

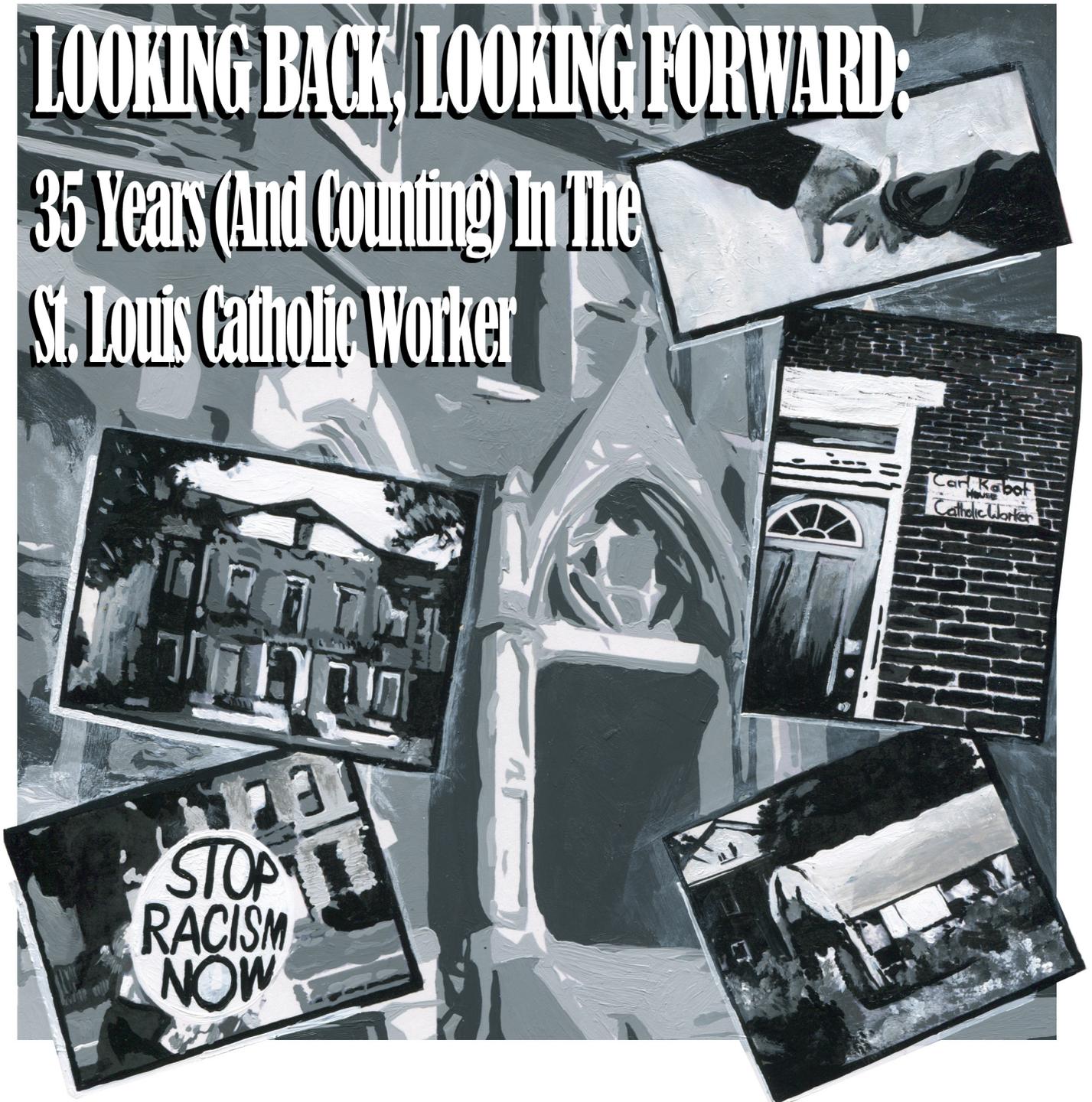
THE Round Table

Spring 2013

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

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD:

35 Years (And Counting) In The St. Louis Catholic Worker



Why This Issue?

I was missing the party! We had a last minute cancellation and I was filling in conducting interviews at Karen House's 35th Anniversary Reunion weekend. During the interviews, I could hear people laughing in the hallway—people who preceded me at Karen House and whom I'd read about in the RoundTable; folks I lived with at Karen House but hadn't seen in years and long-term friends of the house. And I was missing all that joking and reminiscing!

As it turns out, these interviews were an incredible part of the weekend for me, and it was incredibly humbling and moving to be a witness to these stories. Former community members and friends of the house reflected on the impact of the St. Louis Catholic Worker (CW) on their lives. Parents talked about the influence of the CW philosophy on their parenting years later. Couples spoke of meeting at Karen House. Folks shared about the difficulties of community life, of their own regrets, and of the amazing power of relationships with both community and guests. While these stories come from our experience in St. Louis, they are surely not unique within the larger CW movement. Experiments in urban farming, neighborhood houses of hospitality, tales of struggle and evolution on issues of faith, and questions about technology and oppression can certainly be found in the narratives of different Catholic Worker houses across the country. We hope these reflections are helpful in the wider conversation as we look forward to 35 more years in St. Louis.

That weekend, I saw that people carry both immense joy and pain from their time at the Catholic Worker; that there have been very few communities where all people do their own dishes consistently; and that depending on the composition of needs and personalities at any one time, different community members have felt warmly embraced and supported, or judged and ignored (often within the same community!) We learned about the large and inspired community of people who founded the house (the video from the Foundress' Breakfast on our website is a hoot to watch.) We discussed how we've been both inspired by (you know, continuing to live simply after leaving the CW) and ruined by (you know, continuing to smell milk before pouring) our time at the Catholic Worker. We reflected together on resistance. We shared liturgy, music, meals, and a deep fellowship of shared time and vision. And we heard, over and over again, what a central part Karen House has played in the lives of so many of us.

And so we bring you this issue, filled with reflections and ideas gleaned from that magical weekend. Ellen Rehg, Barb Prosser and Carolyn Griffeth share delightful stories and reflections from the early days of Karen House, Cass House, and Kabat House, respectively. Annjie Schiefelbein describes some ways the Karen House community has evolved—and remained the same—over the years. We hear about the particular joys of urban farming from Mary Densmore, while Becky Hassler discusses her experiments in hospitality outside a "traditional" CW house. James shares analysis and ideas on ending racism in the CW movement. Jim Plato talks about how living at Karen House has affected his parenting. Our regular columns feature a sweet "From Karen House" from Braden Tobin, a report from Kabat House by Mary Densmore, and reflections from experiments in eating justly from Danny Schuler.

I did miss some laughs that night at the party, but I also got to witness the most inspirational and touching tales about the St. Louis Catholic Worker. If you like, visit our website and share in the inspiration from that weekend through the videos we have posted. We hope you enjoy these reflections—here's to another 35 years! ✝

- Jenny Truax



Cover: Jason Gonzalez
Centerfold: Teka Childress and James Meinert

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To Share a Sense of Joy

By: Ellen Rehg

In true Catholic Worker fashion, Karen House came about through a pattern of relationships and an ongoing fount of graces; the fabric of its inception interlaced with colorful characters. Last September, on a sunny Sunday morning Catholic Workers gathered from near and far to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Karen House. Some of the people who were a part of the beginning told their stories...

Of relationships...

Sue Lauritsen, a 24 year old lineman for the phone company in Omaha, Nebraska was recuperating from a fall off a phone pole, and had some time on her hands. At the early morning daily mass she attended, she met some people who worked at St. Teresa's Catholic Worker house for transient men. They invited her over; she came, she stayed, she fell in love with the Worker! And she moved in. But her heart was divided; she had left it in St. Louis with her friend Laura, and some Notre Dame sisters who were friends.

"I think St. Louis could use a Catholic Worker house," she mused one day, solving her dilemma.

Al Sprehe began to correspond with Sue after she wrote to the Notre Dame nuns in St. Louis. The nuns housed the Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC) office in the basement of their convent on West Pine, and when Sue contacted them, they thought of Al. Al, married to Maggie Costello, worked as the staff person for CALC. He and Maggie and other CALC members had a burning interest in simple living, and Al had visited the New York Catholic Worker. Sue was given the names of more people who might be interested in establishing a Catholic Worker house.

The Sisters of Notre Dame, whom Sue knew from being in com-

munity with them for a time, agreed to pay Sue's rent and utilities for six months if she moved to St. Louis, to give her time to organize a Worker house here.

Fr. John Lightle found an apartment for Sue on 11th street in Holy Trinity's parish where he was the pastor. He had recently been run out of Bolivia fearing for his life from death squads, who were stalking him because of his outspokenness against the government.



Karen House Community at the time of opening: Mary Ann McGivern, Virginia Druhe, Luanne Schintzal, JoAnn Silva, Ann Manganaro, Marolyn Roberson, Sue Lauritsen, a visitor from Omaha CW, and Kathy Derby. - Source Unknown

Virginia Druhe shared an apartment on Botanical in St. Louis' south side with her friend Beverly Arnold, who was her mentor in all things new and spiritual. Beverly knew John Lightle from her days at DeSales High School. Beverly and John decided to go to the first meeting Sue organized. Not wanting to spend the evening alone, Virginia accompanied them, although she had never heard of the Catholic Worker.

Mary Ann McGivern, a Sister of Loretto, spent the fall of 1976 working in Florida with the farmworkers. She fell in love with the people and the work helping to organize for their rights. When she returned to live in community

with her fellow sisters, Ann Manganaro and Paulette Peterson, she discovered that Ann was among the now thirty or so people who had been attending Sue's meetings.

Ann Manganaro had had a dream about teaching, she told Mary Ann...or no, it wasn't about teaching, it was about transformation, and it meant that she should move into the new Worker being started. She was an educator at the Neighborhood School, an alternative school she had co-founded in the Skinker-DeBaliviere area. Ever since the summer of '69 that she spent at the New York Worker, she had been drawn to living more closely with the poor. Would Mary Ann be willing to join her? Mary Ann would, although



Ellen Rehg is grateful for 30 years of being a part of the Catholic Worker.

she knew little about it.

