

# THE Round Table

Spring 2014

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

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CATHOLICISM AND THE CATHOLIC WORKER:  
A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

# Why This Issue?

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We call ourselves Catholic Workers. I often think how obscure this name must seem to people who do not know its history. When "The Catholic Worker" appeared for the first time atop the paper handed out by Dorothy Day and a handful of others in New York's Union Square on May 1, 1933, it had great significance. It was May Day. It was the Depression. The Square was full of workers who were barely surviving in the early twentieth century's industrial society. The Catholic Church had issued its first two encyclicals addressing these conditions but the Church as a whole was offering far too little to those gathered in The Square that day. But this struggle had also been Dorothy's and she had found a message in her new faith and saw a connection between it and the struggles of people throughout the world. She would help Peter Maurin spread the message whose last lines of his Easy Essay in that first CW paper said, "It is about time to blow the lid off so the Catholic Church may again become the dominant social dynamic force."

As I am writing this piece, we are approaching the 81st anniversary of this movement. It is no longer new and it has grown out of and responded to many emerging issues over the years. Much could be written about the movement's worker identity through the changing times, but the focus of this issue of *The Round Table* is on the Catholic Worker's Catholic identity. Through the better part of its history, a majority of Catholic Workers have identified themselves as Catholic. These Catholics were joined by many non-Catholics who felt drawn to the movement and of course they were also joined by all who lived in the houses. All were welcome. Yet, particularly in the past decade or two, there has been both an even greater spiritual diversity and a smaller percentage of Catholics among those coming to join. Many people, raised Catholic, have become weary of looking to the Church for a dynamic message. If they have found a dynamic message there, they have not found the Church to be carrying it out. The Catholic Worker, its Catholic identity and relationship with the Catholic Church is vastly changing.

Perhaps it is way past time that we address this issue in the *Round Table*, but it has been a confusing area to look at, and often brings up so much pain. We offer this *Round Table* on the issue to allow contributors to share their stories and perspectives.

Jason Ebinger bravely tackles our "background" piece, noting that "variation has always existed and the non-structure of the movement ensures that it always will." I share my story of finding faith and community and my current efforts to be faithful. Ben Schartman notes that the relationship between the Catholic Worker and Church cannot be summed up but is based on each person's experience. Brenna Cussen Anglada writes about her faith and notes she finds herself in a growing minority as a Catholic among many Catholic Workers disassociating themselves with the church. Jenny Truax describes how her relationship to the Catholic Church actually became clearer upon realizing she was "kicked out of the club" because of the Church's stance on homosexuality. Ellen Buttitta shares the reflection of a Catholic Worker named Charlie who grew up Jewish in the Bronx, and later found people of all walks of life gathered at the Worker. Eric Anglada quotes Dorothy Day's insight that "It is the saints that keep appearing all thru history who keep things going." Carolyn Griffeth shares her story of faith through her college years and through her Catholic Worker years. In Colleen Kelly's piece, she laments that while the CW challenges society it often fails to challenge the inequality that exists within the walls of the Church.

We finish the issue with our standard pieces. Ellen Buttitta writes the "From Kabat House" piece. Timmy Cosentino writes the "From Karen House" article. Ellen Rehg writes "The Catholic Worker Thought and Action" piece on Vatican II.

Perhaps, taking the cue from Dorothy Day and Eric Anglada, if we are lucky enough, or holy enough, there will be enough saints in the Catholic Worker, Catholic or otherwise, to keep us going. We welcome you to read these articles and to share your own thoughts. ✚



- Teka Childress

Cover: Jason Gonzalez  
Centerfold: James Meinert and Ellen Buttitta

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# Beyond "What Would Dorothy Do?" Historical and Contemporary Voices

by Jason Ebinger

The relationship between the Catholic Worker and the Catholic Church is a relationship that is impossible to fully define. People in the movement hold varying perspectives, and each individual and community in the movement addresses this relationship in their own way. This variation has always existed, and the structure (or non-structure) of the movement ensures that it always will.

The movement has never required a dogmatic adherence to the faith, and it has always been a place in which people of the movement could wrestle with this relationship. The Catholic faith is not something shared by all members of the movement, but many find that something about it is still relevant. Fred Boehrer believes that it is two Catholic principles, the Primacy of Conscience and the Principle of Subsidiarity (a principle stating that matters should be handled by the least centralized competent authority), that have in fact allowed this precarious relationship to remain part of the movement<sup>2</sup>. Many Catholic Workers who identify strongly as Catholic invoke the principle of the Primacy of Conscience in regards to controversial issues in the Church such as LGBTQ rights and women's ordination. The principle of Subsidiarity puts more power in the hands of common people of the Church, which has worked hand in hand with the

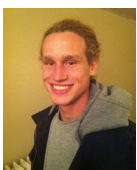


Image by Meinrad Craighead

Catholic Worker's focus on more lay involvement.

Especially in light of discussions about canonization, many people wish to define Dorothy's relationship with the Catholic Church in an attempt to find what the "true" position of the Catholic Worker is or what it "should" be. This approach is troublesome for many reasons. Dorothy, in some ways, exhibited what is typical of a more "traditional" Catholicism. They point to her professed loyalty to Cardinal Spellman, but they ignore her public criticism of him in regards to his attempts to break up a gravediggers strike<sup>1</sup>. They look to her spiritual practices as a model, but fail to recognize that what is now viewed as conservative was in many ways "typical" of a mid-twentieth century Catholic<sup>2</sup>.

As with any historical figure, it is difficult to analyze Dorothy's life, writing, and witness, in a contemporary context. What is more important than looking to her faith as model for how this relationship should play out in a contemporary context, is an analysis of her willingness and attitude toward addressing this difficult question. Throughout her involvement in the movement, she refused to impose a single rule. Instead, she "nurtured the full diversity of the Catholic Worker Movement" and saw its many manifestations as "a series of attempts to encapsulate an evolving ideal"<sup>2</sup>. She, herself, remained faithful while also making a point



**Jason Ebinger** has been the focus of much gossiping on the Northside, as we all clamor to determine his Enneagram number. (He tells us he's an 8, but we all tend to make our own guesses :))

to show her continued support for those who decided to leave the Church but not the movement. Taking a single quote cannot encapsulate the complexity of Dorothy's relationship with the Church. Throughout her life and work she contradicted herself in many areas, which goes to show that she was "generally more interested in getting her listeners to think than maintaining a strictly logical consistency"<sup>2</sup>. Though she remained a faithful Catholic until her death, she wrote that "one must live in permanent dissatisfaction with the church".

Peter died earlier and wrote less, but much of his stance seems similar to Dorothy's. His *Easy Essays*, such as "The Dynamite of the Church", expressed his frustrations with the depersonalization of the Gospel message and the unwillingness of the Church to engage with its social message. It is also significant to note that even as a faithful Catholic, like Dorothy, their joint decision to publish *The Catholic Worker* was "in defiance of Canon 1358" which stated that members of the Church must not publish anything in regard to the Church without Church oversight and censorship<sup>1</sup>.

The question of this relationship must not be addressed solely as a contemporary issue. Members of the movement have always wrestled with this question. Ammon Hennacy, a major player in the early Movement, decided to leave the Church while remaining a part of the Movement and maintaining his strong anti-clerical anarchist influence through his continued publication in *The Catholic Worker*. Karl Meyer, another longtime Catholic Worker, decided to leave the Church. When he wrote to Dorothy to tell her this, "she published his letter in *The Catholic Worker*, retained him as a member of the editorial board, and wrote back to say, 'Your letter caused me grief but I know all works out for good eventually and of course you are always part of the Catholic Worker family'"<sup>2</sup>. Karl remains part of the movement in his explicitly non-sectarian Nashville Greenlands community.

Some assert that the Catholic Worker has fallen away from the Church since Dorothy's death, but in addition to these two specific cases, there have been many times throughout the history of the Movement in which larger components of the Movement have challenged and left the Church. For example, many communities founded during the Vietnam era stood against the Church's stance on the role of women in the Church and the Church's stance on sexual orientation<sup>2</sup>. All of this happened within the lifetime of Dorothy. However, she refused to disassociate herself from these communities or expel them from the movement.

Certain aspects of the Catholic Worker have made it accessible to people with widely varying relationships to the Church. Maybe most important is the focus on the central work of the Catholic Worker--the Works of Mercy. The focus on the Corporal Works of Mercy in

particular has played a role in unifying people despite their individual relationship to the Church. Anyone can practice the Works of Mercy. Many approach them from a spiritual standpoint, but it is not required. Dan McKannan states that, "One does not need to be a Catholic or a Christian to welcome the stranger, even though the Catholic Worker movement as a whole might see this as a welcoming of Christ" and "one does not need to be a pacifist to calm the tensions that sometimes break out in the soup line, even though some Catholic Workers may see such actions as preparation for civil disobedience at military bases"<sup>2</sup>.



Mark Bartholomew  
 "The focus on the Corporal Works of Mercy in particular has played a role in unifying people despite their individual relationship to the Church. Anyone can practice the Works of Mercy"

The Catholic Worker serves as a place of transformation for many. Some come to the Worker and ultimately leave the Church. Others come with experiences that have left them disenchanted with the Church and are subsequently exposed to the rich history of the pursuit of love and justice shouted for by the prophets and lived out through the lives of saints and contemporary cloud of witnesses. Jeff Dietrich, longtime member

of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community, commented in his book *Broken and Shared*, "If it were not for Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement, I probably would not be in the Church at all...but because of her, I have found a home where I least expected, the Catholic Church"<sup>3</sup>.

Dan McKannan, in his book *The Catholic Worker After Dorothy*, asserts that the Catholic Worker is the place in which the American Catholic Church as a whole meets the American Left as a whole. Due to the Catholic Church's conservative stance on some issues, this is necessarily a tenuous relationship. Dorothy wished to bring these two together--a difficult task when many view them as diametrically opposed to one another. Perhaps she sensed the near impossibility of bringing the radical social message of the Left into unison with what she viewed as the positive aspects of the Church when she wrote that we "must live in permanent dissatisfaction with the Church".

Dorothy was not quiet about the injustices that she saw in the Church. At the same time that she was making the Church more accessible to the Left, she was continually calling the Church back to the radical life and message of Jesus. Despite the injustices in the Church, she always felt a sense of connection and responsibility to the Church. She said of the Church, "though she is a harlot at times, she is our Mother"<sup>4</sup>. Many in the movement today continue to hold this perspective--actively involved in parish life while urging the Church back toward the message of the Gospels.

