de facto support of Muslim oppression – contrast this with the American image of itself as the leader of the free world and the supporter of democracy.

The current Obama administration had a slight shift in political posture with a start on the normalization of diplomatic ties with Iran. It is also probable that a more hawkish US administration may have started full-fledged wars in Syria, Libya, and/or Iran. However, the shift in foreign policy is slight, at best. President Obama has a 'kill list.' He authorized the killing of three Americans in Yemen without a trial. Despite his promises, he has yet to close Guantanamo Bay, where at least nine prisoners have taken their lives. The President has conducted

more drone strikes within Pakistan in his first 100 days than President Bush ever did in his eight years in the White House. In the process he has not only condoned the murder of many innocent Pakistani civilians but has reinforced existing hatred toward the United States in the region. Early in his presidency, he gave a speech in Cairo on the relationship between the U.S. and the Muslim World, which became a blip rather than the turning point in this long-term diplomatic pattern. Not only was he unable to pressure Israel to freeze settlements but he also vetoed the UN Security Council resolution condemning settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory as illegal (the other 14 members of the Council voted for it, and it was co-sponsored by over 120 of the UN's 192 Member States). The United States also voted against the Palestinian request for recognition of statehood. The President refused to prosecute any Americans for torture carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. He did not visit a mosque for seven years of his presidency, and then when he did, his emphasis was only in our utility in the fight against terror.

Muslim responses to the conflicts differ not only due to affinity with the Muslim ummah (nation at-large), but also on a very human level. However, within the US today, any sympathy/empathy for the countless victims of American foreign policy runs the danger of being perceived as supporting some imagined caricature of the 'bad' Muslim.

In/Compatible Islam

Similar to the false dichotomy between the good Muslim and bad Muslim caricatures, there is also a polarizing distinction drawn between ideas of whether Islam is or isn't inherently compatible with the West. This discourse broadly divides the "Muslim Problem" within the following two loosely-defined models:

1) The first model claims that Muslims are indeed democratic, women's rights-friendly, liberal, and/or peace-loving, ordinary citizens; let us call this the compatibility model, since the central narratives conclude that Islam is indeed compatible with what the West purports to be its values. Some Islamic scholarship, which may be characterized as within the compatible model, has argued that in order for Muslims

to practice Islam devotedly and free of state coercion, we need a secular state. Others, that would fit within this model, argue that supplementing God's judgment for the states' interpretation of Islam is in itself un-Islamic, while some theorists have developed threads within Islamic theology that accentuate democratic and liberal values. Outside the theological framework, some intellectuals offer modern history as evidence of the existence of varying degrees of liberal Muslim-majority states.



2) The second model claims that Muslims, by virtue of their faith, are fundamentally at odds with the West; let us call this the incompatibility model. Some have employed this model within law enforcement training; most notably the FBI and the NYPD in their counter-terrorism training material which asserts that a practicing Muslim, by definition, is obligated to fight the United States. Others have argued that the incompatible nature of Islam is seeping into American culture, covertly destroying the American way of life (e.g. Congressman Peter King 2011). Within the Muslim world, when the incompatibility model is employed, it is not framed as a clash between democratic Western values and Islam, rather that the incompatibility lies in Western political history and contemporary policy, and how specific interpretations of Islam obligate Muslims to react to it.

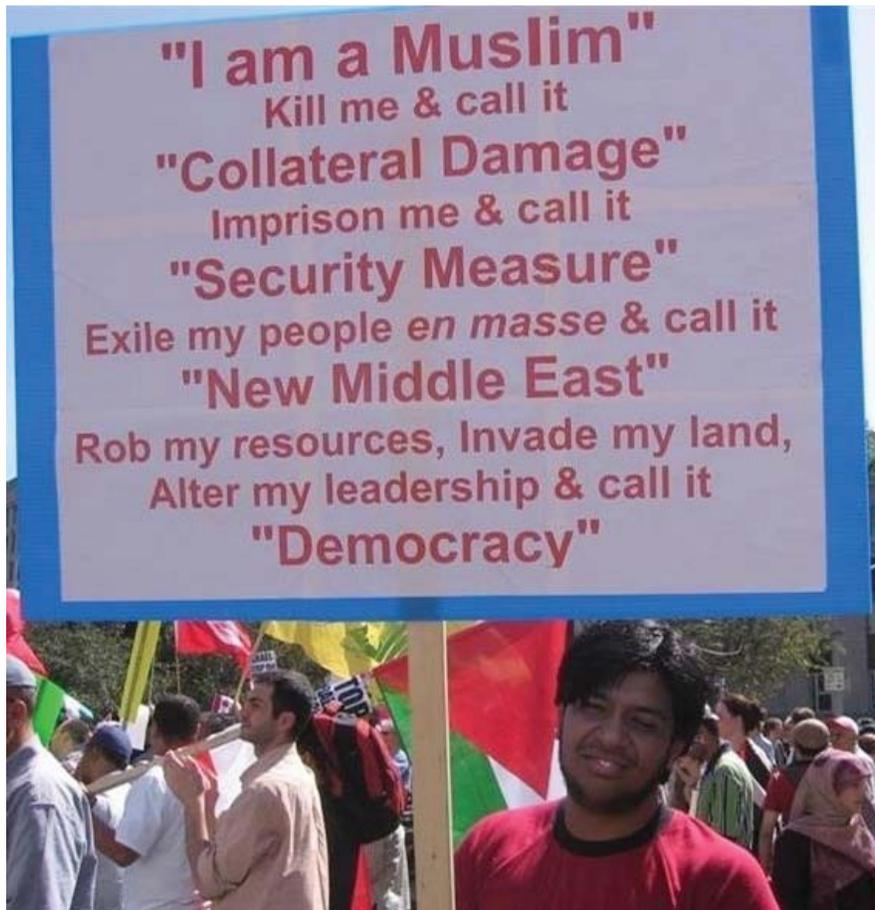
The attempts to frame Islam as either compatible or not with Western values, obscures any spaces for ambiguity of political thought. Furthermore, it allows judgment of other nation-states in an effort to delegitimize their sovereignty/authority, and place oneself in the role of the legitimate arbitrator, and the upholder of liberal, pluralistic, democratic values.

Looking in the Mirror

Both dichotomous frameworks - the one that labels individual Muslims as good/bad and the one that attempts to categorize Islam as in/compatible with supposed Western values - sustain flawed perceptions of ourselves as Americans. In fact, when Americans are faced with contradictory evidence of our behavior as a nation, either we are quick to deny it or we chalk it up to an aberration, an anomaly (Sheth 2009). Each instance of the violation of the rights of other peoples (a devastating invasion of Iraq on a false pretense, continued support of an apartheid state in Israel, drone attacks on Pakistan, Libya, Yemen, a decade long torture program, support of the Bahraini regime as they crushed their Arab Spring, the contin-

ued support of Saudi Arabia amidst human rights violations and propagation of extremism, etc.) remains an anomaly no matter how frequently those violations occur in our nation's history. Viewing them as aberrations in history, rather than as a sustained pattern of diplomatic behavior, allows us to deflect

any real change we can bring to our core. It allows us to constantly judge other political entities. Don't get me wrong though; there is plenty of judgement to be cast on Muslim regimes and on some Muslims' complacency in the face of extremism. And just as there are plenty Muslims fighting for fundamental human rights in grass-root movements around the world, there are many Americans also fighting for social justice causes. But considering the disproportionate power that our government holds in world politics, we, as Americans, have to bring more nuance to our outlook of not just others, but also nuance to our view of ourselves. In order to



<http://fakeplus.com/26765/i-am-a-muslim>

bring ourselves closer to the image Americans have in our heads of ourselves, we have to acknowledge unsavory aspects of who we are right now.