Sue, Virginia, Mary Ann, Ann, Luanne Shintzel, and Kathy Derby formed the first community and opened the house in the fall of 1977. In one of their early meetings, they had developed these goals for themselves as a community:

We hope to develop an atmosphere of prayer so that our actions will be a reflection of the radical Gospel message:

- To share a sense of joy in life with others
- To develop an affirming atmosphere for each individual
- To strive to build a community that provides an alternative to our present day capitalistic system
- To challenge one another to respond justly to ourselves and all creation through non-violence, the works of mercy, voluntary poverty and simplicity

Of graces...

"I was just a conduit," Sue related. "We would say, in a meeting, I think we need a refrigerator, and someone would call and say, we have a refrigerator."

"We really need a truck," they said one day. Soon after, someone donated a 1939 orange International. It was the kind of truck you see in really old movies, with a rounded hood and curved fenders over the wheels. It bore a license plate on one side in the back, and well, it was old too. Ideally, they would park it on a hill. This was because, to start, the truck had to be pushed so they could pop the clutch. During the hot summer, the four women who had committed to living in the house drove the truck all over town, which nobly gave its last in the service of the poor: picking up couches, beds, a freezer, and whatever other bulky and heavy item came their way.

At one point, the just-forming community realized they badly needed money. As they sat one evening at Humphrey's, a bar near St. Louis University, Luanne Schintzel arrived from a speaking engagement at a high school. At the end of her talk, the teacher came up to her and gave her a check for 10,000 dollars.

Mary Ann answered the phone one day before they opened and Sister Roch, a Mercy Sister, asked, "What do you need? How can I help?" Mary Ann, caught off guard and thinking of their many needs, wasn't sure how to answer. Sr. Roch asked, "Have you thought about how you were going to do the laundry?"

Come to think of it, no, they hadn't.

"Why don't you come and pick up a load of linen?" Roch suggested. She worked at St. John's Mercy hospital, and was offering their laundry services. "We'll give you two sets of sheets and towels to start, when the first is dirty we'll clean it for you." Thus began a relationship which continues to this day.

Anne and Bolen Carter had been a part of an earlier Catholic Worker house in St. Louis back in the 1930s, during the depression. Memories of eating powdered eggs still haunted them! They were determined that the guests at Karen House would always eat real eggs. Out of their social security check every month they paid for flats of eggs from the Jesuit kitchen at Fusz to be provided for Karen House.

They learned to live like Catholic Workers. "Whenever we were blessed with a large contribution, if we didn't need it right away, and we knew of another Worker house in need, we would send them the money," Sue said. "That's what the Catholic Worker is about—you don't hang on to what you don't need."

Of characters...

Sue and Virginia shared Sue's apartment for a time shortly before the House opened. One day Anne and Bolen Carter called them to ask if they could take in a single woman who was pregnant, whose parents had put her out. They were not really ready to accept guests yet, still, who were they to question God's timing? The woman arrived and almost immediately went into labor. Sue and Virginia took her to the hospital, and along with other women's expectant fathers, they sat and waited for the birth of the baby. The woman's name was Karen, and although she didn't ever return to the apartment, or even spend the night, she was technically the first guest. She gave Karen House its name.

Monsignor Ripa was the pastor at St. Liborius Church. He was a man out of his element, uncomfortable in the deteriorating North Side neighborhood. He dealt with his fears by forbidding blacks to enter the church. By night, he slept with a Lugar under his pillow; by day, he said the Mass for the Dead adorned in black vestments. Fr. Marty Manion was the Assistant Pastor at St. Liborius, and he was a man also

out of his element, but for different reasons. He spent the bulk of his days literally walking the streets, praying with the alcoholics and visiting the sick, in part to avoid being in the rectory with his pastor. Did he ever want the Catholic Workers as neighbors! He and John Lightle helped the Catholic Workers work out an arrangement with the Archdiocese to live in the convent next door.

Dean was a Vietnam Vet with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Arriving one day in September before the house opened, he brought a woman and her daughter with him whom he had found in a park also needing shelter. Despite a community decision to hold off accepting guests, Mary Ann and Ann found it impossible to say no to the benefactor who called on Dean's behalf. His face ruddy from the sun, Dean had a buff body and a gentle presence. He was hard to understand; he spoke quietly in jumbled fragments that slipped out from his fractured mind. Seeing the need, Dean worked alongside everyone else, helping to get the house ready. When he volunteered to refinish the floor in one of the rooms, the community agreed to let him, but worried about whether he really knew what he was doing. "If he messes up, we'll just lovingly call it Dean's floor," they decided. But it turned out fine. He remained a friend of the Worker for years.

After 35 years, Karen House continues, with its relationships, graces and characters. But as we gathered last September, some of us seeing each other for the first time in years, we also remembered hard decisions, hurt feelings, deep friendships, intense wounds, great passion, giddy meetings, much prayer, and some sorrow. Yet, always, ultimately, joy in sharing our lives together. ✦



Gloria and Cento, some of the first guests at Karen House

A Beautiful Experiment

by Barbara Prosser

“The Holy Spirit loves to do its thing, its fire and water, where the need is the greatest.” - Matthew Fox

And so it began. With Karen Catholic Worker House in full swing, the community of Workers began to dialogue, discern, and struggle with the decision of how best to serve more people. Keep in mind Karen House was bursting at the seams with guests, and the need was great. It was 1978.

The question of how to offer hospitality to men, women, and children, and to help feed those in the neighborhood that needed help was a burning one. In late 1978, the Vincentian Fathers, who had their foreign missionaries and Provincial offices at 1849 Cass Avenue, offered a proposal. They were to relocate sometime in the next year. There were 55,000 square feet of house that could be utilized as a second Catholic Worker House of Hospitality.

The house had a rich history as the James Clemens mansion, then a residence for the St Joseph Sisters of Carondelet, before operating as the Vincentian Foreign Missionaries and Press.

So in the summer of 1979, I joined a band of women and we began the work of transforming the space into a home which would serve as many as 60 to 75 people and feed up to 150 a night. Shored up by the reward of warm 905 beer and government-supplied, unsalted peanuts at the day’s end, we scraped, painted, cleaned, created sleeping and dining areas, and removed materials left behind by previous owners. There was an estate sale, an extensive basement fire, and a blistering St Louis summer (not necessarily in that order), but in the Fall of 1979, the Men’s section (sleeping for 15) opened for hospitality. In 1980, we were ready for women and children. Somewhere in there, we began a soupline open to the public. At Cass House’s height, we served up to 150 a night.

By our last year, 1987, that number would be halved.

This past fall, the St. Louis Catholic Worker community gathered to celebrate 35 years of presence in the near Northside. Cass House was open, and vibrant, 7 of those 35 years.

We reminisced, shared stories, rattled our memories for facts and dates, and celebrated the good and the awkward of our time together. It was mentioned more than once how the CW experience was an untidy experiment in community living. We are hard on ourselves when we look at our imperfections. So as I began to write this article, I grabbed Tim Pekarek, Karen and Cass House community member, and together we talked about what we did right in those years.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” - Hebrews 13:2

Hospitality. As Tim said so well, we often were the “restart button” from craziness. We offered a time for

men, women, and children to breathe for a few days, weeks, and even months.

At Cass House, we were able to offer hospitality in a place that was clean, warm, and offered an extravagant amount of space. The sheer size of the house was a luxury. It was our blessing, and at times, our curse. We had room for kids to play inside, a yard in which to run around, and a back lot with room for women to watch their kids ride bikes and play ball. It was the equivalent of the front (albeit back) stoop.

“Don’t worry about being effective. Just concentrate on being faithful to the truth.” - Dorothy Day

Room for the Movement- There were many social justice organizations that gathered, planned, recuperated and organized within our walls. We had space and could offer a place to gather



Cass House Community, mid 80's. Zach Davisson, Tommy Askew, Tim Pekarek, Audrey Tomkins, Emmett McAuliff, Carol Donohue, Jeffrey Tomkins, Janet McKennis, Stanley Hackney - Source Unknown



Barbara Prosser lived in the Cass House community for most of seven years. Today she lives with her husband, Phil Heagney, and two teenage boys, Nathaniel and Sam, in the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood, an informal Catholic Worker annex. One of her fondest memories of Cass House is the secret rooftop patio and view of St. Louis from the chapel roof (kudos to Dean for demonstrating how to scale the slate roof).



Cass House - Source Unknown

and broaden the community. Local and national groups knew our space was available and that we were an eager community of supporters. The War Tax Resisters, the Nuclear Freeze movement, CALC, and Witness for Peace came to Cass House. Together we were able to benefit from shared passions. And I know I marched and held vigil more often because I was immersed in the presence of others faithful to the truth.

"Charity is only as warm as those who administer it."

- Dorothy Day

Community of Volunteers- We didn't do the work alone. We couldn't do the work alone. It was on the shoulders of hundreds of volunteers, and I am not exaggerating here, who came through our door (or supported us through prayers and mail), and helped do the work of the house. Together we cleaned (a lot), took house, offered rides, made, served, and washed dishes for countless meals. Our volunteers did repairs from carpentry to plumbing and electrical. And when individuals couldn't do the repair work themselves, they hustled professionals to donate services.

Volunteers took care of us from repairing our cars to restoring our souls. (I may go to my grave never knowing who anonymously paid for repairs on my yellow Plymouth Horizon).

"Every person is defined by the communities she belongs to."

- Orson Scott Card

Our community make up was a life lesson in itself. We came as young, old, male, female, black, white, straight, gay, vowed, laity, single, married, with children. You name it. We were a disparate band of workers. We learned from each other. We taught each other different styles of how to live, to make decisions, to create hospitality, to share recipes, and to discipline children. When it worked it was lovely. And when it didn't it was messy and painful.