Because the Church and the Left are often at odds, the movements of one affect the other. Throughout the history of the Catholic Worker movement, many within the movement have reacted to the shifting perspective of the Church. There have been times and events, such

as Vatican II, the publishing of Papal Encyclicals concerned with social matters, and the new era of Pope Francis, in which there has been more involvement in Church matters on the part of Catholic Workers. These have left many feeling more positive about the direction of the Church. Conversely, the Papacy of Benedict the XVI acted largely as a movement in the opposite direction of the ideals of the Worker--which subsequently caused some to give up on the Church.

Today you will see more Catholic Worker publications carrying the words of Pope Francis, and you will hear more Catholic Workers hesitantly discussing what they view as positive steps that the Church is taking. For many, however, these shifts in Church politics do not dramatically change their perspective. Many have come to believe that not only is the Church moving too slowly but has been and continues to be a source of oppression to many by playing into what bell hooks calls "the single most life threatening social disease..imperialist white-supremacist



capitalist patriarchy"<sup>5</sup>. This brings many Catholic Workers to a point in which it seems there is no other option but to leave the Church.

Today, the Church's refusal to acknowledge and affirm gay marriage, the full spectrum of gender identity, and women's rights in the Church (such as women's ordination) has led some Catholic Workers to sever all ties with the institutional Church. In addition to people who feel directly targeted by the Church, the emphasis on solidarity with the oppressed in the Catholic Worker Movement has led many others to speak strongly against the stance of the Church. These issues have become particularly relevant in the present day, and because they are different issues than the ones that Dorothy, Peter, and many other early Catholic Workers faced, there is

no clear model of how to proceed. What has not shifted, however, is the Catholic Worker's "obligation to challenge injustice wherever it appears"<sup>2</sup>.

It is difficult to get a sense of exactly where we are today. Is the movement less "Catholic" than it has been in years past? Many communities do not take a particular stance, leaving it up to individuals within the community to articulate their own thoughts on the Church. Some communities, such as Nashville Greenlands, emphasize that they have no relationship with the Church while others, such as Unity Kitchen in New York, ardently oppose the presence of non-Catholic Catholic Workers within the Movement. Most fall somewhere in the middle. Many maintain a Catholic spirituality, inspired heavily by the saints and Catholic Liberation movements but have no official involvement in the institutional Church.

In a roundtable discussion at the 2006 National Catholic Worker Gathering, Dan McKannan recorded that only eight of fifty participants identified as unambiguously Catholic while others' relationships were either more complex or non-existent<sup>2</sup>. Today many communities claim to be "in the Catholic Worker Tradition" rather than identifying themselves solely as "Catholic Worker Communities". The anarchist nature of the movement allows for such variation. Each individual and each community is allowed to define their own relationship with the Church without any oversight, and the wider vision of the Catholic Worker Movement has even come to include several Protestant Catholic Worker Communities who seek to bring forth the original vision set forth by Dorothy and Peter.

Despite the wide variation, Catholic Workers come back to the question again and again. Dan McKannan notes that even though, "Catholic Workers aren't shy about expressing their opinions...when it comes to ecclesial politics most place first priority on creating space for dialogue"<sup>2</sup>.

In St. Louis, we are Catholic and non-Catholic, religious and atheist. We are eternally frustrated with the church. Some have stayed to call it back to the message of the Gospels, while other have left, scarred and hurt. We all continue to wrestle with this issue, so we continue the dialogue, with all its many voices. †

#### Sources

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# Finding Faith and Community

by Teka Childress

My mother loved God. I can hardly say how firmly I believe this. It is perhaps what has most profoundly shaped my life. So, by the time I was in grade school, having come to know God through her, I was a daily Mass-goer. By daily, I mean--even on Saturdays. We had the option of going Monday through Friday with our class, which I always did, but no one, not even my mother, asked me to go on Saturdays. I just really wanted to. I was that kind of kid. I wanted to be close to God. I remember walking home one day wondering if I could stop thinking of myself and just be led by God. Looking back, I am ashamed of how poorly I have taken care of this strong and early desire. I share this because my connection with and understanding of God was formed, made real and strengthened through this early practice. The Catholic Church with its rituals and sacraments, practiced by my family and community, took a deep hold on me. I went to Catholic Schools all the way through. I even went to Catholic schools when almost all of the teachers were religious sisters. Catholicism, as it was practiced in the 1960s, was basically the air that I breathed.

It was a very different day when I grew up than it is now. The Catholic Church seemed alive and active in the world. It was starting its greatest overhaul in almost four hundred years when Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council. The whole world was changing. The Civil Rights movement, the liberation of women, the peace movements and anti-poverty programs were starting to gain momentum. I grew up with people who felt their faith demanded they be a part

of these movements, and that this was what was demanded of a church in our world. I grew up believing and experiencing that the Catholic Church was the community of believers who comprised it. I knew there were bishops, cardinals and a pope, but I was more struck by the believers I met and lived among, my parents and their friends and the priests and religious who occupied a significant place in my life.

As a young impressionable child, I heard my mother tell a story about how she sat in the pew, listening with great satisfaction to our parish's conservative monsignor (with whom she was in frequent, if not constant, disagreement) deliver a homily denouncing racism. She was doubly pleased, first, to hear this conservative pastor finally addressing racism, and secondly, because he was unknowingly delivering a homily that she (a lay church woman and philosopher) had written, sent out by the Human Rights Office to be used in local parishes. I believed the Church and the people of God could grow and change and also address evils in society. My parents

took me to join rallies in St. Louis City and to visit friends in the mountains of Guatemala.

It was not long after these times though, that as an adolescent, I began to experience great disillusionment in the Catholic Church, especially at my own parish. I lived in a City parish, but one that was fairly segregated. It was certainly segregated in the economic sense, being almost exclusively middle to upper middle class. It was also extremely racially segregated. The only integration in our parish, among blacks and whites, took place in our household when a young man



**Teka Childress** is grateful for the nice spring weather – she's loving her garden, her scooter, and the slowdown of Winter Outreach!

came to live with us, the son of my parents' friends, and when an African American priest came to study at the University and stayed in the parish's rectory. Even though, as a child, I grew up fairly close to these two men, I think I had little appreciation of what that experience must have been like for them. By the time I got to the more diverse high school to which my parents smartly sent me, I began to see my parish as out of touch with the world. I had my own integration to make, that between my youthful faith and the reality of the life I was beginning to know. And, yet this did not take place immediately. As a young teen, in high school, I began to doubt my faith, and began to fear that my relationship with God was a fantasy. I began to think of myself as an agnostic.

It took me a couple of hard years to fully find my way to faith again and even longer, to find my way to a faith community. I wasn't even looking for it. I had begun to think of the world more in political than in spiritual terms. I became active with the United Farm Workers and through this means found myself friends with Virginia Druhe and then, Ann Manganaro. At some point, I started going to mass at Karen House, and shortly after, took John Kavanaugh's Philosophy of the Human Person class. Between the Catholic Worker and the influence of John's vision, I felt that I had finally found my home.

I needn't say a lot of how the Catholic Worker saved me. One can read an embarrassingly large host of articles by me in *The Round Table* to understand its impact on my life. Suffice it, here, to say that the Catholic Worker has provided me the Faith, Hope and Love I longed for as a child, and have found incarnate in all of those I have met at the Catholic Worker.

In addition to finding a meaningful faith and community, I was introduced to aspects of the larger Catholic Church of which I had been ignorant. We had all kinds of great faith practices at the house. In the early days, we began the practice of having Mass at the house, as well hosting a liturgy led by members seeking women's ordination. In Lent we would do vigil all night in front of the Blessed Sacrament, each taking an hour. We frequently gathered in the morning to say Morning Prayer. I was introduced to saints and sacraments and rituals, all of which enlivened and made sense of my daily life of seeking God in the face of all.

Virginia Druhe, Ann Manganaro and John Kavanaugh, particularly, guided and supported my faith. I went to Mass with Virginia when I was 18 years of age and she taught me to end my use of male gendered language to refer to God and to use non-sexist language in general. She continued to be a great companion in faith as she and I met several times a

week in the early morning to pray together. Ann, one of the greatest mentors of my life, taught me about prayer and faith by her stories, her counsel and and by her example. John Ka-



"Ann, one of the greatest mentors of my life, taught me about prayer and faith by her stories, her counsel and and by her example." Photo: Mural on the outside of the *Clinica Ana Manganero* in El Salvador.

vanaugh gave name to my belief in the Incarnation by teaching me the Personalism he personified like no other. And of course, there is Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin who gave me a way to be in the Church.

So, my own relationship with the Catholic Church was able to survive for a long time, inspired by Dorothy and Peter's vision of how to live a radical life within the Church. And, now, here we are, years later and in such a different day. About fifteen years ago, younger members of our community began leaving the Catholic Church, fed up with its treatment of women, initially, and later, and more profoundly, because of its treatment of members of the LGBTQ communities. I watched as fewer and fewer of our younger community members could abide this treatment.

While continuing my own involvement in the Karen House liturgies, even as they were less universally attended by members of our community, I also was active in the St. Cronan parish. But, similar to my experience at Karen House, I witnessed an exodus following two incidents that represent a crack in the wider Catholic Church.

Louise Lears, a Sister of Charity who was part of the Pastoral team at St. Cronan, was singled out as one woman among hundreds of other people (myself included) who had attended an ordination service for two women held in St. Louis. Archbishop Burke began a process of formally censuring Louise. He finally and somewhat ruthlessly placed her under an interdict which forbade her to receive communion in St. Louis. She eventually left St. Louis to continue her life and ministry elsewhere. This experience rocked the parish and was a final straw for many of its most truly faithful people.

Not long after this experience, another terrible incident

took place. A child from the St. Cronan Community revealed having been sexually abused by the pastor. It was further revealed that pastor had been accused in a previous parish and had been moved to St. Cronan. Many in the parish left. They followed a worthy tradition of shaking the dust from their feet and moving on.

I chose to stay because I clung to my childhood belief that the church was the people of God. I have remained a Catholic and disassociated myself from the positions and mistakes of the hierarchy, while trying to acknowledge my own sins. I have thought of belonging to a small community of faithful believers as a way to stay tied to the universe (not just “universal church”) and still remain true to what I know is right and just. I treasured the shared prayers and faith, the lives of the saints and the sacraments and I still do. I was saddened when I found the books of the Divine Office, sitting in the third floor hall of Karen House, having been removed from the newly renovated chapel because of their association with the sins of the Roman Catholic Church. I mourned the loss of our connection with all those who, across the globe and across the centuries, rose all hours of the night and day to offer these prayers.