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If You See Something

by Ramah Kudaimi

As I exited the subway in Brooklyn recently, heading to my hotel dragging my suitcase, a man began following me repeatedly asking, “Are you Muslim?” I have been wearing a headscarf since I was 13, so I have encountered all kinds of interactions over the past 16 years from strangers regarding my Muslim identity, some good and many, many bad. This one though quickly turned scary as the man started shouting: “She is Muslim! Watch out for what she might have in her bag!” I was at once mortified (many of these encounters just bring undue attention) and terrified (I am in NYC and someone is screaming that I have a bomb in my bag) and hurriedly crossed the street to get away from him, walking several blocks in the opposite direction. I had to go just to get away.

The subject of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry has been at the forefront these past few months thanks to a presidential election that has featured various GOP candidates competing as to who can prove their hatred of Muslims more. While there has been a forceful response repudiating this open racism, there continues to be very little willingness to deal with how we got to this point that frontrunners for the highest political position in the United States would feel it was beneficial to be anti-Muslim. The analysis rarely goes beyond blaming the Republican Party for letting these sentiments fester. Little attention is paid to how the U.S. government itself perpetuates anti-Muslim hate in order to advance its agenda. It isn’t a coincidence that Islamophobia is on the rise in the United States at the same time the U.S. government has bombed at least seven Muslim majority countries in the past 15 years. It isn’t a coincidence the War on Terror (and its various tactics including FBI entrapment and surveillance) targets Muslims. It isn’t coincidence that Guantanamo Bay is a prison exclusively for Muslims. It isn’t coincidence that the government

pushes Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs that are designed to drive the discourse that Muslims are a constant national security threat.

This lack of structural analysis around the phenomenon of Islamophobia has pushed some Muslim American activists to tackle the issue in order to draw the connections between U.S. policies and the surge in anti-Muslim bigotry and hate crimes, something that many mainstream Muslim American organizations have shied away from.

Since the attacks of 9/11, there has been a more concerted effort by Muslim Americans to engage in advocacy efforts locally and nationally on a range of issues as Islam and Muslims became topics of discussion in mainstream media and policy circles. Muslim American institutions took to pushing the community to become more involved, arguing that it was important to politically engage in order to affect policy decisions that have a major impact on Muslim Americans. Organizations and individuals launched education efforts across the country, calling on Muslim Americans to reach out to their neighbors, co-workers, and classmates to show them the true face of Islam. Free copies of the Quran were donated to libraries and universities. Public service announcements, ads, petitions, and religious rulings were issued to make clear that terrorism was not Islamic and that Islam is a religion of peace. Muslims ran in local elections such as school boards and groups pushed Muslims to connect with their elected officials more frequently, organizing action days for Muslims to go and meet with their state and national officials.

As the U.S. invaded, occupied, and attacked countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, there was some pushback from Muslim American communities against these latest occurrences of US imperialism. But there was also a general sense that took over in many institutions that in order for Muslims to tackle the increasing national security focus on them, Muslim Americans



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#muslimsrally2closegitmo

had to fight against the narrative that Muslims are terrorists by proclaiming again and again that Islam is a religion of peace. As scholar Mahmud Mamdani noted: “President Bush moved to distinguish between ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims.’ From this point of view, ‘bad Muslims,’ were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that “good” Muslims were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support ‘us’ in a war against ‘them.’ But this could not hide the central message of such a discourse: unless proved to be a ‘good Muslim,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad.’ All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against ‘bad,’ Muslims.” Thus, one of the most frequent forms of political activism post 9/11 has been the condemnation. To meet the created litmus test for ‘good’ Muslims, Muslim American organizations must make clear that they do not approve of any “terrorist” act committed by a Muslim anywhere in the world, especially when that terrorist act targets Westerners and/or white people.

Islamophobia was reduced to a misunderstanding about what Islam is by non-Muslims (thus the overwhelming focus on Muslims needing to reach out to other Americans to prove Islam is a religion of peace and constantly condemn terrorist acts). This took the focus off a purposeful attempt by the U.S. government and media to ramp up support for its wars against Muslim countries. The reality that there is an Islamophobia industry profiting from pushing an anti-Muslim narrative as has been written about in reports such as *Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America* was also largely ignored.

In this climate of mainstream Muslim American organizations feeling the pressure to protect the community and continued U.S. policies promoting Islamophobia, new efforts are emerging to change the discourse and push for a more structural analysis. The Muslim American Women’s Policy Forum (MAWPF) is a collective of Muslim women of color and allies who organize due to the legacies of colonialism at the intersection of state violence, anti-Muslim racism, and gender-based violence with a focus on the DC area. Since 2014, members of MAWPF have organized a call for Muslim Americans

to boycott the White House Iftar, an annual dinner during Ramadan meant to showcase the importance of Muslims in the American story while whitewashing how the U.S. targets Muslims specifically; have pushed to get non-black Muslim Americans to engage with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and struggle against anti-black racism within the Muslim American community; have exposed the Muslim Leadership Initiative, a program meant to change the perception of Israel in a community that tends to empathize with the Palestinian struggle for justice; have engaged in efforts to jumpstart a #MuslimsRally2CloseGuantanamo campaign; and have countered CVE by doing political education events linking these efforts to programs such as COINTELPRO.

What MAWPF seeks to do is widen the scope of discussion around the roots of Islamophobia and expose the central role of the State. Anger at Donald Trump calling for a ban on Muslims is understandable. But the shock that Trump would say something like this also revealed how little attention is being paid to how the United States is already targeting Muslims. In a Washington Post Op-ed, Diala Shammah highlighted four ways the U.S. was already banning Muslims including denying Muslim immigrant petitions and the no-fly list. That Trump’s declarations of what he intends to do gets people more riled up than the everyday policies of the U.S. government is worrisome because it is a clear sign of how acceptable it has become to deprive Muslims of their rights in the name of security and how little connection is being drawn between what Trump is able to propose and how it is facilitated by the State.

Earlier this year President Obama made his first visit to a mosque since coming to office. The visit was hailed by many as Obama rebutted anti-Muslim rhetoric and highlighted the many contributions of Muslim Americans to the United States. Members of MAWPF took to Twitter with the hashtag #TooLateObama to push a different narrative: Obama cannot talk about Islamophobia without acknowledging how his own policies have not only relied on anti-Muslim bigotry but also pushed an anti-Muslim discourse that Muslims are collectively responsible for extremist actions. MAWPF activists highlighted drone strikes on Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia that have killed an unknown number of civilians; the broken promise to close Guantanamo; continued support of Israel’s oppression of Palestinians; and federal programs to counter extremism that trample the civil and human rights of Muslims. As someone posted on Twitter: “Telling ‘thank you’ to Muslim-Americans isn’t just enough. We still are targets of State violence.”

The man who harassed me in Brooklyn could very well have a personal dislike towards Muslims. Or he could be doing exactly what the State has demanded when “If you see something, say something.” Messages are plastered all over public transportation in various U.S. cities. If we want to truly end Islamophobia, Muslims and allies need to first identify the root cause of the problem and that means bringing to the forefront how the State benefits from and perpetuates anti-Muslim racism.



Hijab Awareness Day

by Aminah Yossef

“Judge me by what is in my head, not by what is on it.” For many years, women all around the world and from many different religions have partaken in exemplifying this quote on World Hijab Day, February 1st each year, whether they wear the Hijab or not. It is a day to recognize and spread awareness of the meaning behind the Hijab as well as to honor those who have the strength to do so confidently in today’s society. On February 2, 2016, Maryville University’s Muslim Student Association hosted our second annual Hijab Awareness Day to spread knowledge about the Hijab; the practice of a woman covering the hair and body while portraying modesty and preserving dignity.