"I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort, where we overlap."

Cass House allowed us/called us to offer hospitality with inclusion. Tim reminded me that we were probably one of the few, or only emergency house to offer hospitality to transgendered people. And what struck Tim about the memory of one guest, was how nonplussed the other guests were at what might have been viewed a different lifestyle than theirs. No drama or judgment. Oh the lessons we learned.

"We cannot build up the idea of the apostolate of the laity without the foundation of the liturgy." - Dorothy Day

Admittedly, most of us who formed community came from a Catholic background. And we all had at least a basic knowledge of, and always a respect for, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. But let's be honest, we all struggled with the church and our vision of how to live the gospel, that we felt called to do. Liturgies were important to us, and between Karen House and Cass House, we were fed. There was the sacred space of the chapel, the ways we could celebrate liturgies with inclusion, and the intermittent, but meaningful, morning and eveningsong. In the end, the experiences and lessons from Cass House keep me in the church, even today. It was a reminder that the church is bigger than the Vatican. Our guests reminded us of liturgy every day, in the breaking of the bread.

"One of the verses I have grown to love is the one where Jesus is preparing to leave the disciples and says, "I no longer call you servants.... Instead, I have called you friends" (John 15:15). Servanthood is a fine place to begin, but gradually we move toward mutual love, genuine relationships." - Shane Claiborne

Years later, I am in a neighborhood, Forest Park Southeast, that I love to call the Catholic Worker annex. And together with my husband and two boys we own a building next door to our house that 18 years ago began with housing a young group of women with the idea of intentional community. They chose the name of Sophia House, house of wisdom. Catholic Workers have sprung from the group. I love to think of it as a farm team for the Worker. I continue relationships with volunteers, guests, and community members. My friend Ramona, still marvels at the fact 32 years later, she and her 5 grandchildren are as close to me as anyone in her blood family. In any other world we would be unlikely sisters.

Cass House...an imperfect experiment? Maybe.

But, as Conrad Hall said, "There is a kind of beauty in imperfection." For so many of us...workers, volunteers, and guests, it was a beautiful and necessary part of the people we are today. I believe our relationships and communities are all the better for the time we had together at Cass House. After all, "where there is perfection, there is no story to tell" (Ben Okri). And, in the end, Cass House was only the beginning. ✚



Barb, Crystal, Nodric, and Elizabeth - Source Unknown

Planting Community in Fertile Ground

by Carolyn Griffeth

When my husband, Tery, and I moved to St. Louis as newlyweds with our son Ghana, we never imagined we would someday start a Catholic Worker (CW) community there. Instead, we were drawn to the inspiring experiments in community that already existed, Karen house and the Dorothy Day Cohousing Community. We were also attracted to the ninety-percent abandoned neighborhood of Old North St. Louis, which we saw as a field of dreams ready to be planted.

Another thing that drew us to St. Louis was affordability. For \$7,000 we bought the home that today we call Kabat House, fixed it up with the help of CW friends, and began sharing it with others. A few years later, we bought a smaller house across the street with large yard for just \$10,000 and began gardening, planting fruit trees, and making a home. After the adoption of our second son, Finn Mateo, we dreamed of moving to this smaller house to have a home of our own. Our adopted son, who had been carried across the borders of Guatemala and Mexico in the womb of his immigrant mother, also sparked in us another dream. Why not create a hospitality house to help immigrants? The increase in deportations and the criminalization of those who assist the undocumented further compelled this decision.

Kabat House began as a hospitality house for immigrants in 2006 when my family moved out and four community members, all a couple of years out of college, moved in. Though they could have chosen otherwise, the four, three women and one man, crowded into one bedroom in order to have three other rooms to share. As someone a bit older and more seasoned I often looked upon this and other decisions of this early community and thought, how can this be sustainable? Yet I also appreciated that they were designing their own adventure in community as I had done when I entered the Catholic Worker in Chicago years ago.

Looking back, what I offered these early community members was just a skeleton of a vision and the belief that together we can make our dreams real. Part of the vision that Tery and I put forward was that we and all the Kabat House community members would fund the community ourselves and thus model sharing the little we have to make the world a little better. To this end



Kabat House intentional community in 2012: Dan Schuler, Miranda Duschack, John Nolan, Carolyn Griffeth, Mary Densmore, Heather Hollingsworth, and Ben Schartmann. - Photo by James Meinert

we created a common purse that those who worked outside the community voluntarily put money into to pay the maintenance cost of Kabat House and the costs of hospitality, including such things as helping a deported guest get back on his feet in Mexico. This economic model has helped to create a culture of freely sharing our time, talents, and resources. The six guests of KH, many of which are long-term, contribute to this culture by helping out with cooking, repairs, and chores and by being principal supports to one another. This culture of sharing also benefits the children of this community tremendously; my

sons have so many adults who care about them and do activities with them.

The other thing that helped us get a good start was a big vision of what living in community can be. Having seen community be both a source of healing and of further wounding, we sought to intentionally shape ours to be one of healing and of growth. In Jean Vanier's words: "Community must never take precedence over individual people. It is for people and their growth. In fact, its beauty and unity come from the radiance of each person in their truth, love, and union with others." One way we have attempted to embody this is insisting that each of us cultivate a mutually supportive relationship with everyone and reconcile conflicts directly. We have also stressed that living in community is about creating wonderful lives for ourselves as well as our guests. To this end, we have supported one another



Carolyn Griffeth can often be found in her garden watching Finn and his friends perform flips from the top of the playground to the crash-mat below. She is seeking donations to help some of these neighborhood children join Circus Harmony's social circus program. See back of issue.

in manifesting new dreams in this shared communal soil.

Like the wide open lots of North St. Louis, Kabat House was in its early years an open field with plenty of space for new dreams to take root. A regular cooking schedule sprung up and the tradition of open meals through which a larger extended community has grown. We also began a monthly tradition of having a house meeting where Kabat House guests and community members check in with one another, plan upcoming events, and hang out and have fun. Other routines gave much life for a time, such as learning salsa dancing with our guest, Enrique, and having music jams on Tuesday. Yearly traditions have also taken root, such as our Day of the Dead party, Christmas sing along, craft days, and block parties in which all our neighbors are invited.

Community members have also added some larger pieces to our shared life forging a wider field of relationships. Soccer lovers, such as Sarah Sunseri, helped a regular Sunday soccer game get off the ground, which has become a locus of community for individuals far beyond Kabat House. Individuals from Karen House, Kabat House, and the wider community also began Food Not Bombs, a weekly gathering in which a delicious meal is cooked and shared with folks experiencing homelessness downtown. James Meinert, Mary Densmore, and Miranda Dushack have also furthered Kabat House's connection with New Roots Urban Farm, which has ignited everyone's passion for urban gardening as well as resisting Monsanto. Lastly, my son Finn and I, along with neighborhood mothers, have started Kids' Club, which brings children together to play, and deepens our connection with one another.

Together these pieces have built the external landscape of a thriving culture which no longer resembles a wide open field but rather a lush, multi-layered garden. This landscape includes not only a wealth of traditions but also a wealth of relationships extending beyond the community and into our neighborhood, creating the feel of an urban village. Materially, the external landscape consists of five rehabbed buildings and one side of a city block with garden beds, fruit trees, picnic tables, hammocks, and a playground which serves as the meeting place for neighborhood children.

The internal landscape of our community has similarly grown and developed as we have sought to live more intentionally. One question we are asking is how to eat more healthily and sustainably, which has spurred a series of Round Table discussions, increased food preservation, the addition of bee hives, and adventures in deer hunting. Another is how to become better allies to people of color and better integrated into the lives of our



Image accessed at <http://lvgfsh.de/media/bilder>

neighbors, which has required more effort as our mostly white "extended community" has grown. This growth in the number of friends in the neighborhood has also challenged us to be more inten-

tional about preserving Kabat House as a home for those who live there, rather than an open community center. As our community has grown older, we also struggle to balance community life with our romantic partnerships and marriages, careers and other life-passions, and practices for personal growth. To deepen our prayer lives some of us have begun praying together in the morning; to care better for our bodies others have begun doing yoga together regularly.

Perhaps nothing has shifted how we live as a community more than the introduction of Reevaluation Counseling (RC) aka Co-counseling. For about three years, Kabat House community members have steeped ourselves in this tradition through participating in a weekly class and doing regular sessions. This practice has allowed each of us to better understand and heal the early hurts and experiences of oppression that create conflict and pain in our present lives. In other words, RC has helped us to remove the layers of unreality which keep us separated from one another and from fully living our dreams. We have also developed a compassionate understanding of the way that each one of us struggles and what kind of support can help each move forward. Though we have always sought to create a community that is growth-oriented and healing, RC has uniquely empowered us to be such.

This was never so clear to me as it was on a recent Kabat House retreat, which I spent laying in bed with a horrible migraine while others took turns giving me loving attention. Feeling as if my head might explode, I lay listening to my friends talk about the history of Kabat House and the dreams they have for its future. It brought me great joy to notice the deep sense of ownership and belonging that had grown amongst us, and that the newest community member had been around the Catholic Worker for over three years. I also noticed a growing freedom both in how we relate to one another and in our readiness to clarify our vision. To this end, we composed a mission statement containing these five pillars: Prioritizing Personal Growth, Building Community, Practicing Hospitality, Engaging in Social Analysis and Direct Action, and Embracing Simplicity.

