

THE Round Table

Fall 2016

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

Every Twenty Years...

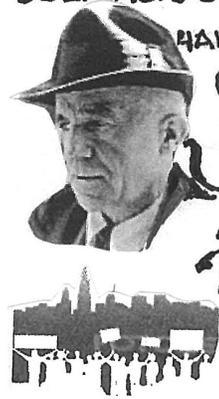
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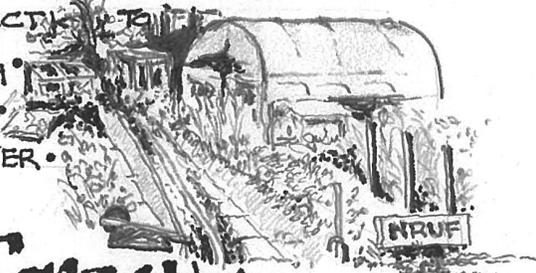
- FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION
- LABOR • POLITICAL ACTION
- REVOLUTION OF HEART
- LOVING • CHALLENGING OPPRESSION
- PEACE • CELEBRATING SELF-CARE
- RESPONSIBLE FOR EACH OTHER
- LIVING COMMUNAL
- BOLD ACTS OF NON-VIOLENCE
- CHALLENGING OPPRESSION



- HOSPITALITY: CARE
- OFFER WHAT THEY HAVE •
- RECEIVE WHAT IS NEEDED
- CLARIFICATION OF THOUGHT •
- EASIER TO BE GOOD • JUSTICE • MERCY •
- LIBERATION • SHARING OUR RESOURCES •
- CONNECTING •
- LOVING •
- GREEN •
- PRAYER •



Seeing the face of God in each person before us...



Why This Issue?

Peter Maurin (co-founder of the Catholic Worker) often said that “The truth should be restated every twenty years.” Dorothy Day later reflected that “[this] phrase means, in my mind, that we have to take truths – statements, dogmas – which are old and stale, and develop them in the light of growing knowledge and understanding which we gain from experience and our contacts with those around us.”

During the past few years especially, our Karen House community has been working to apply an anti-racist lens to ourselves - both doing personal work, and looking at our community and house structure. We’ve made a lot of changes, both small and large, and this spring we wrote a new Values Statement - a statement of our Catholic Worker beliefs and hopes, of our new understandings and dreams.

After spending a LOT of time working on this statement, we thought it would be valuable to ask for reactions and feedback from folks who love Karen House. And so we present this issue as a clarification of thought. The values statement itself kicks off the issue. Annjie then talks about why the community wrote it, and lays out our foundational thinking behind it. Next, you’ll hear reflections from folks who know and love Karen House - former community members, veteran house takers, former guests, and brand new community members.

We asked our authors two questions: “How do you experience the St. Louis Catholic Worker?” and “What is your reaction to our new values statement?” What you’ll see woven throughout these articles is the notion of relationship, of connection, of shared liberation. You’ll read that for many, Karen House is a home in the most profound sense of the word. Tahiesha observes that “Karen House is like a neighbor that will more than likely have a cup of sugar, milk, or the one egg you need to make a meal for your family, and won’t mind you asking.” Plenty of us experience Karen House as a place of learning, of struggling with new questions of identity and purpose, of theology and philosophy. And for so many people, Karen House has been a place of milestones, of growth, of family and relationship. I love this reflection from Antajuan: “Karen House is Virginia’s big smile...it’s Jim and Katrina reading to me in the book room. It’s the side door buzzing all day and the phones ringing. It’s the first time I can call my cousins from a telephone. It’s the smell of coffee and toast in the dining room while I’m eating nasty food. It’s where we used to sneak good food. It’s where I took my tooth out myself...Karen House is not having to worry so much. It’s where I met tons of cool people, some I still know today, some I so wish I could see just once. It’s the relationships, and the lives we lost over the years. It’s being safe finally and having some space...”

We hope that our new values statement continues to embody this spirit that the authors describe so well here. Our growth and evolution is exciting, painful, vulnerable, precarious, and so many other things. Obviously, Karen House wasn’t “wrong” or “bad” before, and now with these changes, “right” and “good”. We are simply a flawed group of people, trying to live out our values in ways that evolve with life. As Teka mentions, “Our vision is imperfect and so it must change as we learn and understand new things, as we witness or experience injustice and re-examine the great issues of our lives.”

Thank you for continuing this journey with the St. Louis Catholic Worker. As Annjie says in her article, “Mostly we want to create, as did Dorothy and Peter and many before and since, a home where people feel loved and comforted, able to dream and love.” We hope, dear reader, that you will continue to move forward with us, to grow and evolve with us in love.