That Tuesday morning I arrived on campus about an hour after our program had begun. It had been going on for sixty minutes and as I approached Maryville’s welcoming campus, I was already witnessing so many beautiful young women walk around campus wearing Hijabs that they picked up from our display booth. I began smiling from ear to ear as I watched these ladies of various religious beliefs and values walk boldly to their classes representing the beauty of the Hijab. As I approached our booth, my smile grew wider as I saw members of MUMSA assisting even more students by dressing them in the scarf as well as educating them on its symbols and meanings. I joined them and proceeded to help spread the wonderful messages of Islam and answer any questions the lovely students had for us.

Our event had two parts throughout the day. Our first

event took place from mid-morning until noon in our dining hall, where we set up a booth with many colorful and unique scarves. The ladies were able to choose from these and keep them as a gift. Our MUMSA members taught the students how to wear the Hijab and the students had the opportunity to take photos once they had the scarf on. Anyone who walked passed our booth, whether they wore the Hijab or not, all had the chance to sign a paper with their name that stated,

“I, _____, support Hijab Awareness Day”.

By that afternoon, we had around seventy-five students and faculty participating in this educational event on campus. Once these ladies wore the Hijab, they had the chance to keep

it on in order to gain insight and step inside the shoes of a Muslim ‘Hijabi’ for the day. The support our club had that day was immense. It was amazing to see the encouragement we got from many faculty members across campus.

Later that evening, we hosted the second part of our ‘Hijab Awareness Day’ event. Around 7:00 P.M., we had students and faculty from all over campus come

and join in on our reflection time. This gave Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, the chance to share and listen to the experiences everyone had during the day. I, as well as other members of MUMSA, shared our stories of how the Hijab has made us who we are, as people, and has affected our lives as Muslims in today’s society. We then opened the floor to our guests as they asked intriguing questions and took the time to enlighten us on their wonderful perspectives on how the Hijab made them feel. Many



**BEFORE YOU
JUDGE, COVER
UP FOR A DAY.**

**#WORLDHIJABDAY
FEBRUARY 1ST**



Aminah Yossef, a second-year speech pathology major at Maryville University, is active on campus with the Muslim Student Association, Latino Student Alliance, the Multicultural scholars program, and many others. She shares that, “I come from a very diverse background and one of my goals is to be able to share that with the people I encounter as well as learning about the unique lives of others.”

ladies discussed how they felt at peace with themselves and became more empowered as they walked confidently around school and work for the day. They shared that many people across campus showed them a higher level of respect as they went about their normal life. Hearing those words brought sincerity and comfort into the room as we all joined in to express the beauty that the Hijab holds. Although we exchanged positive experiences throughout the reflection, brave women also spoke out on how they felt belittled by others because of their appearance with the scarf. One student explained how she felt people constantly staring at her and how many approached her with ignorant remarks that upset her. After she explained to us how she felt, she began to go in-depth on how she was able to catch a glimpse of what women who wear Hijab everyday must go through. This created a wave of questions regarding the reality of how it feels to be Muslim or to be dressed a certain way.

This is when I decided to share my experience as a 'Hijabi' living in America. I have been wearing the hijab for eight years, going on nine, and it has truly impacted my life significantly. Hijab isn't just a way of dressing for me. It is a way of life. The Hijab is a reminder of the magnificence of my religion. It helps me to center--the actions I make throughout the day--on my beliefs, and values as a Muslim. Although there has been some difficulty through the years, I have gained more positive experiences than negative. Thankfully, I have been able to accomplish things in my life such as finding jobs and going to university without people discriminating against me. There are moments when I am out in public shopping, commuting to work or simply doing the "normal" things everyone else around me is doing, yet I feel the stares and awkward encounters people give me. It is discomfoting to know that others around me make their own judgments about who I am, before fully understanding me as a person. Recently with the presidential election coming up, there has been a rise in Islamic awareness which has been depicted negatively by certain candidates as well as by many Americans who know very little about Islam. On the other hand, it has also been portrayed positively by many people

who are speaking up against the hatred, through social media. When I was younger, I didn't quite know how to react when the public acted this way towards me. However, as I have gotten older I have also gotten stronger as a young woman, and now I walk with dignity and disregard the negativity that I may have thrown at me.

As a student at Maryville University, I always feel accepted and welcomed. Our campus does a wonderful job with the inclusion of other students from different backgrounds and cultures. Since my freshman year, when MUMSA picked back up, we have had tremendous support from our fellow staff and students to get it up and running. It is truly enlightening to know we have our university to help build-up our student organization. Because our campus hasn't always been the most diverse, it makes our organization, as well as many others, very eager to share aspects of our lives with everyone else. In the beginning we faced some challenges regarding the number of attendees we would have at our meetings and events. This year, however, has gone increasingly well. Throughout this year, members on our campus have learned more about who we are, and have engaged in our activities.

Being a Muslim woman living in America has me gradually facing challenges that I work hard to overcome. It is important for me to stay focused on who I am and to share my values and experiences with others, in order to give them a glimpse of what my life is like. Hosting Hijab Awareness Day on Maryville's campus was one of the most inspirational events we have ever hosted. It brought together people of many different cultures

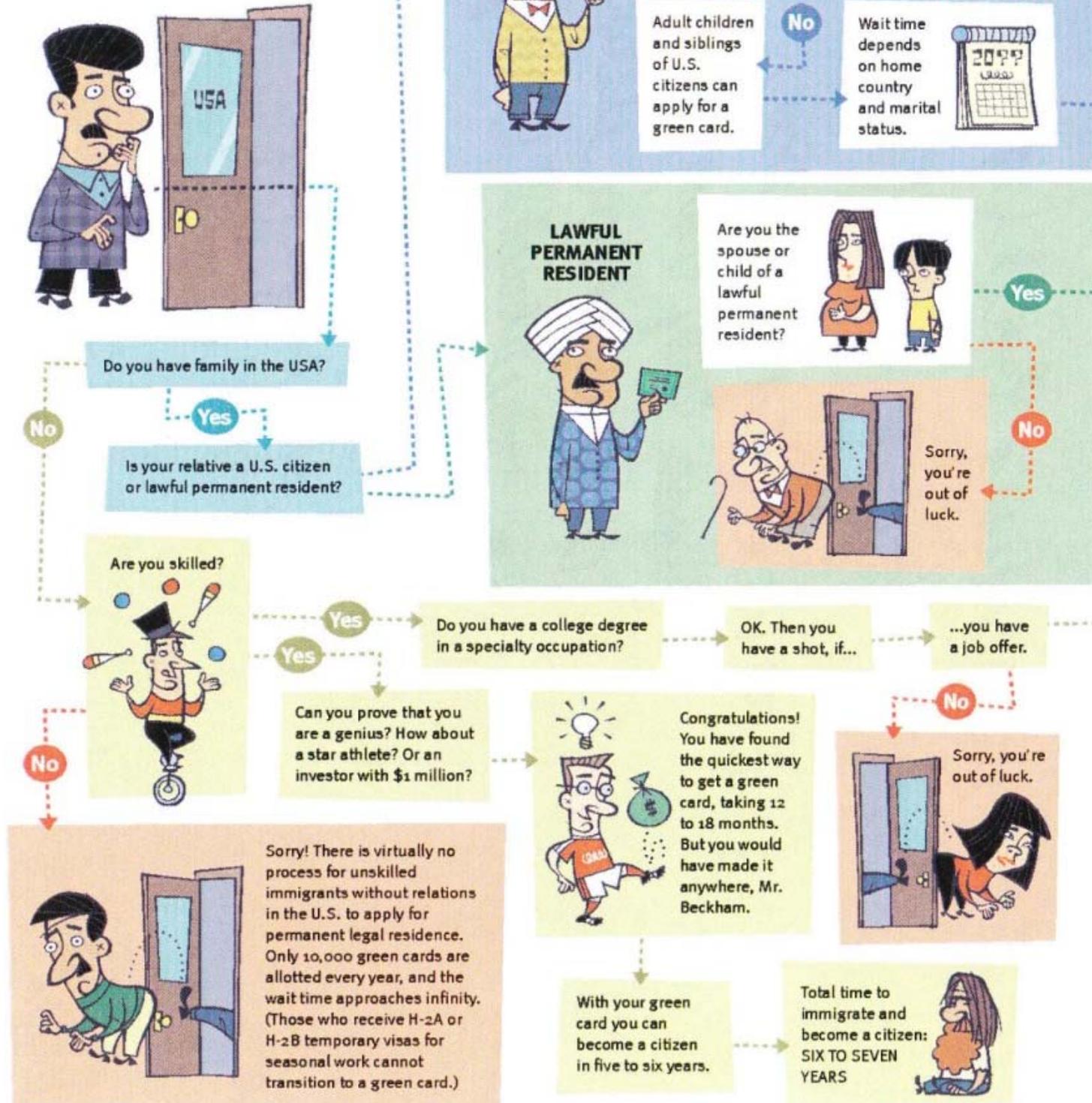
and backgrounds as they embraced learning more about the beauty of the Hijab. We hope to continue this event for many years to come as we share our faith with the amazing people around us. ✦