It seems significant that we put at the top of the list prioritizing personal growth—an emphasis often lacking in my experience of the Catholic Worker. Though we have taken inspiration from the Catholic Worker experiments that have gone before us, we have also dared to create something new. Dorothy Day has been quoted as saying, "start small and get smaller." Ours is a small, humble experiment of a group of people trying to create a culture where it is easier for us to grow, and we have grown, just as the open lots around us have grown from being barren to being havens of biodiversity. It is nearly spring, and as I await the blossoming of our fruit trees, I wonder: What new dreams will we plant this season? This question reminds me of a Brazilian Proverb: When we dream alone it is only a dream; when we dream together it is the beginning of reality. Yes, this is just the spirit of the Kabat House community! ✦

A Place We've Called Home

by Annjie Schiefelbein

I considered at least 12 different metaphors to begin this article describing our 35 year-old Catholic Worker community here at Karen House, but none seemed quite apt. The community as a rock, being shaped by the river water of each individual who passes through on the current of time? Too dramatic and does not get at the process of changes being discerned. A house, then; the foundation laid by our foundresses and each person who comes changing a wall color or adding a room. Again that seems so individualistic, where community is, at its best, the opposite of that. Hundreds of us have come through Karen House as community members. The foundation that was laid 35 years ago is indeed strong, but what has not changed perhaps tells more about Karen House than describing what has. We are still amazed by the wisdom of our foundresses and their community of support. So much wisdom for a group of women who claim, still, to not really know what they were doing.

The Karen House community has changed, of course, in countless ways. I will focus on a few that are perhaps the biggest or most significant changes in our years, including our faith tradition, the neighborhood in which we live, our use of technology, and the outlook of caring for our guests and ourselves.

The faith and religion of any given person or group evolves over time. The Karen House community has followed the trend of the Catholic Worker Movement as a whole in the area of

faith. I have not been to a gathering of Catholic Workers, either on a regional or national level, where this topic was not a focus. For many houses, including Karen House, this has been an area of pain as well as growth.

In the movement as a whole, houses historically identified as Catholic have had to decide what to keep and what to throw away as a larger percentage of new members are not Catholic, and perhaps not theistic. For the first 20 years of Karen House, faith in the form of Catholicism was the practiced norm, shared by most community members. The community prayed every Tuesday evening at mass, and for years the community prayed with each other and the Cass House community several mornings a week. There were times in the liturgical year when the community had 24 hour vigils in our chapel. There was prayer at each community meeting, and most members identified as Catholic.

In the mid to late 90s, the demographic in the Catholic Worker movement and at Karen House began to change. New members weren't necessarily Catholic, and some existing community members began to question their place or welcome within the church. Mass became less meaningful to some, and thus became less of a common practice. Some in community felt uncomfortable with theistic language. The beliefs (or non-beliefs) were diverse.

I think that everyone then (and now) respected the tradition of the Catholic Worker Movement being within the Catholic Church, even if they themselves were not a part of it. We tried

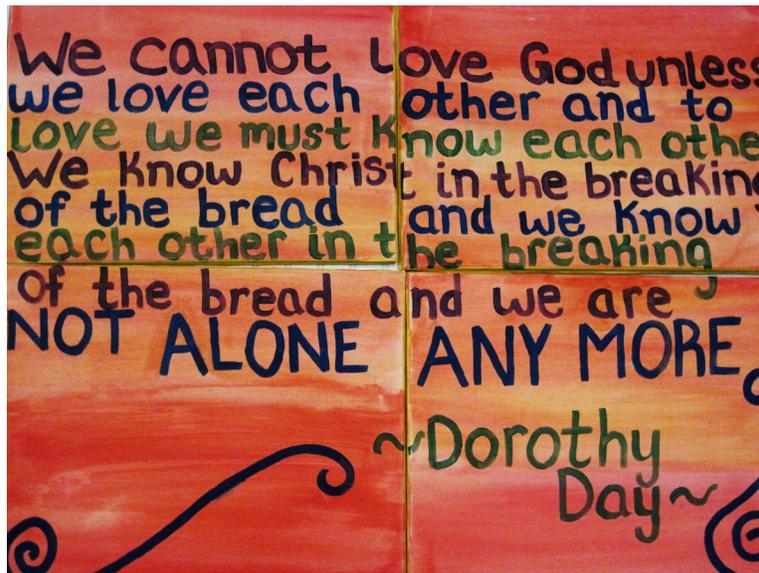


Photo of artwork in the Karen House dining room. - Ashleigh Packard



Annjie Scheiefelbein is petitioning to add, "Care for the feral dog" to the Works of Mercy.



Karen House community in the mid 80's - Sharon Cummins, Delores Gerschman, Mary Dutcher, Virginia Druhe, Mary Ann McGivern, Ben Plato, Jim Plato, Mark Scheu, Katrina Plato, Teka Childress, Joe Angert, Clare Bussjaeger, Harriette Bagget, Ann Manganaro, Karin Tanquist, Pat Coy, Ellen Rehg, Myrrah Rehg. - Source unknown.

hard in those early years of this huge change. Those that were Catholic worked to be inclusive and willing to adapt to this new, more spiritually diverse community, but found it devastating to lose a core part of their identity of the community. Those that were not Catholic worked to honor the community's foundation, but found it difficult to respect a tradition that was either not meaningful or harmful to them. We tried not to change any of our structures, but non-participation in a structure changes it. So Catholic Masses were attended by less and less people; mostly friends and volunteers and less by community members. Retreats and prayer at meetings became a challenge; we found it difficult to use language that could be meaningful to all but offensive to none. We alienated members of our extended community for whom our Catholic identity was paramount.

During this time, we experimented with different spiritual practices that would meet people's needs. We came up with the idea of a community-led liturgy once a month in lieu of Mass. A community member would lead a service with the expectation that every community member would be present. We agreed on parameters and moved forward. But what we found was a practice that was acceptable to everyone might be so watered down that it lacked depth. So, over the years, we started to slack in our participation. This hurt the community in many ways, but also had an unintended consequence. The Masses and prayer services had historically been one of the many ways potential community members came to the house and our community. Decreased community focus on those

practices meant that new members might be less likely to have a strong faith component.

Looking back now I remember the pain but also how hard we all tried to respect ourselves and love one another. It is a difficult balance. How does a community that values inclusion also define expectations and establish core beliefs? How can we imagine including or rejecting someone, often someone we already love, based on their spirituality, or lack thereof? Combining people who are Catholic with people who have been hurt by, or who view the Catholic Church as an actively discriminatory group is not easy. I continue to be proud of how hard we try. And these days, I think we are coming closer than ever. We still have Mass 3 out of 4 Tuesday nights of the month. Community Liturgy still lives, and while not perfect, is better than it ever has been. We reaffirmed a few years ago that we are a community of faith which has many expressions and identities. We have renewed prayer at meetings and during our retreats. Like the Karen House and Cass House communities in the 70s and 80s, we pray (with some Kabat House community members) every Monday morning at 7:15. None of it is perfect, because we are not. But through it all we have tried very hard to abide with consideration, respect, and love for one another. And we continue doing so.

Great change has also come to our neighborhood in the past 35 years, as well as our communities' participation in it. The neighborhood now would be unrecognizable compared to how I found it for the first time in 1992. Katrina Plato counted 34 fires in abandoned houses close to Karen House in 1993, and describes the yards and fields being littered with used needles. Students who come here for urban plunges still liken our neighborhood to a war-zone. There are still a lot of vacant houses, and miles of empty fields where other abandoned houses used to be.

But there is a newness, too, with intermingled blocks of new development, and middle and upper income housing. The new houses started to be built in the early part of the 2000s; they seemed to be both overpriced and cheaply made, contrasting starkly to the beautiful, large brick homes that have been here since the late 1880s. They continued to fill in the gaps around us until the housing collapse a few years back. The new development has increased the overall population of our neighborhood, but forced out those who were unable to pay the new property taxes, as well as our friends who had made their homes in the abandoned buildings close to the services offered downtown. This makes it hard to be enthusiastic when well-intentioned visitors comment on the neighborhood being cleaned up. Crime is far less but still very prevalent. Gunshots and killings are still, sadly, a part of our reality.

The other notable element of the St. Louis Catholic Worker

community and the neighborhood is our extension out into it. Throughout the history of Karen House there were examples of people either close to the community or in the community living near, but not in Karen House. This mostly occurred at the 18th street four-family flat and Little House. It has also been true in every community that individual community members stayed close to guests, often after both had moved on. These practices took on a new life with the creation of the Dorothy Day Co-Housing Community, the dreamchild of Teka Childress, in 2001. The dream was to have a longer, more mutual community which would include both Karen House community-types and former guests. It was a beautiful and challenging experiment. In a significant change for the house, Teka moved out (she had lived at Karen House since the year after it opened). Other community members moved into the neighborhood to participate in the Co-Housing Community. Co-Housing lasted five years, and the roots that took hold have radically transformed our lives in the neighborhood.

Prior to co-housing, community members leaving Karen House also left the neighborhood. There weren't many precedents for staying in the neighborhood or staying connected to the house. Now, several other Catholic Worker Houses have opened, and lots of other like-minded folks have moved into the neighborhood. There are houses offering hospitality, an urban farm called New Roots, and a broader community of people who are inspired by and trying to live out the Catholic Worker lifestyle as best as we can.

Looking forward into our neighborhood's future, we are concerned about Paul McKee's Northside Regeneration plans (see previous RoundTable Peoples History) and what they will mean for our homes (including Karen House.) But we are cheered to be facing the future together and discovering what new and creative ways we can build a new society within the shell of the old.

Our community also struggles with the age-old conflict of self-care versus care of the other. As it has been described to me, the Karen House community may have had this balance down in the 1980s. The stories that I've heard describe a time when individuals did creative things to take care of themselves, spent regular time with other individuals in the community and as a community all-together, gently challenged each other, supported each other, and overall had a good balance. Whether or not that is true, I think that by the time I got to community, the pendulum had swung more toward care for the other. Caring for the guests was the priority, but at times it was at the cost of our caring for ourselves and for each other.

I think we are starting to realize that while caring for others is noble and necessary, if the focus of the community is only this, we are excluding ourselves

from that care. This makes it more difficult to be in Karen House for a very long, or a very healthy time.

Food is one good example of this. We have held the value of making our house meals as simply as possible from the donations we receive, and doing our best to make these meals nice. But for a community member to live long-term in our house, this often means eating donated food, some of which is not very healthy. Eating only dumpstered and donated food meets some values, but not others.