And, yet, I am finally learning that I can no longer divorce myself from the sins of the Church and the profundity of its injustice. Jenny Truax helped me to think about this differently by pointing out that ignoring this was a privileged position, not given to those who have been condemned by the Church for being who they are. While I profoundly believe in unity and God’s welcome to all, this is not the position of the hierarchy. An irony of the “universal church” is that it really does survive by so many of its members clinging to the primacy of conscience in order to stay part of the larger body of believers and a long tradition of people, great sinners and saints seeking God.

And, yet, is this simply rhetoric when numbers of holy people are not welcome unless they deny who they are, who are told that their sexual orientation is disordered and that if they build relationships and relations based on their orientation they are committing intrinsically evil acts? In light of this teaching of the Church, I am wondering if it is right to stay and if so, how to do so. What do I say to those who are so unjustly treated? Or, even to myself, since I believe so pre-eminently that we are one and that the oppression of any of us is the oppression of us all.

Of course, the Catholic Church has been this egregious before. It has been racist and anti-Semitic and promulgated the Inquisition and the Crusades. When I write this, I wonder

if I have accepted too much all along. Is there more that I should do? Is it right to stay? But then, to whom or where should I go?

I found part of my path in the most unlikely of places. Recently, I was sitting in a church similar to that of my childhood, in this case a suburban parish. I was feeling lost in the way I had felt lost as a child. Wondering what I was doing in this church, seeing how far off the mark I and the church were. Yet, even here, I heard something that saved me.

The priest, a young man with a long beard, who himself seemed somewhat misplaced in the surroundings, talked about the Transfiguration in a way that it finally made sense to me. I never understood why Jesus did not want to “build a tent” during his transfiguration as Peter innocently suggested. It was simple. He had to go to Jerusalem. He had to let go of the glowing unity with the holy ones in order to be among the lost—to even seemingly become lost himself. If God was to embrace us, the embrace had to be complete. I realized that there is so much in life I do not know. My favorite prayer lately is “What I know of you is meager. What I love of you is intense.” I am aware of how much God is so much more than I or we will ever understand. It is clear to me how ridiculous it is to assume that any congregation, any religion is the only path to unity with God. The church may not survive at this point. Human beings may not



Fritz Eichenberg

even survive on this planet because of our treatment of it. Capitalism may come crashing down. But the path of Jesus convinces me that God will be there with us. Jesus himself claimed that the temple would be destroyed and raised up in three days. Even if the church comes crashing, we need not fear. And there are aspects of the church that need to come crashing down.

And yet, does my clarifying my faith answer my wonderment of whether to stay in the church or not? Not really. I know I love my faith, the one given to me by the Catholic Church and the Catholic Worker. I am not the young girl who let go of her faith when she was lost as a child. Yet, I am much less certain of how to most authentically celebrate it in this day and time. Dorothy Day sat in the national shrine at the Catholic University in DC wondering in turmoil how she had ended up in this unholy institution as she watched the holy men and women of the hunger march carrying their own faith with them and felt lost. I will sit with my faith, still in a pew for now, and see where I am to go. ✝



# Love and Community: Faith's Core Elements

by Ben Schartman

The Catholic Worker movement was founded upon the teachings of Christ, and grew out of Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day's Catholic faith. But today the Catholic Worker is home to a very diverse group of people, not all of them Catholic, not all of them religious. This issue of *The Round Table* seeks to answer the question: what is the relationship between the Catholic Worker movement and Faith in this time? There is no one answer to this question. If there is an answer at all it is made up of the stories of all the people who currently find their home within the Catholic Worker. This is one of those stories; it is the story of the relationship between Faith and the Catholic Worker in my life.

The family that I was born into was not religious. We existed somewhere on the border between agnosticism and atheism. My mother had been raised in the Protestant tradition but all that remained of this by the time I came around was a Bible that sat in our bookcase next to many books written by Faulkner. My father was scornful of organized religion; his 'religion' was European Philosophy (namely Existentialism, Phenomenology and Marxism). My father's fascination with these traditions, as well as the books in our house on these topics, exerted a kind of magical influence on my personal development. I thought that within those books-- if I could sort out some of the convoluted language--existed the Truth and a guide to how to live in the world. These books provided the foundation for a kind of secular humanist faith that guided me through the early part of my life.

The authors that had the greatest effect on me were Friedrich Nietzsche, Erich Fromm, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. These authors helped me to see through the set up of modern day America, to see it as a sham with institutions and rules that were not objectively true but conditional and based on a history of mistakes and oppression. These authors instilled within me the belief that Truth would not be found in the culture around me but could be found by philosophical and intellectual inquiry.

The piece of writing that I felt brought me closest to this



source unknown

"I wished very much to be part of some great liberatory movement: like the worker's movement, or the movement for civil rights or the anti-war movement of the 1960's"

Truth was The Communist Manifesto. I read it when I was 15 and it exerted a tremendous influence on my thinking and imagination. From it I learned about the class system and class struggle, and these concepts crystallized an understanding within me. I could see that things were not right or fair in the world, and I cared very deeply that they should be. This political philosophy explained to me what was wrong and described how society would be brought into balance. Marxism became the defining element of my faith for the next half-dozen years. It did for me some of the things that religion typically does for others. It explained the world to me, it gave me a future to hope for and believe in, it gave my life a direction, and it provided me with a sense of identity and belonging.

While in college I desired very much to live these ideals. I wished very much to be part of some great liberatory movement: like the worker's movement, or the movement for civil rights or the anti-war movement of the 1960's. But there were no such large scale movements at this time, nor much of a radical subculture of any sort at the university



**Ben Schartman** is now a resident of Columbia, Missouri. We miss you Ben!

that I attended. If I had known about the Catholic Worker at this time, I would have left school to be a part of it, but I did not know of it. So I pursued these dreams at a distance, through what I studied. Ideas and stories(histories) became some of my closest companions and I determined to become a professor of history.

I thought that I had found my place in the world. I had my faith: Marxism, and my vocation: to teach. But my life became difficult and painful at this time and neither this faith, nor this vocation could sustain me through these difficulties, nor were they to last themselves. Looking back at this time in my life I notice both how innocent and how privileged I was. I cared about the suffering of others but more in an academic than in a personal way. I had admired the lives and struggles of oppressed groups but was myself a white man from a middle-class background not familiar with actual struggle and adversity.

When I did encounter actual adversity I found that both the intellectual tradition that I admired so much, and my own intellectual ability that I had such pride and faith in, were of no help to me. These things, I had thought, provided all of the answers that I needed and would guide me through life. But they did not.

The Catholic Worker, it seems to me, is a blend of the wisdom/faith tradition of Christianity and the political/philosophical traditions of European anarchism/communism. I could easily have come to the Worker simply through its political/philosophical predecessors, but I did not, and I would eventually be introduced to the Worker through its roots in the Christian Faith.

After "losing my faith" in intellectualism and in the radical political tradition of Marxism, I sought other ways through life. Feeling that I had put too much faith in the mind and the intellect, I developed a distrust of those aspects of myself and sought out physical work to do in the world, and ways of knowing that were not of the head. I looked first to Zen Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism. Then, when the practice of meditation felt too solitary and isolating, I looked to wisdom traditions that are founded in a knowing that comes from the

heart. I discovered the ecstatic love poetry of Sufi mystics and was very inspired by the great love and simplicity I saw in the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi and his brothers. I saw in the example of their lives a totally different way through life than I had imagined or been exposed to before. It was a way through life devoid of the graspings of the intellect or ego. It was centered in service to others and being open to and loving the world around them. I wanted to live this way: to serve others and be in love with life.

From reading about St. Francis I was led to the writings of Thomas Merton, which I found inspiring in a similar way, and it was in his writings that I first learned of the Catholic Worker. Having learned of this tradition, I sought out a Catholic Worker community and once there I was duly given Dorothy Day's autobiography to read. I found myself very moved by its title: The Long Loneliness. For by this point in my life, I was very acquainted with the long loneliness and was coming to see, as she writes in the book that "[w]e have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

This is a core element of my Faith now: Love and Community. I tried to make my way through life seeking Truth

and Justice within the tradition of secular humanism, but this was not enough. From Christian writers and writers within other faith traditions I have learned to live more from my heart and put love of others and service to those who are struggling at the center of my life. In doing this I have learned that we are all so similar. We all have struggles and failures in our lives, we all need love and to belong somewhere. Within the Catholic Worker community of St. Louis I was able to find this love and sense of belonging and was then able to share these gifts with others. Thank you, St. Louis Catholic Worker!

This has been the story of the relationship between the Catholic Worker and Faith in my own life. It is one little piece of a greater story. I am grateful for having a chance to share it; thank you for reading through it. ✝



"From reading about St. Francis I was led on to the writings of Thomas Merton, which I found inspiring in a similar way, and it was in his writings that I first learned of the Catholic Worker."

# The Church Brings me to Life

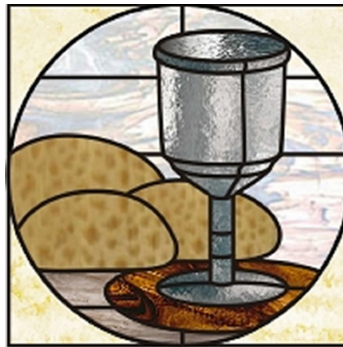
by Brenna Cussen Anglada

My husband Eric delights in asking fellow “radical” Catholics what keeps them in the Church. I love hearing the varied and thoughtful responses, especially because as both an anarchist and a Catholic, I find myself in the minority in a movement that is growing increasingly disillusioned, if not disinterested, in being associated with the Church. Yet it is this very Church, with its teaching on the God-given dignity of the human person, which gave birth to the Catholic Worker, and which led me to this movement.

I am drawn to the Catholic Worker because it is where I have found a community of people (whatever their faith) authentically seeking to put the love of God into practical action – usually in beautiful ways, and often at great sacrifices. And I am compelled to the Catholic Church because, despite all of the many faults of its members, it is what first introduced me to God, and it is what – through the Church’s emphases on the material, tradition, participation in the community of saints, the proclamation of the Gospels, and the sacraments – continues to strengthen that relationship.