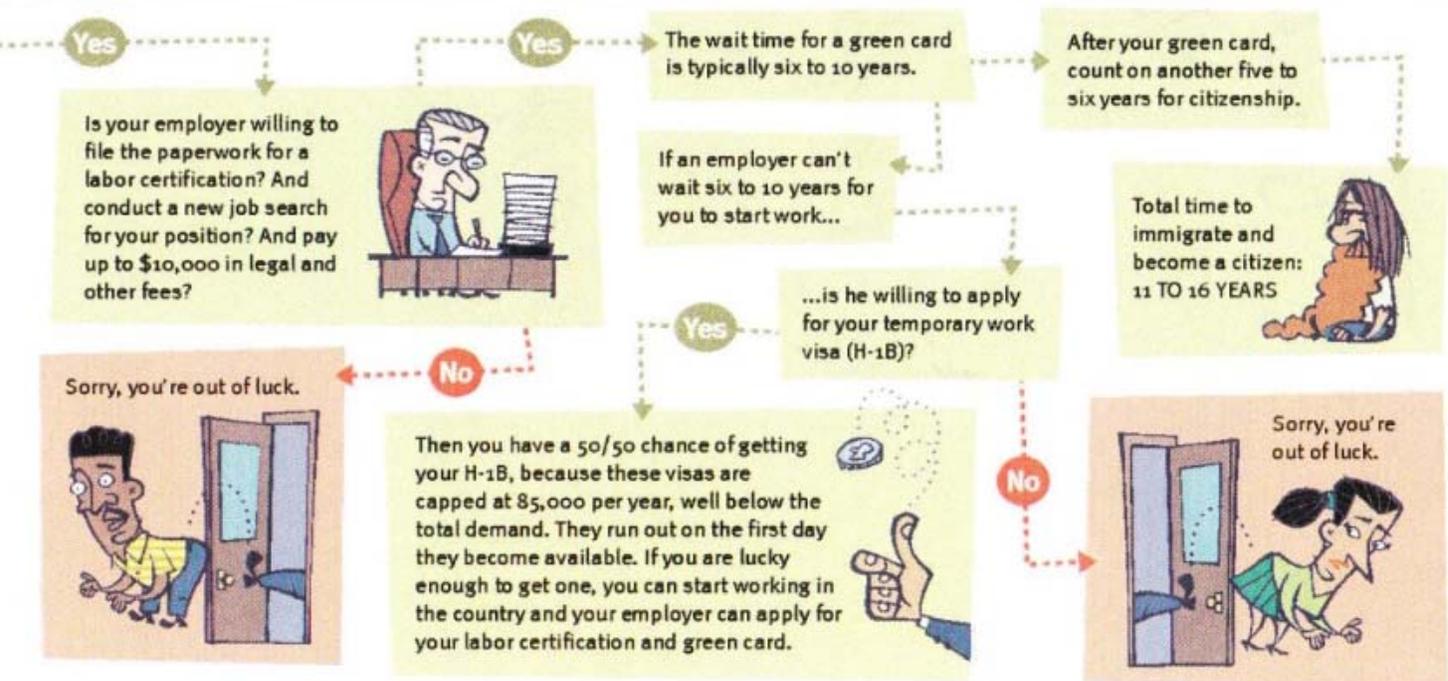
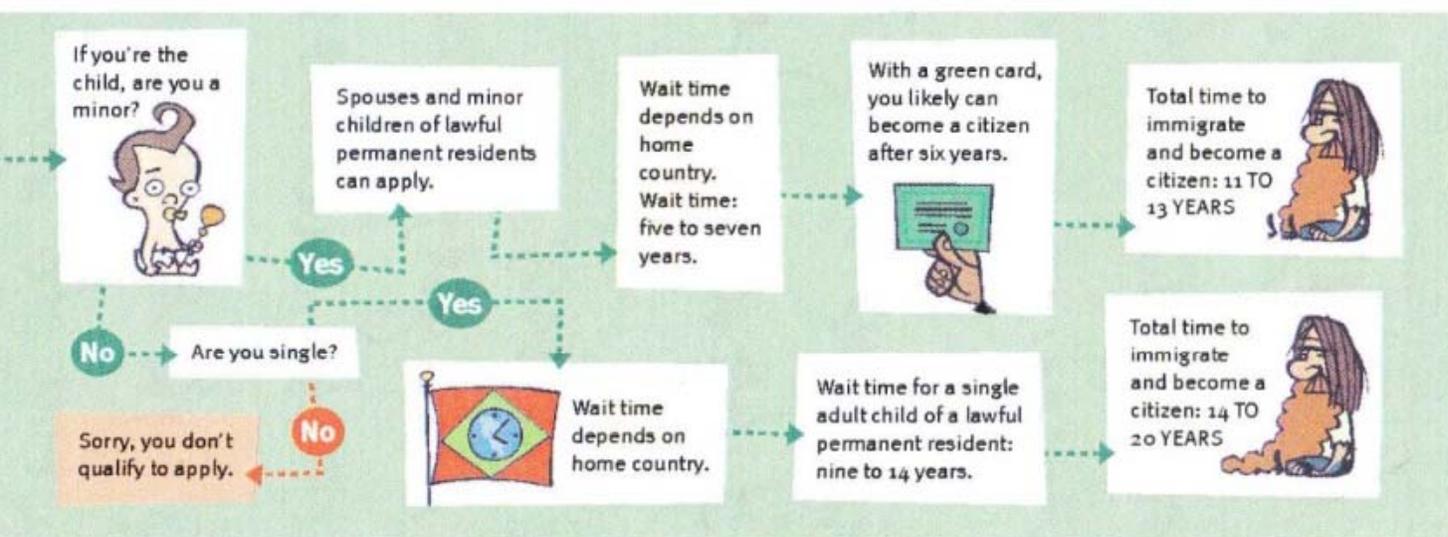
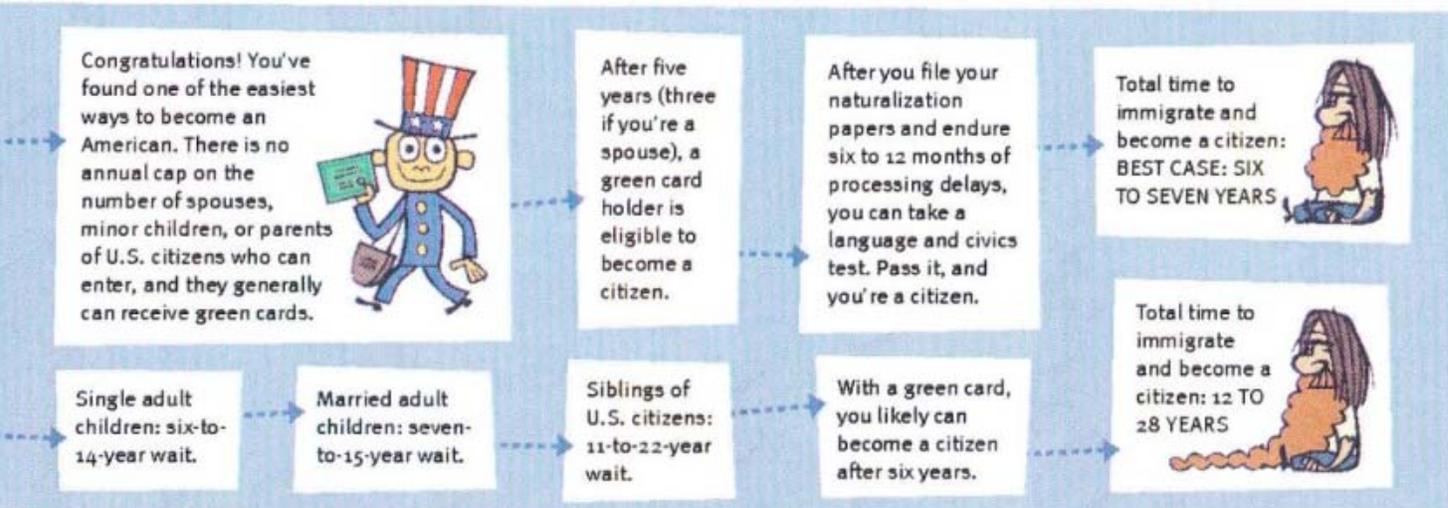