Our awareness has led to great discussions over the past years that will hopefully continue our movement in a healthy direction. There is a greater sense of assessing and caring for the wellness of the community as a whole as it's own good, not just as a means toward the end of doing our work. If we are building a new society, shouldn't we be promoting taking care of ourselves and our relationships? These are the questions we're asking. It's an exciting time.

In our continual effort to challenge the oppression of our time, we have also taken great strides in our understanding of and welcome of the LGBTQ community. Many years ago we publicly professed our desire to be inclusive of LGBTQ individuals and groups. Karen House therefore offers hospitality to transgendered folks, in any stage of transition, which means that we have people whose birth-assigned sex was male but who identify as women, as guests, and vice versa. We have made public statements expressing our explicit inclusivity to all, regardless of age, ability, gender-identity, nationality, sexual orientation, income, and race. To that end, our all-white com-



Karen House community in 2012 - Tim Cosentino, Braden Tobin, Colleen Kelly, Tim Pekarek, Daniel Ryskiewich, Annjie Schiefelbein, Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Ellen Dempsher, Sarah Latham, and Sheila Donnelly.

Inspira Memori 35 y



"Eash person who comes to the Catholic Worker forms and changes who we are." Teka Childress



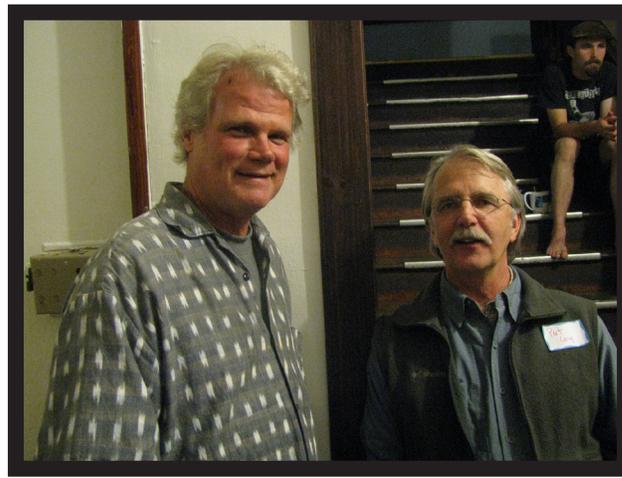
"I can never say no to donations." Mary Ann McGivern

(RT response: MAM, you really can't blame this on the Worker!)



"I find myself a representative for people who are struggling through their lives. By default, Karen House has cursed me with being a representative for all that Karen House is about." Kenneth Pruitt

tions and es from ears



"I want to thank the community for making The Round Table what it is. . . such a part of the Catholic Worker. . . taking tradition seriously. . ." Pat Coy



"One of the blessings. . . living in such a diverse and wonderful community has convinced me that even at my age, I don't have to stop growing." Celestia Gaudreault



Karen House--"Where once long ago our baby slept peacefully on a pile of coats in the back of the dining room--a cockroach crept quietly up and down the altar cloth, and community and guests and friends sang in one voice at midnight mass." Marty King



"We are still amazed by the wisdom of our foundresses and their community of support." Annjie Schiefelbein

"We've been both inspired by (you know-- continuing to live simply after leaving the CW), and ruined by (you know--continuing to smell milk before it is poured.)" Jenny Truax





munity has decided to make anti-racism training a priority and focus for our community this year.

As the world of technology has moved forward, the Karen House community has not been immune. This has had both positive and negative consequences. If a guest is arriving late at night after we close, in the past, she would have had to spend a lot of time and effort to find a phone, get through on the Karen House line (have you ever tried to get through?) and get a person to answer. Now, most guests have at least one of the cell phone numbers of a community member, and access is much easier. Between community members as well, it is easier to get a hold of each other (for example to tell whoever is home that a guest will be late.) More access for ourselves and for our guests is often a good thing.

Most college graduates have the newest technology, so we are introduced to each new thing as new community members move in and it is a part of their daily reality. We struggle with the difficult balance of wanting our guests to have access, but trying to stay apart from the toxic, anti-personalistic new technologies that often serve to limit relationships, not enhance them. It is an old Catholic Worker paradox of wanting to reject certain things while wanting our guests to have access to what they have been denied. In an age where access to the internet and computers leads to increased opportunity, we have been able to offer that access to our guests and incorporate it into our tutoring program.

But we are aware that access to technology comes at a cost. Our cell phones and laptops directly cause the suffering of those who make these products, actively pollute the earth, impoverish other countries, and in many ways are the antithesis of the world we are trying to create as Catholic Workers. The constant evolution of technology has also challenged our value of consensus-decision making. The technology is often upon us

and ubiquitous before we realize that it has altered our house and lives before we have had a chance to discuss it.

At our 35th anniversary weekend, it was astonishing to watch and participate in the conversations about 'how it was done when I was at Karen House'. People from every generation of Karen House shared stories. People from earlier days explained where particular rules came from (some considered arcane by latter communities until they heard the stories.) Noting the differences from one community to another was fun and very informative. But the most telling feature, I thought, were the things that have not changed. We heard about the foundresses' decision, to make decisions by consensus. Thirty-five years later, we still strongly believe in the power, creativity, and cooperative beauty of consensus. The founding community decided to live their lives with the women and children, not to be staff or social workers. They struggled with trying to reject power and privilege as much as possible. Today the struggle continues. Personalism, and the thought that the person in front of us is more important than a rule has persevered. Today we continue to believe in the importance of bringing Catholic Worker thought to the attention of the world, through the Round Table, which was started with the founding of the house, and with Round Table discussions and clarifications of thought. Thirty-five years ago volunteers were amazed that a group of people get to live out their values, putting their time and talents into something that they cared so deeply for. Last week, a volunteer said the same thing to me.

I think and hope that if you were able to time travel and visit Karen House at any point in our 35 year history, you would get the same feeling upon walking into the house. You would of course be aware of the chaos, screaming, running children, donations filling the corners, and probably see that the floor needs to be swept. But you would also sense, at most points in your visits, a warmth and welcome; a sincerity and love that may have been uncommon in the world 35 years ago, and may be uncommon in the world now. For 35 years we have been struggling and failing at this beautiful dream of community and love. But there is something of grace and beauty at Karen House that makes community and guests alike consider this home, even years after they've left. Maybe because no matter what metaphor you use to describe the community and all of it's many incarnations and changes, everyone who has come through our doors has left a piece of themselves here. Those pieces continue to shape and strengthen us, and allow us to continue welcoming new seekers into our fold. ✚

The Spirit of the Worker

by Becky Hassler

It's hard to say when Grace House came into being. No doubt it was officially christened by John Kavanaugh, SJ with a living room full of people in September 2003. But it really started back on N. 18th street. I was praying in front of my wood burning stove on Good Friday, 2002, when I just knew I needed to move on Helen St., not only move there, but buy a house there. What? Me buy a house—and on Helen?!? Helen was the street where our co-housing families lived—and I wanted to be right in the midst of them...

My journey with the Catholic Worker started at Cass House in 1984 when I volunteered there for a year. I came back to St. Louis in 1989 and started Nursing School at St. Louis University. During that time, I started volunteering at Karen House, taking house, and going to Tuesday liturgy. I joined the community in 1992, living at Karen House (KH) and also working in Regional hospital's ER.

It was when I went back to grad school—still working at Regional and still part of the community—that I decided to move to the apartment on N 18th st.—a stone's throw from Karen House. We'd have our community meetings there, and at some time I started having some of the children of the guests of KH live with me for short periods of time.

Ariana, Shannon, Shameka, pregnant Olivia, Christen and Christopher in their first three months of life, all called the three-room apt at 1827A N. 18th St. home at one time or another.

In July, 2003, I, along with Olivia and her 3 month-old twins moved onto Helen Street. Elizabeth joined us in September. Such a sweet, sweet time...

I never actually chose the house I was to buy, just asked if there was one available, a shell of one was, rehabbed by neighbors, volunteers, community and novice contractors.

We'd have our co-housing meetings here in the living room, six former guests of KH and their children, eight or so of community and friends of KH, trying to share our lives together...

Olivia stayed 2 1/2 yrs, then Christen, Andy (Katie), Lauren X2, Susannah, Rob, Shannon, Pallavi, Blen... Never an "official" Catholic Worker, but certainly one in spirit.

I stopped being an official community member about five or six years ago - while I was in Midwifery School, working at Grace Hill and offering hospitality at Grace House. It was a very difficult decision for me, and I felt bad that I couldn't take a regular house shift at that point, or help out in other ways with the work of the house, nothing much more than show up at our weekly community meeting.

I'll be honest and tell you that though I sometimes fantasize of living close enough to Tower Grove Park to make that

my yard, I could never really imagine my life anywhere but surrounded by these people I now depend on to help me continually become who I am called to be. To eat, pray, love with this community of my nearest and dearest make me part of who I am. The principles of the Catholic Worker are a challenge to all of us, and it looks different in some ways to all of us, but for me there is an ongoing pull to the core of these values, to continually become the core of who I am. It is imperfect, no doubt, but my desire to live in a way that I believe is right and just, beautiful and sustainable, keeps me connected like it's my very oxygen. I count on it to keep me

alive—alive in the way I so want to live.

The reunion was such a gift to me, to see multiple generations of people all desiring the same. I want to forever remain a Catholic Worker; there is always room for me and I am so grateful.

I feel that my life as a Catholic Worker continues on—with each decade of my life, ever growing, ever changing, but always full of gratitude for this little space in north St. Louis I've called home for almost half my life. I am continually inspired, challenged, and loved for who I am. ✦



Becky Hassler is delighted to be starting a midwifery practice at St. Mary's Hospital as a faculty member for St. Louis University!