As a cradle Catholic, I have grown up with a deep sense of the sacredness of matter. From infancy, even when I was unable to intellectually comprehend the words of the prayers at Mass, I smelled incense, saw candles burning, used water to bless myself before entering a church, sensed my parents kneeling, bowing, genuflecting before the Tabernacle, and bending to kiss the cross. I knew on an instinctual level that the physical world was not something to be escaped in order to reach freedom, but that it was something to be revered, as our salvation was bound up with it. It is the Church which has communicated to me the profound truth that God is present in all things.

The Church also offers me an important counterpoint to the individualistic culture in which I am steeped: 2,000 years of a tradition that takes seriously the voices of the living, the dead, and the Divine. I find great value in being a part of something greater than myself, and greater even than a community with whom I share a specific way of life or point of view. G.K. Chesterton once



“It is the Church which has communicated to me the profound truth that God is present in all things”

described tradition as refusing to “submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.” I am humbled in the knowledge that my voice, and the voices of others like mine (white, privileged, and American) are weighed along with the voices of the worldwide Church – past, present, and future.

The Church teaches the reality of the Mystical Body of Christ: that we are spiritually connected to our sisters and brothers across the world, and that we are responsible to one another. Such an understanding stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing notion in American culture that our conveniences are more important than the basic needs of others. Moreover, the Church’s tangible

organizational structure actually facilitates our physical connection with others, lest the concept become merely cerebral. I have been to Mass in the white suburbs, in poor inner cities, in Rome, in the West Bank, in Darfur, in Cairo, in Panama, in living rooms, and in Cathedrals – and because the liturgy is the same across the world, I have been able to fully participate.

Ultimately, it is because of this Mass, and most especially the celebration of the Eucharist, that I remain devoted to the Church. (I resonate with former CW Michael Garvey, who recently called the Church “a conglomeration of Eucharist-addicts.”) Each Sunday, it is at the Mass that the words of Jesus, the words on which the Catholic Worker is based, are proclaimed: “Love your enemies; Whatever you do to the least among you, you do to me; Love your neighbor as yourself.” Each Sunday the actual body and blood of Jesus is consumed, binding me and all who eat it to one another and to the Divine.

I need the Church. I need its insistence on bringing me, week after week, the teachings of Jesus, the support of the saints, and the physical body of Christ. And I need the Catholic Worker. For in this culture in which we live, the Catholic Worker not only provides a necessary critique of the dominant “powers and principalities” (including the Church), but it is made up of radical examples of how to actually live as followers of Christ. ✝



**Brenna Cussen Anglada** combines the manual labor of farm life at New Hope CW Farm & Agronomic University with teaching at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa.

# Coming Out of the Closet, Losing and Rebuilding a Spiritual Home

by Jenny Truax

I grew up in a plaid skirt, eating at Friday Fish fries, and singing along with my Mom's alto part for the St. Teresa Church choir. I was president of my high school Catholic Youth Organization, and in college, my daily planner was filled with Campus Ministry retreats, Pax Christi events and Spring Break Service trip meetings. During my six years at Catholic Action Network for Social Justice I got to witness first-hand the passion and wisdom of the progressive Catholic community in St. Louis. The Catholic Church helped form the person I am today; it was truly my spiritual and cultural home for the first part of my life.

During my early years in the Karen House community, I attended Mass both at Karen House and at a local parish. I became steadily more uncomfortable, hurt, and angry at the Church's "separate but equal" stance towards women. I wondered (mostly to myself): if we as Catholic Workers avoid supporting unjust structures, why do we support this institution that is so obviously discriminatory?

At Karen House, I fell in love with another community member. That this person happened to be a woman meant that my life would change in many ways. Now, yet another part of my identity would incur the wrath and disdain of the Catholic Church. My relationship as a Catholic Worker with the Catholic Church actually got less complicated at this time. Before coming out I had struggled with the Church, but after reading the Church documents on homosexuality, I realized that I was officially kicked out of the club. Here's a brief sampling of these documents and letters (no, the new Pope has not retracted, altered, or apologized for any of these statements):

**Lesbians and Gays in General:** The Catholic Catechism describes homosexuality as a "grave depravity" and "intrinsically

disordered". Lesbians and gays are called to celibacy, supported by "self mastery, disinterested friendships, and prayer"<sup>1</sup> The Church has been silent to date on transgender members.

**Civil Rights:** The Church and its member organizations have systematically sought to limit the rights of lesbians and gays to marry, to adopt, and to be "out" in Catholic organizations. To **fight marriage equality**, the U.S. Bishops have used letters, visits with politicians, and homilies to instruct Catholic lawmakers and voters to oppose marriage rights for same-sex couples, and they've donated millions of dollars towards campaigns to ban gay marriage (the Knights of Columbus has also chipped in around \$16 million.) In 2003, the Vatican stated that **adoption by same-sex couples** "would actually mean doing violence to these children." It is not uncommon for Catholic schools, hospitals and non-profits to **fire lesbians and gays** for not living in secret; recently a music teacher was fired in a St. Louis Catholic school for marrying his partner of 20 years.<sup>2</sup>

**In the Church:** For gay and lesbian high school students, parishioners, and priests, the Catholic Church promotes the Catholic **ex-gay reparative therapy group** called Courage, which names childhood abuse and poor parenting as contributing factors to homosexuality. Reparative therapy has been condemned by every major U.S. professional mental health and medical association. To respond to the sex abuse scandal, the Church attempted to **scapegoat homosexuality**, issuing a statement that banned gay men from entering the seminary, and investigating U.S. Seminaries for evidence of homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>

I knew that to continue participating in this organization would be doing violence to myself. I was evicted from my spiritual home and felt sad, angry, and a little lost. Losing the ritual of Church, the



**Jenny Truax** has taken up amateur furniture building, and has decided that junkyards are her favorite places ever!

music I had loved since childhood, and the familiar community that had given me so much, is still one of the great sadnesses of my life.

### The Worker and the Church

For years, the issue of homosexuality has been one of the flashpoints in the relationship between the Catholic Worker and the Catholic Church. A conflict at the New York CW is illustrative of a scenario that has surely happened, in one form or another, in dozens of CW houses across the country. The New York CW hosted a 1983 Round Table discussion on "The Church's Ministry to the Gay Community," and then a series of articles on the issue in their publication. Peggy Scherer, one of the editors, wrote an article describing CW silence about homosexuality as a form of violence, but didn't directly contradict Church teaching. Following its publication, several members of the CW editorial board met and created the policy that 1) "no article in the paper on any topic can include any deviation from what is understood as the Catholic Worker view," and that 2) "no one who disagrees with any Church teaching publicly... can be an editor of the CW paper." This bewildering policy led to the removal of two gay editors, and the resignation of two others, including Scherer.

The conflict is a dramatic example of the choices that the CW movement, and individual houses, have to make as we discern our relationship to the Catholic Church. Do we embrace the warm comfort of dogma? Do we ignore the issue of Church oppression (and thereby side with the oppressor)? Do we dive into the muck, affirming the Church's richness, and admitting that it is mortally wounded in many ways? How does our community think about the Church - are we cordial distant cousins, obedient daughters, or estranged ex-spouses?

### The St. Louis Worker and the Church

In my 15+ years at Karen House, I've been really hurt and frustrated by the narrative (and implied judgement) that the current Karen House community is not "Catholic enough," a message I've received from long-term friends of the house, other community members, and even people who barely know the community. I've felt simultaneously not welcome to pray in my own home at Karen House and compelled to apologize, make excuses, and feel defensive about not going to Mass. Here's a bit of a flawed metaphor<sup>4</sup>: Picture an African American getting kicked out of an all-white country club, and then feeling pressure to apologize for making people feel uncomfortable about the whole situation. It's

an ironic double oppression that I have to apologize for getting kicked out of the Church that I loved.

On a communal level, the St. Louis Catholic Worker has become more spiritually diverse in the past decade. We are not the majority-Catholic community of the 1980s, and we don't fit into the neat box of the "cool Mass" that gives progressive Catholics hope for the Church. It's been tricky to find a communal expression of our diverse spirituality. Last summer, our discernment about Community Liturgy and Mass brought up many questions, tears, and long-buried feelings: "Why do we host a weekly ritual that supports patriarchy and homophobia?" "What is our spiritual center if not the Catholic Church?" The liturgy we've since created is prayerful, welcoming, and community building. It feels wonderful to pray in my own house again.

### Building Relationships

One reason I stay in the Catholic Worker is because I love my Catholic community members. After all, oppression thrives by dividing people - I want to continue that holy process where we try our best, hurt each other, apologize, gain understanding and keep on trying. With that good work in mind, here are some distancing behaviors I've encountered that Catholics sometimes use to skirt the painful truth of the oppression done by the Church:

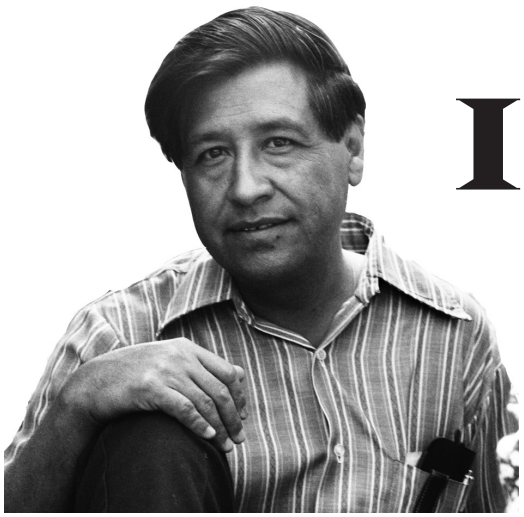
***"I simply don't pay attention to those terrible things the Vatican says about women/gays/lesbians,***

***and besides, I'm not part of the Vatican"*** To be able to ignore it - to not be the target of the violent language and hateful campaigns - is a privilege. It doesn't make me feel very supported or loved that you choose to ignore the bombs the Church throws at me. It was certainly easier for men to ignore the fact that women were prevented from voting before 1919, but it did not make it moral or helpful to claim ignorance. Filling the pews and the offertory plate makes us part of the Church, and therefore responsible to be agents for change within it.

***"But Vatican II was so great, and damn, our new Pope is sooooo great!"*** (The most popular line of the year.) Again, this is like telling a woman how great an all-male country club is. I know that the Church is great in many ways; in some ways, it makes the sting of being excluded worse. I'm jazzed that the Pope is speaking out against capitalism and war. Plus, he doesn't seem to be as terribly homophobic as his predecessor. So, maybe I should be grateful for the crumb of his famous quote in 2013 saying he shouldn't judge me. (Although this rests on the assumption that I have done something wrong for him to judge me about...) But given the Pope's own history of describing same-sex marriage as



(LESSER KNOWN)  
**INSPIRATION**



**Cesar Chavez:**

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress

and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."