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An Immigrant's Path to Citizenship

Opponents of illegal immigration are fond of telling foreigners to "get in line" before coming to work in America. But what does that line actually look like, and how many years (or decades) does it take to get through? Try it yourself!





Building the Beloved Community: A Conversation on Confronting Islamophobia

Interview by Greg Fister

I recently talked with Mustafa Abdullah about how he perceives Islamophobia in American society today. Mustafa is the Lead Organizer for the ACLU of Missouri and was the 2015 recipient of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee's (ADC) "Excellence in Advocacy Award" because of his work to address police accountability, racial profiling, and mass incarceration via Muslims for Ferguson. We talked about a lot of things, including his experience growing up in an Egyptian Muslim family in America in the age of 9/11. We also discussed police anti-brutality work, and peoples' perceptions of religious identity and national identity. What follows is a very abridged version of our conversation.

MA: There's a recent survey that focuses on American Muslims and civic engagement, community participation, and a variety of other social issues. One of the outcomes of the survey was that Islamophobia is really and truly an American issue. The survey found that folks who hold anti-Semitic views are thirty times more likely to hold Islamophobic views. Additionally the survey identified that the only constant variable in whether a Muslim was going to engage in violent activities was if they did not see themselves as being American. Islamophobic rhetoric essentially pits a Muslim identity against an American identity, and can lead to more American Muslims that feel unwelcome. This can create problematic spaces in our faith communities.

Of course, Muslims are certainly not any more likely than any other group to be engaging in terrorist activity. In fact, by a long-shot, white supremacist groups engage in more terrorist violence than any other racial, religious or ethnic group in the country. But certainly Islamophobia is a contributing factor to potential terrorism.

GF: So what are the ways, if any, that the American culture's Islamophobia is reinforced or exemplified by legislation, whether at the state level or higher? There's obviously things like the War on Terror and the Patriot Act, but would you say there are other pieces of legislation that bolster hostility towards Muslims, specifically in Missouri?

MA: Muslims are a diverse community. We're the most diverse religious community in the country. We have many different kinds of communities that make up the Muslim community. And a lot of Muslims are first or second generation immigrants. I'm not aware of the percentages. There certainly are Muslims who are here that

are lawfully present, but maybe aren't citizens.

In the introduction to the higher education budget bill in the state legislature, there is a piece that calls on public universities and community colleges in the state of Missouri to charge international tuition rates for students who are not citizens. So a lot of these students who are lawfully present but aren't citizens receive letters in the mail saying that they will be charged international tuition rates. These students may be dealing with a host of other challenges, such as having to make it on their own in this country or having to support their families. This extra tuition, then, is really an undue burden. Last year the ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of several students who were paying these tuition rates and really couldn't afford to be going to school.

So, in many cases, anti-immigration legislation presents a lot of problems and challenges to the Muslim community, many of whom are immigrants.

GF: So, do you see the political and legal decisions made at higher levels of government that negatively affect Muslims as being fueled by Islamophobia?

MA: I think Islamophobia is a big part of the problem. There is a PEW survey, done several years ago, that showed that a majority of Americans have an unfavorable view of Muslims—somewhere around 60 percent. Less than half—in the neighborhood of forty percent of Americans—actually knew a Muslim. Folks who knew someone who was a Muslim had considerably better opinions of them.

I think that there is an everyday misunderstanding—particularly if you don't know someone who is Muslim. And I think that beyond the politics and beyond the political theater and policy, the values of our country, the values of being a beacon of freedom or liberty, call upon us to be building relationships with those who are different from us and have understanding of the kinds of struggles and problems others are going through. If we are ever, as a country, going to become a beacon of light, we are required to continue to work together—to build a beloved community—and that requires being in relationship with folks.

To give an example, I used to work as a community organizer in North Carolina for faith-based communities. I had worked with someone who wanted to invite me to their church. They had heard me speak about my Muslim identity



Greg Fister brings loads and loads of love and enthusiasm to our community at Karen House!

and about the work that I was doing, and wanted me to talk to their congregation. In the beginning of the talk someone asked me if I was a terrorist. Also, the man who talked to the leadership of his church to get them to extend an invitation, had been told they couldn't have Muslims come speak, because all Muslims are terrorists.

And so, not just for Muslims, but for a variety of minority groups in the country, oftentimes the onus is put upon them to navigate these delicate conversations, and it can be frustrating. And they're not only delicate, but hurtful conversations—and it can be frustrating. I could have shut the door on that conversation when he asked me that question, and I really wanted to, but if I had shut the door then I wouldn't have been able to build a relationship with that person and work towards creating a space to have deeper and more meaningful conversations. So, I do think dealing with Islamophobia is part of everyday conversations.

GF: You said earlier that Islamophobia is an American issue—other countries deal with xenophobia, but in America the culture seems especially hostile towards Muslims, especially with the debate about letting Syrian refugees resettle here, while Canada has already accepted hundreds of refugees. What do you think makes all the difference?

MA: When you have a Prime Minister like Justin Trudeau who goes to mosques during his campaign cycle, has broken bread with Muslims, creates space for being with and reaching out to Muslim communities, it sends a very welcoming message. And it says a lot when it's coming from leadership at the top. And it wasn't until very recently that President Obama visited a mosque in the United States. I think that is to his credit, but it would be hard for me to imagine most presidential candidates going to a mosque and speaking to Muslims. Senator Bernie Sanders, though, has done intentional outreach to Muslims. There are memes that he had in Arabic and other South Asian languages, and so he has been trying to reach out to the broader immigrant Muslim community, and he also has campaigned with one of my friends and colleagues, Linda Sarsour, who has been a

spokesperson and a delegate for his campaign. She wears a hijab. She is a Palestinian-American, and is very proud of her Palestinian heritage. But of course, there were the more than 20 governors who have said that they would not accept Syrian refugees until there was a closer look at the refugee vetting process. I think there have certainly been attempts intentionally and maybe unintentionally to turn Muslims and immigrants into the boogeyman, for the sake of winning elections. Whether it is intentional or not, I haven't seen Hillary Clinton do the outreach that Sen. Sanders has done, and so for folks in the Muslim community, it does make them ask: why? And I think that a lot of it comes down to winning elections. So it does not play well that only one of the current Democratic or Republican Presidential candidates is outreaching to the Muslim community in contrast to the kind of leadership from PM Trudeau in Canada.