Parenting with Catholic Worker Principles

By: Jim Plato

When I was asked to write an article about how living in the Catholic Worker, and in particular Karen House, influenced my parenting I immediately thought of the decision Katrina and I made when we found out our oldest, Ben, was on his way. We decided to live in such a way that one of us would always be with our children through their growing years (Abraham, Francis and Sam came along in quick succession.) This meant only one of us would be working outside the home or as it turned out, we practiced economic sharing, remaining in the intentional community and taking a stipend so that I could continue to work full-time at the Worker. The stipend was taken from a fund created out of donations from several community members who worked outside Karen House.

My experience of parenting in the Catholic Worker became both personal and political. Personal, in that our sons' first experience of family was growing up with the poor and marginalized, both at Karen House and later at Bethlehem Catholic Worker Farm in Chehalis, Washington. The personal became the political as I attempted to raise my sons with an awareness that a life well-lived is a life lived for others.

On a personal level I wanted them to realize that the "poor" have a lot to teach us about our fragility and spiritual growth, precisely because they have nothing to offer us but themselves—simple and raw as that is. Experiencing this has enabled them to be open to the fact that they have something to learn from everyone they encounter, especially from those whom they least expect—the down and out, the homeless, the "bums." Experiencing that vulnerability had its effects later in life for them. An episode from a few years back may serve to illustrate this point.

When the boys were young and attending public school I talked to each of their teachers and told them I did not want my children to be expected to stand and recite the pledge of allegiance; I believed it to be propaganda, especially at such an early age. How often do people place their hand over their heart and mindlessly babble the words never thinking of its implications?



Jim and Katrina, their sons, and Teka and Becky. - Source Unknown

In a Civics class in his sophomore year in high school Abraham refused to stand for the pledge. His teacher became angry and sent him to the principal for disciplinary action! The Principal told him she wished she could force him to say it but knew she could not legally do this. Abraham remained steadfast in his principles, explaining to her that he had thought it through and come to the conclusion that he could not in good conscience say it. He returned to his Civics class to discover a new found respect from some of his classmates. In a conversation I had later that day with the principal I expressed my belief that in an authentic democracy, it is the viewpoints of the dissenting minority (in this case a minority of one!) that need the most protection, suggesting it could be a fruitful topic for discussion in a Civics class!

What I have tried to do in raising my sons is to help them develop discriminating minds and open hearts: To look at the world through the eyes of the poor, to love and care for all, and to be skeptical toward what is placed before them in our culture so they can make informed and thoughtful decisions about what is truly life-giving. I hope they love and care for themselves and others in all their weaknesses and strengths and have compassion for themselves and others so they can, as Peter Maurin put it so well, "Make a world where it is easier to be good." ✚



Jim Plato deeply touched the group gathered for the 35th anniversary by reminding us how important it is to let each other know how we love one another. He remembered our dear friend Mark Scheu, no longer with us, and talked of how he so wanted Mark to know how he had been loved.

Adventures in Urban Farming

By: Mary Densmore

Growing up in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia, I don't ever remember having the thought that I wanted to be a farmer when I grew up. My strength has never been to have elaborate future plans, but in many ways I am okay with that. By some miracle my path has brought me to the St Louis Catholic Worker and into a life of not just hospitality but also urban farming. In many ways I've come full circle in my time as an urban farmer. There was the initial phase of learning, growing a deeper connection to the earth, and the excitement of eating delicious food that I tended to from the seed to the harvest. But after some years into this experiment and the deeper my knowledge and love grew, I couldn't help but realize how limited urban farming is when compared to the space, quality of soil, and security that life on a rural farm offers. I found Peter Maurin's vision for us to return to living off the land and the creation of farm and craft society deeply inspiring.

As I reflect on this and begin the planning for our upcoming growing season, I realize there is no way to compare urban farming to rural life on the land. Instead, I look for ways urban farms can more deeply connect those of us who have a calling to live in the houses of hospitality, that Dorothy so strongly encouraged, to Peter's vision of life on the land. I also believe that urban farming in St. Louis significantly adds to our lives as Catholic Workers particularly in the ways it helps us build community, partake in manual labor, engage in resistance, and educate both ourselves and others. After all, Peter encouraged villages instead of homesteads, so here in our St. Louis village, we have come together to add farming and con-

nection to the earth to our lives as Catholic Workers.

No farm is influenced by a single person nor does any farm benefit a single person, rather they are places of sharing in goods and labor, history, knowledge, and growth. As many of us here in St. Louis engage in gardening or urban farming endeavors, we continue to see how gardening perpetuates connection with each other, and how much we need support, practical help, and encouragement from each other to succeed. I recently attended a talk by Jeff Lowenfells, a true soil enthusiast, where he had us all laughing and on the edge of our seat as he shared about his research and ex-



James, Mary, and Daniel dig up sweet potatoes at New Roots Urban Farm.
- Photo by Ashleigh Packard

periments with mycorrhizal fungi. He showed how they form mutually beneficial relationships with the plants. The fungus, bacteria, microbes, protozoa, worms and other living things form a thriving community in the soil. No need to be an expert gardener to understand that things in nature work together for the good of the whole. Just as the Catholic Worker was often described by Peter as an "organism", we are continuing to see how our adventures in urban farming help us to build mutually beneficial relationships of deep connection. It benefits our community, our relationship with food, and our connection to our neighbors and other farmers.

In addition to the large gardens at Teka Childress House, Farm House, Castle House, the Good Thief, Little House and the Green Bee, we also have the joy of tending to New Roots (often referred to by us as "the farm".) New Roots, one of the original urban farms in the city, was created eight years ago with the idea of having a connection to the Catholic Worker houses of hospitality. Like a seed that lays dormant waiting to germinate, we have in recent years come back to this initial idea as many of us who are involved in New Roots are also living in Karen House and Kabat House. I now



Mary Densmore just keeps getting more and more fascinated by growing food and taking care of the soil. Living in the cycle of life feeds her spirituality and connection with the Feminine Divine. She recently participated in her first-ever chicken slaughter.

see why having New Roots, a large urban farm, connected to these larger houses of hospitality makes perfect sense. Looking at these obvious advantages I can see past the limitations of urban farming and instead joyfully grow food in the city. New Roots is very close to both Karen House and Kabat House allowing us to spend time there daily and organize our time to be there as little or as much as we like. We can also easily include our guests in the processing, harvesting and preparation of food. This allows us to widen the circle of the healing that comes with a connection to the earth and our food.

Additionally, there is a particularly unique juxtaposition that growing food, raising chickens, and keeping bees in the center of the city offers to our lives as Catholic Workers, especially in regards to the ways we work for justice and work in close connection with the marginalized. While the capitalistic culture that dominates the city encourages workers to sit for long hours in temperature controlled office buildings just blocks away, we turn compost, spread mulch, sow cover crop and build new garden beds. Likewise, there have been days when I have spent the morning at New Roots planting and harvesting heirloom varieties of vegetables and gone straight to the gates of Monsanto's Headquarters to call for an end to GMOs (and more recently to the headquarters of Peabody Coal to demand an end to mining.) This year we will provide food for a food pantry that would otherwise be giving out only canned, processed or packaged food. And, many times I have walked out the doors of Kabat House feeling discouraged by the weight of injustice and oppression in the world and find that stepping into the garden and digging my hands into soil grounds me in a profound way, reminding me of all that is good and alive, and giving me the energy to keep going. I have found that farming provides balance to my life in a community full of people and constant social interactions. I know that on some days, I can go to New Roots to work, be alone, and gain the needed clarity and perspective that solitude offers to my life (and not have to interact with anyone other than our cat.)

Peter Maurin, a huge advocate of "agronomic universities" would probably be pleased to see urban farms being used as centers of education where information is exchanged and knowledge shared. While urban farming is not a new experiment, it's becoming increasingly popular with not just Catholic Workers but also ur-

ban dwellers from all walks of life. We are all learning together the benefits of growing in our backyards. Recently in St Louis, a group of farmers has started coming together monthly for an "Urban Farmer Meet-up." Similar to having roundtable discussions for clarification of thought, we come to share ideas and ask questions. We have brainstormed how to resist Monsanto and their pervasive funding of garden projects, how to start a local seed bank, and how to build community with one another as individuals partaking in similar work. In a less formal sense we are learning how to do this more with each other in our immediate neighborhood. At New Roots, we host workshops for ourselves, our guests, and neighbors. This past summer we led workshops on making soap, pickling and preserving food, starting a backyard garden and making kombucha and hard cider. From these practices, I've seen the way urban farming is a stepping stone towards a life more connected to the earth—from small steps like growing spinach instead of buying it to a bigger step like choosing to leave the city and live rurally. We've seen this happen with friends and former New Roots collective members. In a way, maybe one of the most important things about urban farming is the way that it grows farmers. It provides us the space and support to learn and fall in love with farming without having to leave the people we care so deeply about in the city.

It is in reflecting on all these reasons that I tell myself I am not yet ready to leave my life as an urban farmer. I'm continually invited to follow my calling to balance life in an urban hospitality house with a life connected with the earth. And while our projects may not be comparable to larger rural farms (Carl Kabat is quick to remind us we are gardeners and not farmers,) we still manage to grow hundreds of pounds of produce, ranging from delicious fruits to over 30 types of vegetables (not including all the different varieties), and are still able to cover crop and rest some beds each season. Last summer when I came home from a day at New Roots, and Enrique our guest from Cuba told me "Maria, parece campesina" (Mary, you look like a peasant farmer,) I took it as a huge compliment and smiled to myself thinking, "I don't know how I ended up with a life like this but I sure am glad." While it's hard to say what the future will hold for me and my life, I know it will include working the earth with my hands wherever I am. ✦



Heather Hollingsworth, Sheila Donnelly, Jon Heyde, and Stephen Inman enjoying some urban farming activities. - Photos by Ashleigh Packard

Eliminating Racism from Within

By: James Meinert

Note: Many times I use the term, “we”, referring to white Catholic Workers. This is not to exclude people of color but it is the white Catholic Workers, myself included, that I’m calling out.