**Fr. Augustus Tolton**

"We should welcome all people into the church, not send them away."

**OF**

**Larry Rosebaugh**

"Before I first went to prison for civil disobedience, I did a retreat with Daniel Berrigan. He told us: 'If you



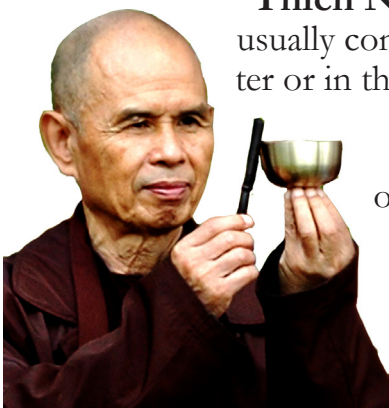
can't do this without growing angry and bitter - then don't do it!' I prayed the whole night before my first arrest; both because I was scared and because I knew I needed God's help not to grow angry and bitter!"



**Maya Angelou**

While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God's creation.

**Thich Naht Hanh** "People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth.



Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize."

# ONS

## Leo Tolstoy

I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by all possible means - except by getting off his back.



**Ivone Gebara** "We move only on the surface of the male patriarchy, but it is inside us. We are colonized by it. It takes possession of our [minds] when we thought its force was [outside]. We must hold hands strongly... As an ecofeminist, I believe 'All are connected to all.'"



## Maura Clarke

"One cries out, 'Lord, how long?' And then too what creeps into my mind is the little fear or big, that when it touches me personally, will I be faithful?"



# THE

## Mary Magdelene

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken



away from the tomb... Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her. - Gospel of John

# CATHOLIC WORKER

“a maneuver of the devil”, and the fact that he hasn’t changed one Church policy regarding homosexuality, I have a hard time responding to the excitement of progressive Catholics about him. It seems like a re-branding without any meaningful policy changes, while sticking to the “love the sinner, not the sin” paradigm.

**“My identity is Catholic, so I don’t want to/can’t leave it.”**

Again, this a privileged choice of someone who is not being targeted. My identity was intertwined with being Catholic; I was kicked out. And it sucked. The ramifications of taking solidarity seriously can feel terrifying, especially for those born with privilege. But it should be taken seriously.

**“We (meaning: you) should be patient. It takes a long time for the Church to change.”** I will paraphrase a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” to respond: *For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’... We must come to see that justice too long delayed is justice denied. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of discrimination to say, ‘Be patient’...Our greatest stumbling block in the stride toward freedom may be the progressives, who paternalistically believe in setting the timetable for another person’s freedom, who live by a mythical concept of time, and who constantly advise us to be patient. Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.*

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Here are a few humble suggestions for both individual communities and the larger CW movement.

**Be true to where the spirit is calling us.** For so many Catholic Workers, we are afraid to be “too Catholic” or “not Catholic enough”. If we really believe in personalism, that each person is a brilliant manifestation of God who is also suffering and hurt, we can each accept one another with less judgment, lose the Catholic litmus test, and believe that we are each doing our very best. If we stay, we can and should be agents of change within the system, and if we leave, hopefully we can interact with compassion with Catholics who stay.

**Share our stories of both celebration and hurt.** We all want to be known and loved. Can we form communal relationships where we authentically share our experiences? Folks in dominant groups (in this case, especially men and straight people) might consider inviting women and LGBTQ friends and community members to share their stories in a supportive environment that is committed to action.

**Extend our voice for justice to include both our own community and the Church.** Just as most white folks are afraid and ashamed to admit our own racism, it’s hard for us to acknowledge the presence of patriarchy and heterosexism in our own communities. We can create the Catholic Worker vision for society within our very own communities - the first step is acknowledging and learning about the places where we need to grow.

The Catholic Worker challenges injustice done by the U.S. government, but the Catholic Church feels a little scarier - we tend to avoid publicly challenging oppression from that direction. Many of us are secretly afraid that our houses will close if our Catholic supporters decide we’ve gone too far and withdraw support. Hope-

fully our communities can continue the work that many CW houses have been doing for years - being explicit about our celebration of ALL people, and challenging oppression, regardless of it’s source, and trusting in the goodwill and wisdom of our supporters.

**Be allies for each other.** In the St. Louis CW, we have shared stories, read articles, and seen that “tolerance” alone does not satisfy our Catholic Worker call to personalism. We try to support each other in whatever way we’ve been targeted by society, monitoring our assumptions, our behavior, and our community structures for seeds of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. It’s blessed, hard, daily work, and it improves both the quality of the hospitality we do and the connections we build among one another.

I’m grateful for the home that the Catholic Church provided me in my youth, and I’m relieved to be building a new spiritual home that is life-giving and fits my Catholic Worker values. Catholic Worker communities must discern what their relationship will be with the Catholic Church and with each other. It’s in this hard work of listening, questioning, failing, and trying again that the beloved community is truly being born. ✝

### **Sources and Notes**

1. Catholic Church on Homosexuality:

- Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2357-9 (calls lesbians and gay people to chastity, which in this case means celibacy, since homosexual acts are considered “depraved”).
- [hrc.org/resources/entry/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-roman-catholic-church](http://hrc.org/resources/entry/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-roman-catholic-church)

2. Civil Rights for Lesbian and Gay People:

- [hrc.org/nomexposed/section/the-catholic-hierarchys-devotion-to-fighting-marriage-equality](http://hrc.org/nomexposed/section/the-catholic-hierarchys-devotion-to-fighting-marriage-equality)
- [equally-blessed.org/sites/default/files/KofCEquallyBlessed.pdf](http://equally-blessed.org/sites/default/files/KofCEquallyBlessed.pdf)
- “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons”
- [stltoday.com/news/local/education/catholic-school-fires-gay-teacher-planning-wedding/article\\_c65612c2-c939-55e2-b379-acffcd594ed.html](http://stltoday.com/news/local/education/catholic-school-fires-gay-teacher-planning-wedding/article_c65612c2-c939-55e2-b379-acffcd594ed.html)

3. Gays and Lesbians who are Catholic:

- [welcomingresources.org/couragefactsheet.pdf](http://welcomingresources.org/couragefactsheet.pdf)
- [cnsnews.com/news/article/vatican-bans-most-homosexuals-catholic-seminaries](http://cnsnews.com/news/article/vatican-bans-most-homosexuals-catholic-seminaries)
- [catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=60273](http://catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=60273)

4. It’s tricky to use metaphors for different types of discrimination and oppression. I want to avoid creating an “Oppression Olympics” scenario where we are comparing oppression of African Americans, women, and LGBTQ people with a “Who has suffered the most?” paradigm. This thinking ignores the reality of intersectionality (that we are all made of different identities) and is often used as a distancing tactic: “Latinas have it worse than African American men,” “Gay is the new Black”. I used these metaphors to help illustrate, especially for straight people in the dominant group, what it is like to be in a targeted group as a lesbian; not to compare the pain suffered by African Americans to that suffered by LGBTQ people.



# Reflections From a Man Named Charlie

by Ellen Buttitta

*Eds. Note: Ellen conducted an interview with Charlie from the San Francisco Catholic Worker in March, and has paraphrased his story here:*

Growing up in the Bronx, 75% of the neighborhood was Jewish. Both of my parents had immigrated to the United States from Jewish ghettos in Europe. The move was easy in that the Jewish tradition was so central to their lives and would remain a dominating role. My childhood was that of any child with practicing Jewish parents. There were times to fast, times to celebrate and plenty of rules to follow. My parents were so dedicated that they paid neighbors to turn on our lights during Sabbath. I went through schooling to learn Hebrew and eventually had my Bar Mitzvah. The day after my big celebration of manhood was the day I stopped being Jewish.

While studying and practicing for my Bar Mitzvah it had dawned on me that I knew nothing of the philosophy of my religion. There was no depth, no meaning, no principle; just follow the rules. I hated it. In many ways, this marked the beginning of my opposition to all structure. What is the point of religion, government or even schooling when there is no deeper meaning or room to question authority? Inspired by the '60s, I began protesting war and nuclear weapons as well as starting collectives. It

was a time of activism and hard work. By the early '70s I was working as a carpenter to get by and a bit burnt out. It wasn't until 1974 that I ran into the Catholic Worker. A friend of mine had started bringing food to a Catholic Worker soup kitchen in San Francisco and asked if I would help drop some off. It had merely felt like a duty since I owned a car and had the time, however, it was the

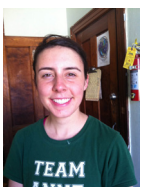
atmosphere of the place that led me to continue volunteering. People from all walks of life gathered at the worker: Catholics, atheists, privileged, impoverished, white, black, straight and gay. Although Catholic priests had started this particular San Francisco worker, the religious aspect was scarce. To me, religion had nothing to do with it; it was just a soup kitchen.

What began as volunteering once a week is now the center of my life. Shortly after I had started volunteering at the soup kitchen, I met the love of my life. Barbara was her name. Coincidentally, she had grown up with Jewish

roots as well. Although she stopped practicing religion in a traditional sense, she was the most spiritual person I had ever met. Together we sowed our seeds in the Catholic Worker that was increasingly less Catholic. Our Worker could no longer support a Church intolerant of certain individuals' sexuality. Equality for all, a central part of our mission statement, was not the message being sent



Brian Kavanagh, Advent 2006



**Ellen Buttitta**, in an unprecedented move, is making her debut in this Round Table with two articles!

by the Catholic Church and so our ties to it finally broke. We are now considered a non-Catholic group striving to live out Catholic principles. Barbara, our spiritual leader in a sense, was a fearless model in living out these values without clinging to a religion. She inspired people to give and receive, forgive and forget, admit defeat and try again. During the AIDS crisis in the '80s, Barbara was at the bedside of many terminally ill people, and the grace she brought with her helped ease these people into the next stage of life. She is one of my central spiritual influences.

Today, there is room in many Catholic Workers for religious and spiritual exploration. Along with being inspired by Barbara, Dorothy Day is a huge influence on how I live my life. I also attend weekly Buddhist meetings. We practice silence for 40 minutes and then reflect on the theme of ourselves. Buddhism in the United States is unique in that there is an emphasis on becoming who we are. All religions have the capacity to create this environment of finding who we are, but it is a small minority that do it. They are practicing religion at a higher place. The vast majority of Catholics think they have all the answers and that these answers come from their Church. They are practicing religion at a lower place. There are few who actually practice what their religion preaches. Jesus was an activist, a prophet, a boat rocker. In my community, we all strive to live like Jesus but only one of us claims to be Catholic. Our core community members know the roots of the Catholic Worker, however a new volunteer may not necessarily recognize that our soup kitchen and house

have those ties.