- Jenny Truax

Cover: Jeff Finnegan
Centerfold: Jenny Truax

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Jason Ebinger, Sarah Nash, Greg Fister, and Ellen Rehg. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Karen House Values Statement

by The Karen House Community

Karen House is a Catholic Worker rooted in the vision of Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, and the Gospels.

1. We believe in welcoming all people and creating a space that feels like home.
2. We believe in community, and in sharing life, work, decisions and resources together. We hope to do small things with great love.
3. We believe in both meeting the direct needs of people and confronting the injustices that create these unmet needs.
4. We believe in challenging oppression at the systemic AND personal level in an ongoing way. We believe that personal work is central to taking risks and challenging systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, ableism, size-ism, heterosexism, ageism, classism, transphobia, and religious oppression.
5. We believe that our liberation is tied to each other, and that we are responsible for one another: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”(Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activists group)
6. We believe in seeing the face of God in each person before us, that all creation is interconnected and interdependent, and that the sacred lies in even the simplest acts. We seek to be good stewards of God's creation.
7. We believe in creating a space (and world) where people are living their best lives, pursuing their dreams, and where it is “easier to be good” (Peter Maurin). We support each other in our spiritual journeys. We celebrate life, goodness, beauty, and joy. We believe in self-care, courageous acts, accountability, and active engagement with each other as avenues of growth and liberation.
8. We promote political education, manual labor according to our ability, and the “clarification of thought” through Roundtable discussions, informal conversations, the work of the house, our newsletter the Round Table, and our website.
9. We believe in sharing our resources and living communally. We hope to resist the toxic effects of capitalism and consumerism, acknowledging the differences between voluntary downward mobility for middle class folks, and achieving economic stability for poor and working class folks. We seek to create a house where people can both offer what they have, and receive what they need.
10. We promote bold acts of nonviolence that promote love, connection and justice. We believe that active nonviolence as a tool for revolution helps us to avoid replacing one violence with another. We do not promote nonviolence to maintain the status quo, to silence angry or outraged voices, or to dictate to oppressed groups how they should respond to state oppression. Our interpretation of nonviolence includes courageous, risk taking acts – both large and small – that challenge oppression and injustice.
11. We believe that value statements and mission statements are no substitute for relationships and face-to-face interactions. We invite you to meet us, and get to know Karen House!



Our New Values Statement: Why it Matters

by Annjie Schiefelbein with Jenny Truax

Did you read the values statement? It was the first article in this Round Table, but I bet a lot of you skipped it (I know I would have if I weren't one of the authors!) Many of us probably think of values statements as boring and generally so vague that they don't say much of anything. So, a whole article about a values statement is probably even more boring, right? Yet I feel compelled to tell you about it. I want to tell you why we decided to draft a new values statement and why it is actually super exciting. And, I would add, audacious: there were several times in this process that we had to fight off the "Who do we think we are?" demons to get this thing done. In the end, the demons lost, and the Spirit (in whatever way you would describe a force of good) won. Our new values statement is the formal and public face of all of the recent changes at Karen House. Annjie, Jenny and Colleen wrote it over the span of several months this Spring. If you have been around the house, you've seen some of these changes. If you have read previous Round Tables, you've heard mention of these changes. It is a time of great energy and transformation and light at Karen House, and we are really excited to share that with you!

Perhaps you didn't even know that Karen House had an existing values statement prior to this change. Surprise, we did! The larger Catholic Worker (CW) movement has a values statement of sorts in its 'Aims and Means', which are guiding principles of the CW as penned by Dorothy Day, influenced by Peter Maurin, and updated annually by the New York Catholic Worker. Many CW houses use the Aims and Means as their explicit values statement or just as an underlying guiding foundation. Several years back, the community drafted our own version of the Aims and Means, which described how these values were manifested at Karen House specifically. It was good and I loved it. One of the reasons I loved it is because it was created for me by people a lot like me - folks who had grown up white, middle class, with a higher education, and the sense that something was wrong with the way our country functioned. The movement has brought life, identity, and purpose to so many of us who were previously floundering in the malaise of capitalism and consumerism. For folks with a lot of privileged identities, in terms of class, race, sexual orientation, sex and gender, the CW offers a vehicle to both meet the direct needs of people and confront the injustices that create these unmet needs.

For myself, I knew there had to be a better way, and I found it in the CW.