This past summer the Midwest Catholic Worker gathering began with a large presentation on eliminating racism. The topic is pertinent to Catholic Workers here in the Midwest and beyond as we struggle to continue our prophetic work in the world. Something we noticed, which has been noticed many times before, is how white the Catholic Worker (CW) is. While many Catholic Workers may struggle for workers’ rights, against poverty, against war and violence, all of which disproportionately affect people of color, those who choose to join the CW are overwhelmingly white.

Looking Back

From its inception, the CW has been involved in the struggle for justice including racial injustice. Dorothy would often report on worker’s conditions, especially those of African Americans, race dynamics, and racism. And there were more than just words. She put her own life on the line to support the work of desegregation at the interracial farm Koinonia and was shot at while vigiling there. Peter also began what would today be called a popular education center in Harlem. Peter’s vision was to have a center with shared leadership in an almost entirely black neighborhood. Later, throughout the struggles for civil rights, many Catholic Workers marched in solidarity in the South.

In addition to solidarity work we also need to recover the stories of black leadership within the movement. There have been several CW houses started by African Americans. These houses in D.C, Memphis, and Chicago were started by people committed to the vision of the CW but also rooted in the needs of their area. Helen Caldwell Day started the Blessed Martin House of Hospitality in Memphis where she ran a daycare for parents in the neighborhood who had to work but couldn’t afford care. Arthur Falls started the first Chicago CW. He didn’t consider the hospitality work very important. He wrote that, “the greater need in Chicago was an opportunity for ‘intellectual exploration and an avenue for bringing together white and colored Catholics for mutual enterprise.’” Pete’s Place, a CW drop-in center currently operating in Chicago was co-founded by an African American and a white. But while it is

important to not forget the stories of black leadership, the movement remains predominantly white, and it is time to start taking responsibility for changing that and eliminating whatever racism is operating.

The St. Louis CW has a history similar to many of the other houses in the Midwest of being almost entirely run by white people. This isn’t something that has escaped people’s attention; real efforts have been made to change that. In 2000 a group formed the Dorothy Day Co-Housing community in an effort to create a community of equality that crossed both race and class. This, however, ended; some have said the reasons for that were the difficulties in overcoming the challenges created by racism and class divisions. In 2006 the St. Louis community published a Round Table titled “Privilege – Crossing the Divide,” in which white privilege and racism were analyzed and put out there for all to see. Maybe someday looking back, we will see that these were the first steps in transforming the CW in St. Louis to being recognizably anti-racist.

What is getting in the way?

So what is holding us back? Robert Jensen, author of [The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege](#), identifies the core fear that holds racism in place to be essentially losing whiteness as the norm. As Catholic Workers we must ask ourselves, then, how have we confused protecting an inner norm of whiteness with protecting the tenets of the Catholic Worker? Are we afraid to have the CW change drastically from what it is into something else? Hopefully thinking about this together can help us move toward making some real changes and uncovering some assumptions that had gone unquestioned.

Several ideas have been tossed around as I’ve talked to people about this and from reading Tom Cornell’s excellent critique of Pax Christi and the racism within. One question is: Are we more committed to values or tenets than we are to people or communities? Do we act in the world in a way that puts CW ideals before “the needs of those who suffer the violence we oppose and without accountability to those for whom we seek to speak and act?” To whom are we accountable?

Also, does our language perpetuate an internal culture that is attractive only to the more privileged, particularly white and middle class? For example, having fought one’s way out of poverty one may ask whom it benefits to voluntarily accept poverty? Could we emphasize simplicity or solidarity with the earth and oppressed instead? For those raised in communities targeted by state violence,



James Meinert is excited about the dream to start a St. Louis Catholic Worker farm connected with the CW community (See bottom of page 22).

"nonviolence" seems to communicate passive acceptance of oppression. Instead could we emphasize direct confrontation with oppressive forces?

Have we created white middle class cultures in our houses that we presume to be normative? Many houses have had people of color join the core community, but rarely have they stayed long. In St. Louis this is the case. Sometimes this is a sign of a culture that is not willing to examine its own presumptions or back the leadership and ideas of people coming from different perspectives.

The culture of volunteerism/self-sacrifice in the CW needs to be looked at hard. For those who come from groups who have been used by capitalism as servants and slaves, not getting paid for work done might not hold the same level of attractiveness as it does for the more privileged who have been given so much without working for it and want to reject this injustice. One story of St. Elizabeth's house in Chicago relates that the Workers there began to think that what their neighbors needed most were jobs. The house transitioned to hiring some of the people from their neighborhood to run the shelter. Some have claimed that it lost its "Catholic Worker identity" but does that simply mean it put the needs of people above the abstract tenets of the CW?

Have we valued antiwar work or anti-poverty work more than anti-racism work (and anti-sexism, and anti-heterosexism). Do we fail to see how these are interconnected?

Looking Forward

Many in the St. Louis community have decided that it's time for a change. But sometimes this is where it gets tricky. Many predominantly white groups have made a mistake at this point that perpetuates racism by simply asking "how do we get more people of color in our group?" This question assumes that your group looks attractive to people of color. But if a group is already all white, there is probably some unaware racism going on that white people have trouble seeing, but may be obvious to people of color. Instead of asking how to get them to join you, how do you get yourself to join them? So what to do? Here in St. Louis we have had some retreats discussing our unaware racism and the following ideas are ways we are moving forward. One basic one is building friendships with people of color—we do this realizing that as white people our lives have been limited, being cut off from people of color, and having these connections will enrich our lives. This often brings up embarrassment for white people (isn't it racist to want to be someone's friend just because she is Latina?) But are we white people more welcoming of other whites just because they are white? This embarrassment has been keeping us segregated too long and we haven't yet unintentionally de-

segregated our world so it's time to do it intentionally. While you still get to choose who you are connected to, don't ignore that we white people keep "choosing" mostly other white people.

Another step is backing and supporting organizations that are led by people of color, even if an organization doesn't line up exactly with CW values. Make their struggle your struggle. This is where the values of rootedness and connection in an actual community that we are accountable to become more important than other abstract values.

An important move is also forming a white-allies support group—a group that meets regularly to help hold each other accountable to taking steps towards ending racism. Choosing to be a white ally in the fight against racism means pushing against a lot of enculturation that discourages that very thing and a support group can often be helpful so that we don't give up no matter how difficult it feels.

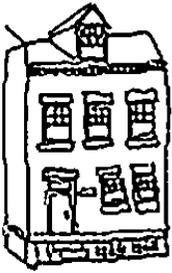
This is work that we must do as Catholic Workers if we want to eliminate oppression and injustice. All oppression is linked and we will never end war or poverty with racism in place. Though it may feel like adding

another responsibility to an already overwhelming life, the work of eliminating racism is not burdensome with a good support group. Rather, it is liberating; it frees us from the chains that have held us in a place of isolation, disconnection, fear, shame, guilt, and embarrassment. If our goal is to integrate the Catholic Worker, we will probably fail, but if our goal is to end racism by taking whatever steps necessary, then the Catholic Worker, in whatever form it may exist come fifty years from now, will no longer be the white middle class group it is today. ✦



Original artwork from onelawforall.org.uk. Edited by James Meinert

1. <http://www.catholicworker.org/roundtable/pmlegacytext.cfm?Number=65>
2. Ibid.
3. <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=722&SearchTerm=love>
4. <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytextcfm?TextID=840&SearchTerm=civil%20rights%20movement>
5. <http://www.uscatholic.org/church/2008/07/built-living-stones>
6. <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint2.cfm?TextID=640>
7. http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/american_catholic_studies/v123/123.2.rice.html#img01
8. Ibid.
9. Jensen, Robert. What White People Fear, Yes! Magazine, Spring 2010 Issue 53; page 40.
10. This article is especially insightful and I drew much from it. For anyone interested in thinking more about the issues presented in this article I recommend it. <http://paxchristiusa.org/tag/pax-christi-anti-racism-team/>
11. Resource at <http://karenhousecw.org/documents/DismantlingRacismResourceBook.pdf> See pages 7-8.
12. The transition of St. Elizabeth's from a CW house to a Social Agency is documented in an article by Barbara Blaine in the Summer 1994 issue of Taking Sides, and a feature article by Sean Callahan, "Open House," in Daily Southtown, 10 November 1996. Much thanks to Phil Runkel for finding this information.



From Kabat House

Mary Densmore

Like many of the great things in life, communities pass through times of change. We've passed through times of growth and welcomed many new friends, but now we are experiencing a period of change not surrounding the coming and going of others, but a period of placing roots, settling down and growing deeper in our relationships with one another.

Coming out of summer, many of us in community and especially those of us who live at Kabat House were feeling a little exhausted of our larger open meals on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

What once started as smaller, irregular meals eventually became larger social gatherings. I contribute much of their success to the amazingly talented and dedicated cooks and recognize that they were a weekly touchstone of connection and fun. People returned week after week with such regularity and inviting their friends that on some weeks we were reaching numbers upwards of 40 or 50 people. Coming into winter and realizing we could no longer scatter among picnic tables, under trees, or on benches in the yard, we knew we had to make some changes.

We also recognized how our guests often were not present at the meals; they were hiding in their rooms or would come just long enough to eat a little food and then run. As we discerned how to make some changes, we knew we needed to alter not just a dinner schedule, but shift the culture of the house away from a place of constant social activity: From a place towards a home where all of us, especially the guests, could rest, be at ease, and feel safe and comfortable. Through all the discernment and meetings, I kept thinking, "What is a home? What would it look like to create a home here?" While in many ways I am still sitting with these questions, we were certain we were ready to slow down the opening and closing of the front door. We eventually decided to take a break from the open meals and limit the amount the house is used by those who don't live there.

In the months that followed these decisions we weren't sure what would come of them. The weeks passed and fewer and fewer friends came by, and I felt the loss of our open meals and seeing many people I love daily. But in shifting my focus towards hospitality (which was one of the main reasons for

making the changes to begin with,) I began to see how organically our household was beginning to develop, how there was less of a distinction between "worker" and "guest", but instead a group of people working together to live together well. We meet once a month to intentionally check-in about how things are going in the house, but it is in the day-to-day interactions and subtleties that I see a new culture developing.