Back when I first began volunteering, the soup kitchen had weekly volunteers that took on the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning and serving. Catholic churches often took on these responsibilities once a month or more. Throughout the years, many parishes became burnt out from the big responsibility of taking on the soup kitchen. We have some remaining connections with Catholic or Christian churches, however it has taken on a different form from what it had once been. Our relationship with other Catholic Workers is similar. We still get visitors from other Catholic Workers coming to stay with us, but there aren't any other communities with which we regularly interact. In the last ten years I have experienced that communities like ours are more and more common. Fewer young people are willing to commit to communities of old ideals. If Dorothy Day had been alive today, I think she would have been more willing to criticize the Catholic church than she had been in the '50s.

I'd like to think that my story is less about me being a Jewish Catholic Worker, and more about the progression that is trending in Catholic Worker communities today. We're becoming less content with the hidden oppressions in all large powers including our churches. There is safety in tradition, but there is hope in progression. Our desire as a community aligned with the tradition of the Catholic Worker is to always be working towards a world of equality for all religions, sexual identities, races, ages and walks of life. ✝



"Martin's is named for St. Martin de Porres who is the patron saint of social justice, the sick, the poor, and all the animals. With his gentle spirit he fed or nursed anyone, or anything, in need. St. Martin is remembered for his ecstatic prayerfulness, extreme penitence, and profound humility." - [www.martindeporres.org](http://www.martindeporres.org)

# In the Company of the Saints

by Eric Cussen Anglada

“We need *form*, not formlessness. We need *tradition*.” – Gustav Landauer, anarchist

“As a convert, I never expected much of the bishops. In all history popes and bishops and father abbots seem to have been blind and power loving and greedy. I never expected leadership from them. It is the saints that keep appearing all thru history who keep things going.” – Dorothy Day, 1968

*They're not Catholic and they don't work*, goes the joke about our movement. It was certainly true of me in 2002, when I moved into the St. Jude Catholic Worker. Asked what the Church had to do with the Catholic Worker, my response was typically, “very little.” And yet, there I was, four years later, sitting at our dining room table with a self-described “Catholic Marxist,” discerning officially joining the Catholic Church. Each week that fall I would bring my anxieties and questions and he would bring provocative essays to deepen our discussion.

Raised in a largely secular family, I nevertheless became a seeker in my late teens, reading the Bible and eventually joining a Presbyterian church at the age of 18. In the ensuing years, I searched for spiritual roots, for a tradition to identify and grapple with. I felt the need to resist an individualistic, consumer-oriented approach to spirituality and religion. My religious questing continued through my early twenties, leading me into reading about world religions and checking out a variety of churches. While at the Catholic Worker, I attended an Episcopalian church—“Catholicism

without the crap,” I'd brag—until they began processing the American flag during liturgy (the Henry VIII thing had always nagged at me anyway). I felt a natural affinity with the Quakers and especially the Mennonites across town, but they both lacked the kind of awe-filled ritual that I pined for.

It was around this time that I realized that virtually all of the people whose life and words meant so much to me—not just Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and Thomas Merton, but Ade Bethune, Helen Prejean, Bede Griffiths, Henri Nouwen, Daniel Berrigan, Oscar Romero, Rosemary Haughton, Cesar Chavez, Lanza del Vasto, and Jean Vanier, to name a few—were all Catholic. It was refreshing to encounter their robust voices that were at once orthodox and radical, contemplative and active, ancient and ever-fresh. I was realizing that perhaps the Catholic Worker movement did in fact have much to do with Catholicism. And if the Church was good enough for them, I began reasoning, maybe I too could make the leap. So I began biking over to the Catholic Church for Mass where we prayed in Spanish, Korean, and English.

I began to unearth an immense amount of resources within the Church that I found utterly compelling. Among them: its global, transnational, trans-ethnic solidarity; its preferential option for the poor; its distributist economics; its anarchistic principle of subsidiarity; its dynamic continuity over 2000 years; its literary giants (Greene, Percy, Mauriac, et. al.); its sacramental love of the created world; its monastic counterculture; its deep, deep prayer life; its assertion that everyone—*across the board*—has



St. Isidore and Blessed Maria Patron Saints of Farmers and Rural Communities



**Eric Cussen Anglada** is excited about *The Agronomist*, the new publication of New Hope CW Farm & Agronomic University. We also hear that he is a rabid Green Bay Packers fan!

innate, God-given dignity; its affirmation of “what is true and holy” in other religions; its emphasis on the communal; and its Eucharist (and *not* the “sermon”: fellow convert Joshua Casteel, echoing Chesterton, once called the homily “the smoke break”). Where else was this being preached and practiced, even if imperfectly?

Slowly, the Mass enveloped me into its sensual rhythm. At first, it had left me with the feeling that I was encountering something almost impenetrably exotic. Yet, as I joined the folks over at St. Mary’s church, I began to learn its language and culture, its colors and rhythms. A Catholic Worker retreat for workers and guests helped to crystallize my understanding. Sitting perched atop an enormous bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, a priest and supporter of our community led us slowly and meditatively through the ritual of the Mass. As we went along, he explained every prayer, every movement, imbuing the sacrament with intelligibility and profound meaning.

There was also something oddly enchanting about the Catholic assertion that the saints throughout history were somehow present in this sacrament. It is their presence and companionship that purifies, deepens and continues to radicalize this Church. Julian’s “all shall be well,” Hildegard’s greening *viriditas*, Martin’s kinship with creation, Brigid’s subversive largesse, Francis’ revolutionary renewal—within the context of their peculiar circumstances they had become emblems of the upside-down logic of the Gospel, upending the norms of the world. It was discovering these brave people armed with their mystical insights that resonated my core. I began to note their feast days, as well as the liturgical seasons. Instead of honoring November 11th, for example, as Veteran’s Day, I remember St. Martin of Tours, a conscientious objector of the early Church. In December, rather than participating in a consumerist frenzy, I recognize Advent as a season of stillness and waiting. Lent is a time of pruning—within myself and out in the orchard. I am grateful for this alternate way of keeping time, of locating myself within a counter-narrative to the violence of the state and market.

There are also problems within this Church, too. I never expected utopia. “The Church is our Mother,” Lanza del Vasto once said. “All mothers make mistakes.” Many of these mistakes are profoundly painful for people, and I grieve the Church’s tragic fallenness. My Catholic-Marxist mentor brought my attention to the work of subversively orthodox Herbert McCabe, who admitted that “The Church is quite plainly corrupt.” Still, he remains within the Church because it does “in fact link us to areas of Christian truth beyond our own particular experience and ultimately to truths beyond any experience.” Influenced by people like McCabe, my teacher stressed over and over to me that the Church is a “vast set of arguments.” Theologian Gerald Schlabach puts it well: “Tradition is really a centuries-long, authoritatively guided,

but still-continuing conversation.” My discernment became a little clearer as I reflected on joining not a static, stagnant church, but a dynamic process. After all, it was Paul who boasted that he “opposed Peter”—the first ‘pope’—“to his face” (Gal. 2:11). These insights made it much more palpable for me to grapple with sharing a churchly identity with sometimes authoritarian bishops and occasionally power-hungry priests. (Like Dorothy, I’ve never expected very much from the hierarchy; the fact that I find

Pope Francis’ words and actions inspiring is merely a bonus.)

What gave me greatest pause in my discernment was the Church’s relationship to gender and sexuality. It struck me as not being sufficiently catholic. A few of my views on these matters have softened a bit. Nevertheless, I’ve been deeply intrigued by those whom I still find identifying as Catholic: a bi-sexual friend who converted from Judaism (“The Church is the *last* place I thought I’d end up,” he tells me); another convert, a queer African-American woman who I heard speak at an anarchist conference; authors Richard Rodriguez and James Alison, both vocally gay men; theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Joan Chittister (“I am a feminist because I am a Catholic,” she writes); and memoirs of conversion or reversion from strong women like Mary Swander, Kaya

Oakes, and Heather King. If they can do it, if they can still find this communion valuable, even prophetic at times—so can I.

On December 10th, 2006—significantly for me, the “feast” of Thomas Merton—I walked up to the altar with a handful of Korean-Americans and officially stepped inside of this Great Tradition enlivened by its several billion members over the centuries. I had joined, no matter how dysfunctional, a family.

Little more than a month later, I moved to Iowa to join the New Hope Catholic Worker farm where, though we are not all Catholic, we are Christian, and we have prioritized communal prayer. We have prayed the psalms together, shared silence, engaged in *lectio divina* during Lent, and read regularly from Scriptures and the lives of the saints. We invite friends and extended community each May to come and bless our fields on the Feast of St. Isidore, the patron of farmers. In October, near the feast of St. Francis, we celebrate the harvest with a bonfire and potluck. In December, we host an Advent Vespers service in our chapel. We are blessed, too, to have several supportive religious communities nearby, which serve as resources for retreats (both individually and as a community), spiritual direction, financial support, and insights into communal reconciliation practices. Our local parish, hardly a bastion of revolutionary fervor, still nourishes us with the Eucharist and friendship with those unlike us. For me, the imperfect riches of Catholicism continue to inspire me and point, sometimes obliquely, to the Reign of God which we Catholic Workers imperfectly try to live. ✚



Source: <http://blackdogofwells.com>

# Choosing a Life to Live

by Carolyn Griffeth

As I drove through the night back to Washington University Medical School, I sorted through a deep well of pain and loss. In three years, I had gone from having annoying tendonitis in my legs to barely being able to walk. Driving was hard because of constant neck pain, writing was difficult due to arthritic hands, and I was yet to recover from recently undergoing abdominal surgery. How quickly my life had gone from being a grace-filled adventure to something to simply endure! Desperately, I offered-up a prayer for a better life. What came to me was these words from scripture: I set before you life and death. Choose Life so you might live.

Somehow in the mysterious cocoon of my old Subaru, I was able to say Yes to life, knowing it would mean giving up all I had worked so long to achieve. Within days I had dropped out of medical school, and set out anew seeking to recover my love of life. Guiding me was a strong sense that to live life fully I needed to discover a way to fully live my faith. To this end, I visited a wide range of intentional communities, a journey which ultimately lead me to the San Antonio Catholic Worker.