History and Transitions

Many people have noticed that both the Catholic Worker movement as a whole, and Karen House seem to attract mostly middle-class folks, and mostly white people (of course, with many exceptions). At Catholic Worker gatherings over the years, our racial disparity has been a frequent topic of conversation: "Where are all the people of color?" There has been some good thinking and work around the issue of our homogeneity for decades, but without much real change. Our Karen House community began explicitly exploring anti-oppression thought in the early 2010s, looking at how sexism and heterosexism manifested in our community and the movement. We began the conversation about how racism was present in our structures and policies then, but did not feel able to move forward with any changes because of the transitory nature of our community and interminable work of the house.

I give this history not to give the impression that before August 9, 2014 there was only darkness and since then, only light. But I do want you to understand that even so, on that hot August day when Michael Brown was murdered, everything changed. After this, our communal energy expanded to join and support the Black Lives Matter movement while we've continued to still do hospitality. We talked and prayed and had meetings with a new urgency about how to directly confront the racism in our own community. Even with this sense of new purpose, the crushing work of doing hospitality for 40 people made any change seem impossible. But the Spirit kept moving, and forces aligned to make changes possible. We temporarily decreased the number of people living in the house to a smaller number of folks who could live independently. We realized we did not have to be open 14 hours a day, seven days a week, and shortened our open hours. We expanded both the privileges and responsibility for the guests living in the house. Everyone living in the house got keys. We stopped restricting how people lived in the house in terms of cooking and curfew. We ended the gatekeeping of resources like hygiene items and laundry soap. We started experimenting with shared decision making with everyone in the house. We wrote down the specific



Annjie Schiefelbein and **Jenny Truax**, both community members at Karen House, have a well-suited marriage which currently involves lots of cuddles from their three dogs, increasingly obscure Star Wars references, and the constant sound of Hamilton playing in the background.



Jenny at a march downtown during Ferguson October. Photo by Daniel Stout

responsibilities of different levels of participation in the house, to make the process of moving into the house or joining the Core Community more transparent. (This is a particular way that racism shows up in organizations and communities - membership being based on who you know, and subject to the implicit bias of current members.) It is an experiment in constant flux, but it is important. And so far, it is working beautifully. Our volunteers and extended community have handled this transition with support, understanding, and grace. Some who have been involved have decided that these changes are not for them and have moved on. Others, new to the house and inspired by the changes, have come forward, the Spirit moving us all.

Another shift has been in the way Karen House welcomes volunteer groups. We've noticed over the years that some groups want "face to face" interactions with our guests, which sometimes means that they feel entitled to hear the personal stories of people who are homeless, without having any relationship at all with them. (If you Google "poverty porn," you can read more about this phenomenon.) In some ways, we've been insensitive to the fact that this is our guest's home, and we've hosted too many volunteers in the house at once. The house is definitely sustained by volunteers, and many of the the relationships have been that have developed between guests and volunteers over the years have been so beautiful! So now, we are trying to find the balance of creating opportunities for relationships without overwhelming guests. To better connect with our supporters and extended community, we've decided to do more regular Round Table discussions as a way for folks to plug-in to the house.

In the midst of all of these transitions, the community decided to revisit our founding principles this Spring. It's

important for us to acknowledge that these conversations were held with us standing on the shoulders of our predecessors at Karen House, benefitting from the wisdom of our larger St. Louis community, and are part of an ever-evolving conversation. We love, believe in, and want to remain a CW house, while challenging in love those things that we feel need transformation. So, we began looking at both the CW Aims and Means, and our Karen House-specific document based on it through a specifically anti-classist, anti-racist lens. This process helped us to deepen our understanding of the ways that CW and Karen House have largely become a movement for white, middle-class, able-bodied people. While this is phenomenon may be unintentional, unless groups are doing explicit anti-oppression work, they (and we) are colluding with the oppressive systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism, etc. These systems are present in every aspect of society, no matter how well intentioned or radical a group is. An anti-racist lens has helped us to both examine our philosophy, structures and policies, and also to wrestle with all of the deep racist messaging we have been given. It is not a very comfortable process.

As we looked at them, Colleen, Jenny and I found several points of dissonance when analyzing both the CW Aims and Means and our KH-specific Aims and Means. We asked the questions, "Who would this speak to? Who does it explicitly welcome and unintentionally exclude? How have these ideas been interpreted by our friends who are not white or middle class?" On first read, it was obvious that both documents required an advanced reading level to even understand the vocabulary and concepts. We learned that the CW Aims and Means scored a 42 out of 100 in the Flesch-Kincaid readability test (A score of 100

is considered “very easy to read”). In comparison, Harvard Law Review scores in the low 30s, Time magazine averages 52, and Reader's Digest scores at 65 . A values statement that can only be understood by people with a college education is intrinsically exclusive to those without class privilege.