GF: One more question: Could you say anything about efforts by Muslims that you know of, or have been involved in, to fight back against prejudice and combat Islamophobia?

MA: There is a growing number of Muslims who are being more public about their Muslim identity. I think the important question, that Muslims across the board, face, is whether we should be publicly and proudly Muslim, and bear our religious, cultural and ethnic identities.

For me, organizing and political work, whether it's working on voting rights, or women's rights or LGBTQ rights, or police accountability and racial justice issues—whatever it is—organizing has given me an opportunity to play a role in the potential of this country, and the potential of my community. I see that as the most basic way that I can right back and address Islamophobia. I think that there is a growing number of Muslims across the country who are engaging in meaningful work that is building up the community. As I said before, I think that Linda Sarsour does incredible work. There is a friend of mine, Mark Crain, who does digital work for MoveOn.org. I have another friend, Muhammed Malik, who does great organizing in Philadelphia around Islamophobia and police brutality and other racial justice issues—I could go on with a list of folks that come to mind—but I think that they are gaining more of a presence and a visibility. And if you are not Muslim and you see folks like them, whether they're on the news or in the community, it helps diffuse stereotypes and pre-conceived notions.

As a second part of my response, I am working with Faizan Syed of CAIR on having a strategic conversation with folks in the Muslim community to get more Muslims civically engaged. The most basic aspect of this being to get more Muslims registered to vote. One of the other findings from the survey I mentioned earlier, is that Muslims are the most likely, it's something like 57%, to believe in the integrity of the democratic process in the country. But they are by far the least likely to be registered to vote. And for some reason there's a gap—I'm not sure what it is. We were hoping to coordinate with the Muslim community in St. Louis during the month of Ramadan to get more Muslims not only registered to vote but also educate them on some of the issues that affect them locally, in the state, and nationally.

The way that I feel confident addressing Islamophobia is to get more Muslims to feel comfortable in their own skin and to do the kind of meaningful community work that we're passionate about. This also involves being public and getting Muslims registered to vote and to put more pressure on our legislators to address the concerns of the Muslim community.



Mustafa Abdullah



A Security Risk To Our Misconceptions

by Sean Ferguson

Terrorism and Security Risk. Two words that I have heard thrown around, both in the media and discourse amongst citizens of the United States when speaking on the subject of Islam, and which boldly proclaim just how uneducated white Americans can be.

These painful and powerful words have also begun to become associated with the Syrians fleeing their war-torn country. A war-torn country, it is important to add, whose instability can be traced back to the United States' meddling in the Middle East. Without a context of the reality that the Syrians are facing, without understanding what it means to be a refugee or what that process looks like when coming to the United States, we remain uneducated and unaware. How to remedy this?

Faizan Syed, a Muslim activist in St. Louis, works as the Executive Director of the Council of American-Muslim Relations (CAIR) and has had an active role in bringing Syrian refugees to St. Louis. CAIR defends the legal rights of American Muslims while also engaging in media and advocacy work, oftentimes teaming up with other activist movements, such as Black Lives Matter. The main work of CAIR, however, is to educate. Non-Muslim Americans often enter into the conversation surrounding Islam with a scattered, prefabricated opinion, shaped by the media and

political rhetoric, without any foundation in the human reality.

Through his work with CAIR, Faizan has participated heavily in getting the Syrian refugees to St. Louis through the "Bring Them Here Campaign," which has been surprisingly successful in a politically right-leaning state. As he spoke, Faizan framed his narrative around a bit of history that is incredibly relevant to the Syrian refugee crisis that we are facing today--the history of the Jews fleeing from the Holocaust. He shared with me a story of the transatlantic liner The St. Louis, which sailed from Germany in 1939 bringing 937 Jews to the United States who were fleeing the Third Reich. Due to the fear of The St. Louis carrying "Nazi insurgents," the ship was turned away off the coast of Florida and sent back to Germany. Due to this harsh treatment, 532 of the St. Louis' passengers became victims of the Holocaust, with 254 dying during this awful event. Now however, as said so pointedly by Faizan, "Jew has been replaced with Syrian, and Nazi insurgent has been replaced



Faizan Syed at the St. Louis #BringThemHere event in 2015.

with terrorist."

Fear is such a powerful tool when it comes to swaying peoples' hearts and minds. The current US Presidential campaign has done nothing to settle lingering doubts in some Americans' minds on the subject of Islam and accepting Muslims into the United States. The rhetoric we keep hearing revolves



Sean Ferguson, an amazing rugby player, has been our faithful Sunday morning house-taker all year and plans to move into the Karen House neighborhood soon.

around one central point: security risks. I asked Faizan to address this question and the facts that he provided were staggering. His immediate response was, "I'd trust a Syrian refugee over a member of my own parish due to the amount of screening they have to do." The depth of examination required to receive asylum in the United States is shocking. An overview of the process laid out by Faizan is as follows: First, a refugee must leave their country and go to another country before coming to the United States. That is why the refugees

we are receiving are coming in through Jordan or Turkey. After getting to another country, the refugee must live in a refugee camp, oftentimes not being able to work as they apply for asylum, which takes a minimum of two years to attain. During this process, their entire lives are scrutinized. We lack the understanding in the United States that these refugees are coming from a country that still exists. As he jokingly pointed out, "This isn't the Wild West. There are still numerous files on individual citizens the United States can gain access to."

White Americans seem to be under the impression that the refugees coming in have the ability to forge documents and to "sneak" past the screening process which is simply untrue. The agencies looking into these refugees' pasts are incredibly thorough and it would be nearly impossible to forge your way through. This makes security risks more of a fantasy based in fear than in reality. After receiving "Refugee" status, the asylum-seekers are brought to cities throughout the States to settle. The only thing for which they need to pay the United States government back, is the cost of their plane ticket.

Faizan reports that so far, the "Bring Them Here Campaign" has had fantastic success. The idea for this campaign was inspired by St. Louis' warm welcome to the Bosnian community in the 1990s. Now, St. Louis has the second largest Bosnian population outside of the country itself. Forty-nine Syrian families have been settled in St. Louis, and according to Faizan, that number is only going to increase. The goal is to have around 250 families settled

by October of next year and Faizan assured me that this is not only plausible, but likely. The families are being placed in some less-populated blocks of North St. Louis and the hope is to place them near one another so that community can begin to form. When I asked Faizan what the reception has been like for the refugees, he reported that there has been almost no hostility towards the Syrians from the St. Louis citizens and the refugees have felt nothing but welcomed.

Oftentimes, Faizan shared, these Syrian refugees were professionals back home. Sadly, more often than not, the United States does not recognize graduate degrees from overseas. This means that a refugee must take an exam to "prove" that they are a capable doctor or engineer, for example. The barriers to passing these tests are significant, which can make it difficult for them to continue in their chosen profession. This doesn't stop the Syrians from being driven and motivated in their new home. This passion also drives the Syrians to take an active role in rebuilding their lives and becoming active citizens here in St. Louis. The Syrians'



The #BringThemHere movement is "a grassroots movement to organize passionate and caring people who are witnessing the plight of Syrian families to organize and put pressure on our elected officials to bring Syrian refugees to our communities."

desire to contribute to St. Louis from the richness of their faith and culture is strong, and is something that should be exulted and celebrated.