The word "Catholic" in "Catholic Worker" has been described as an invitation to some and a stumbling block for others. For me it was the latter. My college roommate and my medical school boy-friend had both been involved in the Catholic Worker, but I showed no interest because I didn't want to be involved in anything related to Catholicism, which for me brought up images of affluent Cathedrals and sexism. For this reason, when I first moved into the Catholic Worker in San Antonio I told my Protestant mother that I was living in a Dorothy Day house in order to avoid using the word Catholic, as if it might cause me to choke! Yet

despite the difficulty I had saying "Catholic Worker," it was clear that I had found my spiritual home.

During the year I lived at the CW in San Antonio I made great strides towards recovering my health and faith. In the community's library I literally stepped on books that would greatly impact my life: Reaching Out by Henri Nouwen, Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton, The Long Loneliness by Dorothy Day. Mysteriously, the CW life fulfilled the dreams planted in my heart when I fell in love with Jesus in college. About half my day was spent cooking a big meal with homeless friends and the other half walking and praying alone, often in a picturesque abandoned cemetery. Overflowing with gratitude for this new life, I deeply identified with Dorothy Day during her time on Staten Island and conversion to Catholicism.

By the time I moved to Francis of Assisi CW in



"Go where you grow... it is our primary responsibility to grow ourselves into whole and holy individuals"



**Carolyn Griffeth's** garden is the talk of the neighborhood in early Spring, with more flowers and vegetables than we can name!

Chicago, my spirituality was steeped in the Catholic contemplative tradition, though I had yet to enter a Catholic Church. My introduction to Catholicism began in an underground Church which met at a homeless drop-in center around the corner from the Worker. It included a unique group of individuals: women religious, a Catholic priest, as well as many who were homeless. The experience of faith at "the Harold" was so compelling that I came back each



"We must remember that our highest calling isn't to following Dorothy Day or Peter Maurin or any other; no path to holiness has ever been replicated - we must forge our own."

Sunday and eventually for my wedding. Though then a practicing Quaker, I grew to greatly appreciate the "Eucharist" that we took turns presiding over.

For the last thirteen years I have been part of the Catholic Worker in St. Louis, along with my husband and two adopted sons. We have sought to find church that is reflective of our values including our commitment to ending all oppression. For many years we attended a progressive Catholic Church, St Cronan, which tragically was placed with a priest who was a sexual predator. Later the woman religious who was on our pastoral team was persecuted by the Church hierarchy. Her treatment was not only an abuse of Church authority but also a manifestation of its un-

derlying sexism. This, combined with the Church's demeaning statements about gays and lesbians, have made it clear that the Catholic Church is not the tradition in which I want to raise my children.

I recognize that another might face the same discouraging situation and choose to be an agent of change within. I honor this path just as I do the life of Dorothy Day, who greatly influenced the Church and society through her engagement of her Catholic faith. Certainly, many in the Catholic Worker have felt called to this tradition, while many others have felt the same Spirit-led calling to leave. Either way, as Catholic Workers we must remember that our highest calling isn't to follow Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, or any other; no path to holiness has ever been replicated, we must forge our own.

As a Spiritual Director, I have often advised others to "go where you will grow" believing it is our primary responsibility to grow ourselves into whole and holy individuals. This dictum has led me to explore new spiritual waters extending further and further from the shore where I originally dove in. Most recently my faith has expanded by delving into earth-based spirituality and the Divine feminine; my experience is captured by the words Sue Monk Kidd (paraphrased):

Despite the growing disenchantment we may feel, the idea of existing beyond the patriarchal institution of faith, of withdrawing our external projection of God onto the church, is almost unfathomable. It's that old the-world-is-flat conviction, where we believe that if we sail out on the spiritual ocean beyond a certain point we will fall off the edge of the known world into a void. We think there's nothing beyond the edge. No real spirituality, no salvation, no community, no divine substance. We cannot see that the voyage will lead us to whole new continents of depth and meaning. That if we keep going, we might even come full circle, with a whole new consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

As a Catholic Worker, I have experienced this pull to stay within familiar spiritual waters, not only personally but also as a community and as a movement. Though our St. Louis community is religiously diverse, for a long time Mass was our only form of communal worship. After much discernment we have at last designed something different, a time of worship that is community-lead and welcoming to all, as well as several other opportunities to pray together weekly. The way we worship has changed, yet we remain a faith community which encourages one another to embody our deepest truths.

In the CW movement we face similar challenges. Are we willing to venture away from the shores of our early tradition in order to create experiences of

worship that reflect the diverse spirituality of the movement and which are welcoming to all? Are faithful Catholics willing to challenge oppression within the Church as an expression of their commitment to their faith?

At a recent "Sugar Creek"<sup>2</sup> gathering, the St. Louis CW sought to build unity by designing what we called a "Catholic Worker liturgy" (in other words, not Mass) which included beautiful readings and songs which reminded us of the faith and hope that we share in common, whatever our orientation toward Catholicism. From the feedback we received the liturgy was joyfully received. At the same gathering there was also a traditional Catholic mass.

At the following Sugar Creek, I was disappointed that a worship option was not created that was non-sexist and welcoming to people of all faiths and sexual orientations. This disappointment sparked a charged conversation with two wonderfully faithful Catholic women who had helped to organize the gathering. My tone was harsh at first as I attempted to explain my sadness about the sexism and heterosexism of the Catholic Church and how disheartened I am when I see it unchallenged within the Catholic Worker. The women gracefully received my pain, and shared their own experience of feeling marginalized in the movement as traditional Catholics. They also spoke movingly of the valuable things they take from Catholicism. Though the conversation kept me up well past my bedtime, it ended in a way that was deeply satisfying:

we held hands and prayed together having arrived at a much greater mutual understanding.

Though I still question what my faith will be when it is no longer moored to the shores of patriarchal Christianity, my hunch is that the world is not flat but rather that there is abundant new life when we follow our hearts into uncharted waters. As when I dropped out of medical school, Spirit has time and time again challenged me to let go in order to allow something new to grow. Perhaps Spirit is inviting us as CWers to let go; to let go of old divisions, rigidities and alliances that no longer serve us. To do this we must be willing to listen to one another as we sort through all the good that has come through Catholicism, as well as all the hurtful, divisive, and confusing things. Through such conversations we can discern as individuals and communities what to hold onto and what to leave behind. The last remaining question, and really the crux is this: How do we build a movement that is both spiritually diverse and uncompromising in its commitment to faithfully growing in Love? While answering this question is challenging, the effort is worth it, for it is not only the question that confronts the CW, but rather most communities of faith in this time. Let us be a sign of what is possible! ✝

1. The Dance of the Dissident Daughter by Sue Monk Kidd
2. Sugar Creek is the name of the yearly gathering of Catholic Workers in the Midwest.



"How do we build a movement that is both spiritually diverse and uncompromising in its commitment to faithfully grow in love?"

# Searching to Believe in Something

by Colleen Kelley

I don't feel like I was shaped by the Catholic Church. I went to public school with Monday night PSR classes that focused more on keeping the mostly male class under control (there was only one other girl). We went to church every Sunday but my memories are just snapshots of moments; dropping the communion when our family was chosen, my mom getting the case of the giggles and her shoulders shaking from suppressed laughter, going in and out of the church because the Monsignor was upset that our PSR class didn't genuflect with our knees touching the floor, a PSR teacher that asked us who our vision of God was, rather than telling us, my grandmother holding her rosary beads. Growing up, my social circles were not Catholic. I felt no strong



affinity for the church. It wasn't until I was an adult and began searching for a spiritual community that I made my way back to the quiet familiarity of Mass. I was introduced to concepts of the Church I had never known or had been too young to grasp, radical Catholics invested in justice, liberation theology and Catholic Social Teaching. I quickly became engaged in working on justice issues (women's ordination, open and affirming communities for LGBTQ) within the church. After a few years, Mass and everything related to the church felt

like "work" and no longer could I hang onto the calm I had felt when I first walked back into the Church. Everything became politicized. However, during my journey, I discovered the Catholic Worker.

The Church is confusing to me within the context of the Worker. On one hand, we hold up foundational sayings such as "building a new society within the shell of the old" or concepts that push for creative alternatives to unjust systems or urge decentralization in faceless bureaucracy. In contexts related to government or institutions we believe in standing outside and not participating, sometimes even putting our bodies on the line. Yet, traditionally, those same standards aren't held to the Church. Catholic Workers believe in standing with the "other", those who are pushed to the margins within our broader society, yet in the Church we rarely stand with the "other" or even challenge the inequality that exists within its walls, often even defending laws that aren't foundational to the early Church.

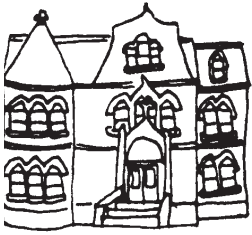
I appreciate the foundations of faith within our movement. I believe in BELIEVING in something, some higher energy of goodness. The nihilism of today's society is too easy to sink into. The lure of cynicism is strong within me and it's so easy to be seduced by the fun of sarcastic wit that distances my inner self from engaging fully with the world around me. The underlying faith of the Catholic Worker draws me away from that separation and reminds me that MORE can be possible. For me, that faith has not much to do with the Church but more to do with the universal idea born within all faiths—love.

Courage, like love, can be contagious. In my experience, Catholic Workers do not separate themselves from the injustices occurring around them, but live with them and loudly name them. We do not say "wait for change" but actively create it. So why do we need to wait hundreds of years for a hierarchy to change or for one man deemed infallible to make a statement? I want everyone to practice whatever faith that moves them towards peace, because that is an individual, deeply personal journey. However, collectively as a movement, I want us all to stand in the margins where all are welcome with the open arms of radical equality. ✚



**Colleen Kelley** has discovered a new favorite past time: taking holiday pictures of her new nephew with her sister. Here's Earth Day!





# From Karen House

by Timmy Cosentino

Whenever someone asks me how Karen House is doing I always respond the same, "crazy as ever." Which is true, the people may change but the work and the feel of the house remains essentially the same. It is a way of looking at the House as an entity in and of itself. Something akin to the seasons that are ever changing but always the same. I often found safety and security in that idea that I was a part of something bigger than myself; that Karen House was greater than any person and had an identity that went beyond people. However, I was struck by something the other day that the wise and very entertaining Annjie Schiefelbien said. She mentioned community as a group of individuals, which is something that I noticed personally but always separated from the House.