Who Is “We”?

We noticed that the language in both documents created an ‘us’ (people who are doing the work) and a ‘them’ (people who need our help). The following statement by Dorothy Day is an example of this: “...(we need to cast) our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice”. This statement describes a movement where “we” (those who are not poor) can join those who are involuntarily poor. It doesn’t describe a movement that welcomes anyone who believes in the work and philosophy, regardless of the amount of class privilege they have. In crafting a new values statement for KH, we were aware that we were welcoming several formerly-homeless people into our community, and did our best to avoid us-them statements that confined membership into having class privilege. While we know that in practice, many Catholic Worker houses welcome former guests into decision making, our public statements need to reflect this.

Both documents, by using the first person voice, assume certain things about who is already in the movement and who is explicitly welcome. We noticed this particularly in the areas of Green Revolution and manual labor. In these tenets there is a theme of rediscovering roots, of getting back to the land, back to simplicity, back to manual labor. Our community does value these things, but we also wondered where this leaves people who have already lived a life of manual labor, enforced frugality, or subsistence living? These realities are not acknowledged in the either document’s social critique, nor in the suggested practices. This is an implicitly saying, “We welcome only those who want to voluntarily rediscover these things.” Specifically, the tenet on manual labor says nothing about the history of slavery in the U.S. This omission both ignores folks whose ancestors were enslaved, and also creates a strange dynamic of promoting the beauty of working with your hands while ignoring the reality of those who don’t have a choice. Likewise, the Green Revolution tenet discusses “rediscovering our true bond with the land”. It is clear whose point of view is being represented here - those who have lost their connection with the land. How would this read to an Indigenous person, whose land was stolen by European settlers, who perhaps does not need to “rediscover” that bond? In writing our new statement, when we talked about labor, voluntary poverty, and the environment, we tried our best to either name these realities or simply name the intent without presuming a certain point of view that might exclude a group of people.

We were very nervous about how to talk about the Catholic Worker ideal of voluntary poverty. When the St. Louis CW hosted the Midwest CW Resistance Retreat in 2015, which discussed structural racism in CW communi-



Props used by Catholic Workers during the 2016 Resistance Retreat in Minneapolis. Photo by Jason Ebinger

ties and in the movement as a whole, this was a rich topic for discussion: Does the description and current practice of voluntary poverty in the CW presume that members begin with a high level of material wealth? In what ways does “downward mobility” apply only to those who have experienced a life of financial stability? How do poor and working class people interpret this value? These have been questions we’ve been asking even before the Ferguson uprising. It’s been our experience that our friends who are economically poor and working class, and also many people of color, seem stumped at the way we talk about and practice the value of voluntary poverty. So after many hours of discussion and discernment, we wrote, “We believe in sharing our resources and living communally. We hope to resist the toxic effects of capitalism and consumerism, acknowledging the differences between voluntary downward mobility for middle class folks, and achieving economic stability for poor and working class folks. We seek to create a house where people can both offer what they have, and receive what they need.”

The subject of nonviolence has also been a hot topic in our world lately. In the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, our community has heard the feedback that people of color are fatigued and angered at being told by white people how to respond to racist oppression. We also

acknowledge the ways that the term “nonviolence” has been used to silence certain voices, especially those of people of color, to actually promote the status quo. We’ve experienced white folks who employ a “nonviolence litmus test” on events led by people of color that they don’t extend to white-dominated groups (such as environmental or progressive Catholic groups). For example, when thousands of people came to support the actions of Ferguson October after Michael Brown was murdered, Karen House received a call from a Catholic Worker who was basing his decision to come on whether the organizers had published a statement of nonviolence. We have also realized that some of the definitions of what white folks have categorized as “violent” might be a reflection of a culturally-white practice of politeness and compliance. For the white folks in our community, we have been encouraged to offer our voices, but it has been vital (and humbling) for us to understand that this movement deserves and demands our support, not our leadership. It is not our movement to control or direct.

So we’ve been doing a lot of thinking and talking about what nonviolence means to us and how we want to talk about it publicly. We noticed in reading the Aims and Means that the tenet of nonviolence lists several “excellent means” of action in resisting injustice, but doesn’t acknowledge that agent groups (like white folks) do not get to dictate to targeted groups what type of reaction they should have to their own oppression. Doing so just reinforces domination and oppression. Nor does it acknowledge that many of these actions require class and/or race privilege (for example, long term war tax resistance requires legal help and arrestable direct actions put people of color more at risk than white folks). With all this in mind, we wrote, “We promote bold acts of nonviolence that promote love, connection and justice. We believe that active nonviolence as a tool for revolution helps us to avoid replacing one violence with another. We do not promote nonviolence to maintain the status quo, to silence angry or outraged voices, or to dictate to oppressed groups how they should respond to state oppression. Our interpretation of nonviolence includes courageous, risk taking acts - both large and small - that challenge oppression and injustice.”