"Many have seen family murdered, some have been tortured by the regime, some have seen their children killed, and all of them have seen their entire towns totally obliterated. These people have been through a lot." As members of the St. Louis community, as citizens of the United States, let us move beyond our complacency and instead join the work of organizations like CAIR and activists like Faizan as we stand up against hatred and paranoia and stand with our Muslim brothers and sisters.





From Karen House

The Catholic Worker has so many different components and different ways of expressing the Aims and Means that I feel I haven't even scratched the surface in understanding this movement in my eight years at the house. This reality makes the CW movement such an inspiring and intimidating world. I learn how one house manifests a vision and the beauty of that interpretation and I'm inspired to incorporate it within my own life and our own home. With all things, life seems to be a series of weighing what choices and options are out there, and figuring out how to make space for new understandings and new visions without letting go completely of things we hold dear. And sometimes we do let go of beloved beliefs, jobs, or ideas in order to bring in new ones. I'm beginning to see life not as a journey in finding the one right path, but rather a series of paths that constantly affect the ways in which I live my values. I recently left *Instead of War*, a space where I found many skills and political understandings that helped to shape my life as an organizer. I have deep love for the space I found there, the self-discovery, the amazing people I got to meet, and the eye-opening experiences. It was a bittersweet to recognize that I needed and wanted space in my life to figure out something new, while still trying to figure out ways to live out my value of challenging militarization. I'm slowly realizing that there is not just ONE way to do something but hundreds of different paths that I can manifest to live out my values.

It's been a gift to focus on Karen House without major outside responsibilities these last few months. Slowing down, moving away from constant busyness, creating space to vision and dream without the onslaught of crisis is challenging. Even now the tugs and pulls of needing a million things to do whispers in my ear, even though I'm the only identified Catholic Worker in the house. The voices in my head say, "Do more, your worth is in the tangible things you can produce". These are all the whispers of capitalism that say the bigger and faster, the better. The Worker has always stood in opposition to that and has always held on to the idea that the small will be the solution. Every day I feel like I have to remind myself that sometimes the big solution is lots of small ones. We have made conscious decisions with everyone living in the house to slow down, to see different ways in which we can live out the idea of "home" in a way that both makes room for people to live at Karen House longer and that values stability. I'm grateful to everyone I live with and their reminders to me

to hold onto the strength of consistency and calmness.

I'm reminded often that change is not one big idea but often small pulls in many directions. We so often fear change rather than embrace it, as if somehow it means we were doing something wrong. I have always loved the Worker because it sees change as an exciting opportunity and that we all carry the greatness and courage to walk into the unknown together. The Worker values clarification of thought as a central principle, calling us all to be fluid and swim deeper into our understandings of the world. There have been a few times in my life as a Worker that I thought to myself "That's it, I'm done". It might have been some insurmountable conflict, heartbreaking situation, or an outside offer that holds the promise of something exciting, care-free, and full of new challenges (this promise often includes living alone with the siren call of a dish-free sink and a pristine, clutter free hallway). And then something calls me back in, some new idea or fresh way of looking at a principle that I thought I had understood to its fullest interpretation. And then I go through the process of weighing the strengths and weaknesses of the house and my place within it. Karen House always wins, because so far, it is the only place that holds tradition and future with equal value and consistently challenges oppression at its most root and basic manifestation.

Changes at Karen house don't feel big to me but feel like a progression of what we have known collectively as a Catholic Worker, as a house and as individuals participating in this active "movement moment" that challenges white supremacy across the country. Historically the CW movement has beautifully done hospitality with dignity and has challenged the bureaucracy of traditional social service agencies. We have not done well, as a movement, incorporating and making space for those who receive hospitality to transition to be the givers of hospitality within our homes. Our language and culture is often inaccessible, and the path to becoming a decision maker is not always clear and transparent. It's been amazing to be part of a process that attempts to reframe and create spaces and opportunities for people to move into, if they wish. We've been addressing the current reality that our guests have been staying for much longer than the 3-6 months of many years ago by acknowledging that our space can and should change for folks who live with us over a year. We have shifted from curfews to no curfews. Everyone who lives in the house is considered part of the house community and has their own keys and the ability both to take house, and to participate in weekly house meetings, where decisions about the house are happening more collectively and re-



Colleen Kelly has recently discovered the wonder of paint-by-numbers. Watch out, world!

flective of those who have experienced homelessness.

I'm often reminded of the beautiful tradition of Karen House as we embark on some of these shifts. When the house opened, the rooms were filled, with multiple people in each room. There was a beautiful strength in the idea of meeting the housing crisis head on by housing as many people as possible. The flaw was that folks didn't have space to heal, to recover and to have autonomy. Every single thing has a strength and flaw, I'm discovering. I'm grateful to the Karen House elders and foundresses who remind me that physical space does not need to dictate emotional capacity and we can continue to grow creatively about the use of our space. The systems of exploitation are powerful and there doesn't always seem to be clear ways forward. Everyone has an opinion and looking through the history of social movements, some have been successful and some have not. All have been valu-

able because with each experience is a lesson and sometimes our greatest failures are our greatest lessons. It's been inspiring to look at the tradition that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin visioned around centering poor and working class folks at the forefront of revolutionary change and to figure out ways that deepen our understanding and manifestation of this vision.

This is the same Karen House, a place that centers the strengths, the beauty, and the dignity of women. A house that continues to do hospitality for those seeking a bed and roof, a spiritual home, a political home, a communal home, or some of all of those combined. In some ways, lots of things have changed at Karen House, but in others, nothing has changed. That to me is why I stay - the grounding tradition with the flexibility of possibility. But throughout it all, and at the end of the day, we are a space that seeks to love in a way that sustains, balances, empowers and meets each person where they are.



Recent Photos From Karen House

Christmas celebrating, fridge cleaning, new baby adoring, anti-racism banner making, dog loving, window rehabbing, and dinner cooking at Karen House!





Catholic Worker Thought & Action

A Peter-Predicted Transition by Joe Kruse

It was the second night of occupation at the 4th Precinct Police Station. The sun had just set and a November chill gradually replaced the day's warmth. Normally the cool crisp of fall evenings brings me centeredness. But that night, the tension in the air kept me vigilant and anxious. Jamar Clark had been killed the day before by Minneapolis police. Most witnesses said that he was handcuffed when he was shot. That day, at the recently initiated 4th Precinct occupation in protest Jamar's murder, I was witness to the heart-breaking rage and mourning of many Northside residents. Some of that rage was understandably directed at white people taking part in the occupation. Many of us white people did not live on the Northside of Minneapolis, a predominantly black neighborhood cut off physically, socially, and economically from the centers of wealth that lend Minneapolis its designation as "one of the best economies in the country." That same economy is embedded in a Minnesotan white supremacy that upholds the most egregious racial wealth disparity in the country. The "liberal" economic and social policies of our solid blue state, enacted by our disproportionately white political bodies, make this a great city to live in, if you're white. According to a study done by the Huffington post profiling the 10 worst US cities for Black Americans "...only 3.9% of all Twin City residents are unemployed, one of the lowest figures in the country, (while) the unemployment rate among the city's black residents is 12.8%."(1) Like the implementation of the New Deal and the GI Bill, the distribution of wealth in Minneapolis seems to stop at the color line.

So, understandably, white Minnesotans at the 4th precinct were targets of some frustration and outward expressions of pain. I remember a black man yelling at a white clergy, "Where do you live?! What is your address?! What is your address?!" bringing attention to the socio-geographical barriers that inherently separate many white people from his exact depth of despair and grief. He brought attention to the dream many of us live out in other neighborhoods, blissfully unaware of the state-sanctioned body breaking and psychological scarring that is part and parcel of life on the Northside. At one point, several men pulled down the American flag in front of the police station. As they lit it on fire, one of them said, "Where are the white people? We need a white person to hold this with us!"