I couldn't have been more delighted with this culture-shift in our house. The changes were slow, small and almost unnoticeable, but looking back, I realize we have come a long way.

There may be no more late night sing-a-longs with friends, but William and Enrique tell me jokes from their childhood as I brush my teeth; no more big open meals, but monthly potlucks and roundtables on the first Fridays of every month. And, my favorite, I spend way less time cleaning and putting away things, but instead the house is cleaner and better maintained as we all take responsibility for the

house and check-in with each other when work isn't getting done.

The guests are now not only present at meals, but also usually the ones to prepare and clean up. Often we will share multiple meals together in the same day, and we are learning to enjoy each others cooking. They eat my usual oatmeal with raisins and apples for breakfast, and I thoroughly enjoy Byron's handmade tortillas. We spent a delightful evening celebrating Christmas with music, dancing, and food that was a true communal effort and celebration.

Just prior to Christmas we welcomed a new guest, Guillermo. Because we are so much unlike any other shelter, we can often be a confusing place to transition to as an outsider. I was amazed at how everyone worked together to get him oriented. While one person was teaching him how to make coffee, someone else was cooking him breakfast, and another was getting him a pair of shoes.

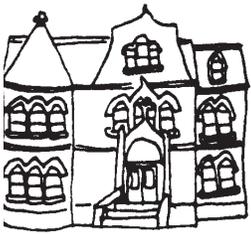
I left our last monthly meeting laughing and grinning and reflecting on these shifts. I still am not sure what exactly a "home" means to me, but at least I know now that we are headed in that direction. ✦



A gathering at Kabat House for Enrique's birthday - Danny, Heather, Enrique, Douglas and Sarah. Photo by Mary Densmore.



Mary Densmore is really loving teaching yoga to children, and she is already dreaming about having her own classroom next year.



From Karen House

by Braden Tobin

A Thankyou For Your Support

I love Karen House because it is a place of mutual trust and understanding. We are able to continue the work that we do because our support is there without the scrutiny. It is a trust which pervades all aspects of our lives at Karen House. Never have I lived in a place where I could feel the love pour out for me in a way in which I knew that I am loved best when I am being shamelessly who I am. It's because of this support that we are able to have the space in our hearts to be a listening ear, a comforting hug, and a clear presence to our guests; to share that we are all deserving of true healing. This is a privilege and it doesn't cost a lot, but without the trusting support of our donors it wouldn't be possible.

When we figured out that we lost a considerable amount of our Christmas donations, we in the community became a little bit nervous. We were afraid what people might think or if people would be hesitant to resign their checks and help us to continue the work that we do. After a little deliberating and some serious consensus meeting time, we decided to send out an appeal letter. After only a week or so, donations began pouring in. We have vastly exceeded the amount that we lost and we couldn't be more grateful to all of our donors. Thank you for trusting us, understanding that we are all doing the best that we can; and most of all, for loving us best when we are shamelessly ourselves. ✦



A few of the notes we received



After a year of working as a case worker in substance abuse with the homeless, **Braden Tobin** looks forward to taking some time off to study and dip into that vast well of creativity.

our bodies, homes for the homeless.

braden tobin

3 a.m.
still in the corner, the string-haired woman—
her thin pursed lips sliced
into a sinister smile.
an inanimate shadow
waking life.

baptized by stifled light, dulled by thoughts
of a place, standing still.
its inhabitants restless, tempest in a box.

two months—and this place is no longer working for her.
the world with its constant cycles
brutal seas, out of reach.

and the shelter of trees no longer relevant.
farewell, old wisdom,
birth and reverence to a new power—cash and cages.

bloated bellies are essential, corn and wheat
and mechanical meat.

demands to our bodies—

be a machine, a sea inside.
a subdued shell
home to a roaring of restless bees,
severed from their hive. ✦

The St. Louis Catholic Workers are in the initial phases of looking for a farm. There are a handful of Catholic Workers excited about moving to a farm and many others excited about the richness it would add to our larger community. With dreams of retreating to the country, bringing fresh food to the city, and bringing guests to swim and play in the fresh air, we are putting our dream out into the world. If you or anyone you know has land that could be farmed within about an hour from St. Louis please let us know! Call Mary Densmore at 404-403-8382 or Jenny Truax at 314-974-9937.



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Catholic Worker Thought & Action

The Green Revolution

by **Danny Schuler**

I wanted to eat healthy food and had little concern for taste or satisfaction. I wanted it to be sustainable and good for the earth. I wanted to know where it was from and what was in it. I just wanted a simple plan to follow that would keep me free of cancer, heart attacks, and obesity and thought I had to sacrifice taste to do it. I believed that with enough self-discipline it would be easy. I was wrong.

Three years ago Dr. Vandana Shiva, a physicist and Nobel-prize winning activist working with farmers in India, spoke about farming and food at Webster University. She had traveled around the world and found that the place with the greatest scarcity of food was the U.S. At that time, I had no idea what she meant.

I came to realize that Dr. Shiva was speaking of food in its natural state, not engineered food products created in a lab; food that was free of toxic pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones. I had thought that Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was a story about the way things used to be. I was wrong. Documentaries like *Fast Food Nation*, *King Corn*, *Supersize Me*, *Food Inc.*, and more recently *American Meat* have showed us a grim picture of the U.S. food system.

The more I learned about it, the faster I wanted to change my diet. My list of dietary rules began to grow. No more high-fructose corn syrup or hydrogenated oils. No more white flour. Cut out the corporate meat. Pitch the sugar, fake sweeteners, and rBST (hormone) milk. Scratch that, all commodity dairy products. Shipped from across the world? Too big of a carbon footprint; can't eat it. And of course, everything chemically preserved with an expiration date of sometime next century simply had to go.

The list seemed endless. With each new piece of knowledge about dangerous ingredients or destructive farming methods, I attempted a strict new dietary regimen, and failed. It seemed hopeless. The shelves of food products, the corporate meat, hormone-tinged dairy, and pesticide-covered produce were everywhere. Besides that, I didn't have time to grow and harvest or even cook real food, much less afford it. Do you have any idea how long it takes to bake a sweet potato in a toaster oven? Or the cost of a pound of organic cheese at the local market?

I was fighting this monstrous broken food system alone, and with each new discovery of evil food products and my subsequent rejection of them, I felt ever more isolated. I needed the help of my Kabat House community and my family. What

advice did they offer? Slow down. Take your time. Enjoy a meal with friends. It's too much to try to overcome alone, and besides, eating separate food by oneself overlooks a central purpose of food; that of bringing people together.

Here are a few of the ways we responded together. As a community we began identifying good foods we want to eat. We learned to make yogurt, granola, sauerkraut, and dried fruits. We changed our lifestyles, not just our diets, by harvesting honey from our own bees, keeping a stock of fresh vegetables in the house, purchasing meat raised on small-farms, hunting deer, and eating eggs from our chickens. We made a commitment to harvest and preserve more of the food in our gardens. We decided (after months of difficult discernment) to give the weekly Trader Joe's donation to another group in the neighborhood and get rid of the junk food in the house. Filling the house with good things while removing the bad helped fulfill the Catholic Worker vision of creating an environment in which it's easier for people to eat better, or something like that.

The change was gradual, but over the last several years, we've made progress. We realized that we needed to think what food we brought into the house, how we stored it, and how we prepared it. We found places to order bulk foods and meat that are both healthy and affordable, ordered food storage buckets and glass jars in which to store them, and strategically found ways to arrange our schedules to prepare them. With the help of our guest from Guatemala, I learned how to make beans and rice taste delicious. I even discovered that oatmeal can taste like a gourmet dish if prepared well.

There is an overwhelming presence in our society of cheap, empty calories that often cost us more in the long run. By building bridges with others, we realized that it is possible to eat fresh, local, sustainable, affordable, and delicious foods.

Let patience, balance, flavor, and community be your guides. In a few years, you might be surprised to see how far you've come. Bon appétit! ✦



Photo by Ashleigh Packard



Danny Schuler is finally settling into eating well and is looking forward to the rest of his graduate classes in Math.

The Round Table

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

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The St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

Karen House
1840 Hogan
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-4052

Ella Dixon "Little" House
1540 N. 17th St.
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-974-7432



Carl Kabat House
1450 Monroe
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-7099

Teka Childress House
1875 Madison
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-588-9901

www.KarenHouseCW.org

We welcome your donations and participation!

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

RoundTable Discussion

Saturday, April 20th 7pm

Join Rosalie Riegler, author of Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family and Community and Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace to discuss these two powerful books. Rosalie is a friend of the community and co-founder of two Catholic Worker houses in Saginaw, Michigan.



Gathering in Dubuque, Iowa

Looking to improve your experience of life in community or to help create an intentional community of some kind? Come to *Building a Thriving Community Life Gathering* at the New Hope Catholic Worker Farm in Dubuque, Iowa, from the evening of May 30 to the morning of June 3. Workshop presenters will include Jenny Truax and Carolyn Griffeth. Topics include: Consensus, Self-care, Conflict Reconciliation, Community Building, and more!
Contact: **Eric Anglada** at 563-556-0987. Space is limited.

These Kids Belong in the Circus!



Carolyn from Kabat House is seeking donations to help neighborhood children participate in Circus Harmony's Social Circus Program (the cost is about \$250/child). Checks can be made out to Circus Harmony, and sent to Carolyn Griffeth at 1441 Monroe St. St. Louis, Mo 63106

We've Got More!

Because 24 pages isn't nearly enough clarification of thought, we now have a video section on our website!

- Foundress' Breakfast - stories of the founding and early days of Karen House
- RoundTable Discussion - how the Catholic Worker has affected our lives
- Interviews with current and former community members
- Stories and CW philosophy



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