So here we are a group of individuals working and living in community joined together by Karen House. We are smaller than we have been in many years. Only eight of us in town right now: Teka, Tim, Annjie, Jenny, me (Timmy), Colleen, Daniel, and Sheila. Kristina is still in community, but currently studying abroad in Austria. After so many years of community being in the double digits we had to stop and take a look at what it means to be in a smaller community. There are some advantages to a smaller community. We are able to make decisions faster, we are keeping our list of philosophi-

THE CATHOLIC WORKER BELIEVES  
IN CREATING A NEW SOCIETY  
WITHIN THE SHELL OF THE OLD  
WITH THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE NEW,  
WHICH IS NOT A NEW PHILOSOPHY  
BUT A VERY OLD PHILOSOPHY,  
A PHILOSOPHY SO OLD  
THAT IT LOOKS LIKE NEW. - Peter Maurin

cal discussions short, and we are able to grow closer to each other. There are also distinct disadvantages; the work of the house stays essentially the same no matter how many of us there are. We still need to fill 21 house shifts a week and cook 14 meals. Someone has to take out the trash everyday, and so on and so forth. Additionally we have noticed that our open lunch to the community has been bigger than ever. The needs in the community that Karen House seeks to address

has no regard for how big or small our community is, and so we are responding to it as best as we can. One of the ways we are changing is to reach out to you all more than we have in the past.



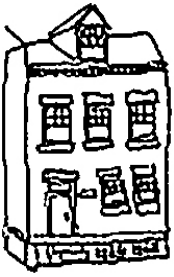
Daniel presents his now famous Easter bread.

Some of you may have noticed our emails about the House. We are looking at our needs and asking for support with specific things in ways we haven't before. We also have collected our invaluable housetaker emails and we are communicating with them in a new way too. Looking at our needs in this house of individuals and asking the great and generous community of individuals who support us for help. Both of these things are new ideas but we are having fun with them, and it has been nice to be able to communicate with volunteers so directly. On a personal note I also like that Noodle (my dog) is a star of the emails, he was really made for the camera.

The point of this is that I remembered that while Karen House is always the same, it is also always changing. New guests come and go and so do community members. As a house we have changed to better reflect the values we hold. We as individuals and we as a community and we as Karen House are not static, we are not dead. We are changing and growing and evolving and we need all of us to do that. It is exciting times at Karen House because we are trying to embody the immutable feeling of the mission of the House and the constant growth of community into something "new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new" ✦



**Timmy Cosentino** recently came out of the video game closet, bravely naming the various and multitudinous game systems (Nintendo 64, Sega, Xbox, Gameboy...) that have lived in his room during his 5+ years at Karen House.



# From Kabat House

by Ellen Buttitta

Hola from Kabat House!

Revvig up for the Spring, our community has begun gardening and adding a little natural beauty to our backyard and neighborhood. After enjoying food that we preserved from our bountiful growing season last year, we have new-found energy and excitement for fresh food from our own gardens. Many of our community members are working with New Roots Urban Farm right down the block. We hope to incorporate our fresh food into our community dinners.



"Jason holds a new born chick at New Roots after our first attempt to let our eggs hatch" - Photo by James Meinert

There has been some transition in our house, as well as the structure of our Wednesday meetings. We are reading "Witnessing Whiteness" by Shelly Tochluk and discussing the chapters each week. Although the book is challenging in many ways, it is bringing our community closer to recognizing our own internalized white supremacy and helping each other to grow into new understandings of race. Being white, according to Tochluk, means having unearned privileges and more opportunities, feeling entitled, "normal," unaware,

isolated and emotionally superficial, and being considered by society as dominant, valued and knowledgeable. The first step in eliminating racism is recognizing it in ourselves! We're on Chapter 8 out of 9 and although we're excited to dive into these last few chapters, it is melancholy to be finishing such a thought-provoking and community-building book.

In addition to all our Kabat House community stuff, we're re-vamping a few projects for this upcoming Spring. Round tables will be taking place, starting with a mini-series on gentrification. Music nights will resume monthly. Food Not Bombs is ready to roll as soon as we are blessed with warmer weather and a place to park our table. More concrete dates and times will be sent out to our e-mail list.

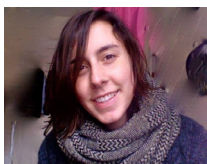
As Danny would say, this is the "year of music" at Kabat House. Guitar and banjo echo from the third floor as saxophone comes from the living room. Despite our harmonious voices, William is convinced it will bring "baaaaad weather" for the next day. A dream of Jason and Mark's is to busk around St. Louis, stealing the hearts of pedestrians with their old-timey tunes. Mark has taken on the fiddle to add a little something special to the band.

Wood-carving is a new obsession within the house. You may find wood shavings scattered around our backyard and sometimes even the living room floor. With the focus primarily on spoons, the community has been lucky to be the home of such craftspeople. Spoons carved right from cherry wood from the Little House yard take on a beautiful sand color and are practical and pretty to look at.

I think Peter Maurin would smile at our humble attempt to live out his land and craft vision for community. Our effort to re-learn skills that our world has de-valued brings to mind the question of what is important in our lives. At Kabat House we find importance in connecting with our resources through farming, bread-baking, wood-carving and other crafting endeavors.

Carl continues to fight the death penalty by protesting at Bonne Terre and spending the night in a jail cell. As the amount of state murders continues at a steady pace, it is encouraging to know that Carl remains persistent in his actions against such crime.

There is so much to be blessed for and our community is just one of them. We're grateful for health in mind, body and soul, the talents we are able to share and the opportunity to continue growing in kinship with everyone we meet. ✦



**Ellen Buttitta's** parents knew neighborhood Catholic Workers Carolyn and Tery back in their early Chicago days. With that knowledge, we are all feeling duly aged.



# Catholic Worker Thought & Action

## *Second Vatican Council*

by Ellen Rehg

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts." -Gaudium et Spes

These are words I love so much that if I end up having a tombstone and it's big enough, I would want them engraved on it! They are the opening words from the last document ratified in 1964 by the Second Vatican Council, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World." In its total identification between the concerns of people of God with the struggles and joys of everyone in the world, this passage expresses the essence of Vatican II. It is also, I believe, the key to understanding the Roman Catholic Church today.

Vatican II is often seen as the start of a radical change in the Roman Catholic Church. Actually, it was the culmination of previous decades of new theology and new experiences. One of the huge changes was an about-face with the 'world'. Instead of building up the walls of the institution to keep it away from worldly influences, (e.g. the Index of Forbidden Books) the institution would open its arms and engage the world. The idea was to bring Jesus' great message of hope and love to the people who needed it the most. What some church officials may not have banked on (or did bank on, and either opposed or supported this change depending on their viewpoint) is that engaging the world is a two-way street. It changes the person and institution doing the 'engaging' just as much as it changes the people to whom one reaches out. If you authentically engage in any relationship with an Other, you can't yourself remain unchanged.

The worker priest movement in Europe, written about by the New York Catholic Worker, is an important precursor to the changes Vatican II instituted and also illustrates the 'danger' of bringing the Gospel to the world. A French priest working on the docks in Marseille in 1941 started this ministry. He had been sent by his Dominican superiors to study the conditions of the working classes but not to actually join them. Apparently, that injunction didn't last long. By 1944 worker priests

were joining workers in factories in Paris, Lyon and Marseille, wearing secular clothes and doing the same labor as the 'masses'. The initial goal was to try to win the workers back to the Catholic faith, either from no practice or from being Communist. It wasn't long before the goals of the movement shifted as worker priests joined campaigns for better wages and working conditions, and in support of unions. By 1953, out of 90 priests, 10 had married and 15 were working with the communists. At this point the movement was suppressed by the Vatican.

Yves Congar, a Dominican theologian working to develop a more historical understanding of truth and of Scripture, was a leading advocate for the worker priests. He and others such as Marie-Dominique Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Hans Kung, wanted to return to "the sources" -the Gospel, in other

words- as the basis for their faith, rather than the philosophical framework that under-girded Catholic catechism. Both Chenu and Congar's works on reform were censured by the Vatican, their writing suppressed.

However, just a decade or so later these banished theologians were put in positions of influence by Pope John XXIII, who placed them on the committees drafting the documents of Vatican II. Their work is especially evident in the document cited above.

I believe Vatican II can be seen as an attempt (led by the Spirit) to realign the institutional church back toward the Gospels, where really, it should have been all along. Since Vatican II, the institutional church has been embroiled in a protracted counter-revolution that is attempting to retreat from the radical implications of truly following the Gospel in the 20th and 21st centuries. While that is tragic, especially for the institutional church, it hasn't stopped the followers of Jesus, nor the followers of the Spirit of love, whether named as Jesus or in another way, from identifying with the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted". This *is* the church- the people of God- in the modern world; which my poor, human and fallible Church struggles to encompass and reflect. ✚



**Ellen Rehg** is really so cool. She teaches classes at SLU with names like "Spirituality of Peace and Justice" and takes classes with names like "General Microbiology" as she nears her nursing degree.

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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314-621-4052

*Ella Dixon "Little" House*  
1538 A. 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](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)

### Liturgy at Karen House

Come pray with us Tuesday nights at 7:30pm for a community- led liturgy!

### Karen House Needs

Box fans, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, sugar

### Karen House Updates

- We have a new KH- style blog! Check out our website for our monthly "From the Round Table: Featured Article"!
- We have finished replacing our slate roof, and repairing the gutters. We are finishing the refurbishment of our windows, and looking forward to replacing half of the flat roof, and a major tuckpointing endeavor. Whew



### The Karen House Bike Shop

Our weekly bike shop provides and repairs bikes for both guests of the house and neighbors who are dependent on their bikes for transportation. We could use donations of bikes, helmets, locks, and other bicycle accessories!

### Summer in the City

During the summer we are more stretched, with fewer volunteers and fewer financial donations.

**Cooks** - If you could cook even once a month, or could be on a 'call list' when we have openings, let us know!

**Housetakers** - We will be very short on housetakers this summer, and could use some new folks especially for the weekend shifts. It takes about three shifts to get trained, then you can sign up to take house according to your calendar. Shifts are 8am-1, 1-6, and 6-10:30pm.

**Money** -Typically, our Christmas money runs out about now, and we can use extra help with our higher summer electric bills. Additionally this year, half of our flat roof needs to be replaced. We hope to do this before we get significant water damage.

**Thanks for all your support!**

Let's talk more! Sign up for our monthly emails by sending an email to:  
**karenhousecw@gmail.com.** - Dan, Sheila, Jenny, Timmy, Annjie, Tim, Colleen, Teka, and Kristina (not pictured).

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