His request immediately pulled me into a new awareness. I glimpsed what a deeper and more empathetic solidarity might look like. As a Catholic Worker, much of my spiritual world-view centers around the philosophy of non-violence, ways of maintaining peace both in myself and the world, and a questioning of anger as a tool for social change. While these beliefs are central to my core being, they are also products of my upbringing and a personal history entrenched in racial, gender, and economic privilege. Perhaps the ease with which I proselytize non-violence is because I have never experienced a real threat of violence in my life. Perhaps the way I deemphasize anger as a useful emotion is because our social

systems have never rendered me hopelessly trapped.

Being called to question my assumptions and to stand in solidarity that day has not resulted in the relinquishing of all of my deeply held values. It has, however, forced me to sink into an important paradox. It has allowed me to sit with compassion for my identity while questioning my assumptions and compelling me to follow the blueprint for revolution outlined by women, queer people, poor people and people of color. It is within the context of this paradox that I see a possible transformation for the Catholic Worker movement.

Last Spring at the 2015 Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat in St. Louis, Catholic Workers and other like-minded communities came together to discuss a long ignored reality: racism within the Catholic Worker. In listening to Catholic Workers during that intense weekend, it became clear that many of us had begun to notice how our "radical" communities often unintentionally embody the systems of oppression we work against. Charismatic white male leaders often control the form and voice of communities. Predominantly white Catholic Worker core communities "serve" their guests who are often the only people of color in our houses. And the sacred tradition of Catholic Worker direct action is often dedicated to the liberation of the oppressed but planned and carried out by predominantly white organizing groups. Understandably, the realization of how deep these systems of oppression have infiltrated our beloved movement has left many of us confused and spiritually lost. Afraid our movement is too contaminated with the vestiges of white supremacy, some have understandably chosen to leave the Catholic Worker entirely. But others, too in love with the poetry and culture inoculated by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, have chosen to stay. I believe that our ability to sit in the tension, to stay open to criticism and change within the Catholic Worker, and to stay relationally accountable to communities of color and other oppressed groups, will result in a rebirthing of a Catholic Worker movement that is more keyed in to the heartbeat of the unfolding revolution.

In his important article, "Undoing the Politics of Powerlessness," Yotam Marom, a white organizer from New York and a facilitator with Wildfire, recalls a time when he was asked by leaders of color to step up and offer his unique knowledge and gifts to a particulate project. He writes,

"The feedback makes me a bit blurry. I can't remember the last time anyone told me they wanted me to be powerful. I'm a straight, white, class-comfortable male in the North Eastern United States, certainly not part of the groups most impacted by the systems we are fighting. I've spent the past few years duking it out with the voices in my head — on one hand knowing I have something to offer in this important moment, and on the other hand internalizing deep shame about where I come from and guilt over the mistakes I've made along the way as a result. In the



Joe Kruse lives and works at the Minneapolis Catholic Worker (also known as the Rye House). He is also currently very interested in board games.

midst of those mistakes and in the face of a movement culture that seemed to see me as a threat, I internalized the message that the best thing I could do for the movement was to mitigate the damage I've done by existing — that my job, really, was to disappear. There are historical reasons for this dilemma, and current reasons that our movements have adopted these knee-jerk responses to what it perceives as power or privilege. But in the end, the impact was that it made me less effective, whether as an ally to other oppressed people, a leader



Midwest Catholic Workers acting in conjunction with Black Lives Matter activists in Minneapolis, 2016. Photo: Vanessa Shuck on BLM Minneapolis FB Page

in Occupy, or a facilitator with Wildfire.”

I think the tendency to make ourselves invisible to mitigate the damage of the racist legacy we represent is an understandable response for white people in the Catholic Worker. I also know that it is a response that is ultimately self-centered, grounded in shame, and useless to oppressed people struggling for liberation.

The reality is that the Catholic Worker is incredibly important. Our communities have remarkable gifts to offer the wider movement for social justice and access to important social and economic capital that could be allocated to leaders of color. There are few organizations (or organisms) more nimble, more unaccountable to corporations and the government, or more willing to open its spaces to strangers and people in need. These qualities are gifts that we offer in the fight against white supremacy. But we must be held accountable to the leaders of the unfolding movement moment. We must try to be in relationship with leaders of color who can guide us in utilizing our gifts and transforming our movement so it stays relevant and useful. We must exist in the paradox of embracing our sacred identity while relinquishing our need to control the narrative.

In the spirit of this accountability we at the Minneapolis Catholic Worker have committed to organizing an experimental 2016 Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat. Our retreat will happen this spring and has been organized, from start to finish, under the guidance of activists from Black Lives Matter Minneapolis. So far our roles have primarily been orchestrating logistics like housing for retreatees, food preparation, and fundraising. Much of the content of the retreat will be designed and carried out by BLM activists. The goal is that the work done at the retreat will benefit the work of BLM locally. Through this retreat we hope that we are embracing and using the beautiful tradition of Catholic Worker resistance in the service of incredible organizers of color. We're not saying that what we're working on is perfect or is the direction in which the Catholic Worker must move. After all, many Catholic Worker communities are already doing incredible and creative anti-racism work. We simply

offer this retreat up as one way to maintain what is beautiful about our Catholic Worker culture while shifting our work so it is accountable to the leadership of women, queer people, and people of color.

During an intellectually rigorous conversation I had (and which I barely understood) with Catholic Workers Eric Anglada and Lincoln Rice at Sugar Creek, it came up that Peter Maurin predicted that the Catholic Worker would transform every twenty years. It would be hard to argue that we are not in a moment of Peter-predicted transition. What unfolds over the next few years, and the role the Catholic Worker plays in this progressing racial justice movement, is in our hands. Perhaps now is the time we shift our already adaptable movement from a culture that focuses heavily on direct service to an ethos that takes more time to listen and build accountability. Perhaps we might focus less on (but not completely abandon) our action-oriented anarchistic politics, and listen more to activists of color and what they are asking of us. Perhaps our houses and communities can act as places of healing and hospitality for white activists trying to make sense of their place in the movement while also attempting to cultivate deep love of self.

It's time to cut ourselves free from the constraints of rigid expectations and crushing self doubt, and fall into the reality of God's infinite love. We are innately and completely good. At the heart of oppression is a lie we've been told that tricks us into believing that we don't deserve love, that we have to earn it, and that there's not enough to go around. This lie, that we have to be "better" to be "good," is how we white people destroy other people, our planet, and ourselves. Let's be liberated from this yoke and fall into sacred change with abandon.



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Footnote:

1. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/worst-cities-black-americans_us_5613d10ee4b0baa355ad322f

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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Carl Kabat House
1450 Monroe
St. Louis, MO. 63106
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Teka Childress House
1875 Madison
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-588-9901

www.KarenHouseCW.org

Karen House Updates

1. Check our website for an updated list of needs!
2. We could use volunteers to **Cook Dinners** (Call Colleen) 314-761-7428 to sign up!)
3. We are re-initiating **monthly RoundTable Discussions!** We will be discussing this issue of the RT on **Sunday June 26th 6:30pm!** Check our website for details, or sign up for our monthly email to get updates: karenhousecw@gmail.com

We could use your **financial help** right now. We have a few extra expenses, including sending several Karen House kids to **Summer Camp**, providing a **stipend** for one of our live-in community members, and fixing our leaking copper **gutters**. Thank you for anything you can give!



Alleluia, Jane!

Our community is saddened by the recent loss of our dear friend Jane Corbett. Jane has been a supporter and frequent visitor at Karen House for decades, always showing up with a huge smile and words of love. One did not leave her presence, no matter how long the interaction, without feeling an extra bit of sunshine and love. We will miss her terribly but plan on filling her last request of us: to continually ask her to intervene on our behalf so that she can stay busy in heaven. We love and miss you Jane!



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

Check www.KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, information on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!