As you can see, our priority was to look at these foundational documents to notice who is invited and who is not acknowledged. We want Karen House to be a community that welcomes anyone who loves the life and work of the house - both our direct service and our justice work. We also want to continue to acknowledge that these societal ills are just as present in community life as the are on a larger structural level, and use that knowledge to propel us forward with anti-oppression work. These distinctions we noticed may seem small or nit-picky, but the underlying manifestations of exclusion are ubiquitous in both service and justice groups. So often, white-led groups such as the Catholic Worker bemoan the “lack of color” in our groups and ignore the seeds of oppression that make our organizations inaccessible. As our community moves forward,

we hope to look at our structures through the lens of more social identities such as ability, age and gender. By doing this, we hope that the walls of Karen House and the Catholic Worker will expand to welcome a greater diversity of people. Are our changes perfect? Of course not. Are they a good start? I hope so.

Looking Forward

It is an exciting time for Karen House and the Catholic Worker. Our new values statement helps us answer the question of who we are and what we do to for new potential community members and anyone else in the world who is interested. It allows us to explicitly name anti-oppression work as paramount to our lives and work. Mostly we want to create, as did Dorothy and Peter and many before and since, a home where people feel loved and comforted, able to dream and love. We love the Catholic Worker. We love Karen House. We cherish the writings of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. We want to continue the work they started, and to love in the particular and amazing way they showed us how to love. And we also want to be led by the Spirit, and have the ability to evolve. We want to honor those we stood by in Ferguson. We want to be part of a more radically inclusive Catholic Worker movement. We want to acknowledge all of our teachers, from Dostoevsky to our neighbors quietly offering hospitality without fanfare or a donor list. And we want to keep working with other Catholic Workers to expand the walls of love and welcome. Dorothy said of people, “Some moved out and that made room for more.” Can we say the same thing for ideas that need transformation? Let us move out any unwelcoming idea or practice in our movement to make room for even more love. ✦

Seeing More Clearly: A Re-Vision of Catholic Worker Values

by Teka Childress

After being away from Karen House for about two years, it is probably time to announce, to those who might not know, that I am no longer an official member of the Karen House community. As my work at BJC Behavioral Health and with St. Louis Winter Outreach grew, I did not feel I was enough involved to be part of the decision-making community. Therefore, my approach to this values statement is as an observer or commentator, rather than as one of its authors.

I will start by expressing my appreciation of the new statement and its thoughtful expression of Catholic Worker tenets and tradition. The statement highlights Karen House's commitment to hospitality and personalism. It reiterates the need to respond to people's immediate concerns while also working to create a just society. It maintains the Catholic Worker values of clarification of thought, nonviolence and the green revolution (by calling for us to care for God's creation) and addresses the issue of manual labor while acknowledging different abilities in this area. Most importantly, it acknowledges the value of community which makes living all the other tenets more possible. For Dorothy Day reminded us in the Long Loneliness, "We are not alone anymore." So, for those afraid of change, there is much that simply continues and "is still going on today."

Yet, I learned a lot by reading Annjie and Jenny's lead-off article. They explained how profoundly they wanted to live the vision of the Catholic Worker in an authentic way. They discussed the insights, experiences and understanding that caused them to see the necessity of seeing things through an anti-racism and anti-oppression lens. The new interpretations of the vision that came forth, and the community's determination to be faithful to this vision, continues the Catholic Worker movement's tradition of being a *movement*, and of it being one that aims to fight oppression, (albeit, in this instance, with a whole new understanding). It was the movement's identification with the universally oppressed worker

(unfortunately still to be found) that gave the Catholic Worker its name.

As human beings "we . . . see only a reflection as in a mirror." (First Corinthians 13:12) Our vision is imperfect and so it must change as we learn and understand new things, as we witness or experience injustice and re-examine the great issues of our lives. Many of these new understandings are reflected in the new values statement offered by the community.

Several members of the community were already aware of the damages caused by multiple oppressions and some indeed experienced these personally. Yet, after Michael Brown's death, the community as a whole more fully understood the nature of racism and how real it has been in our city, country and even our community. It became absolutely necessary to become more active in being intentionally anti-racist and in re-building the community to reflect this. Therefore, there is a great emphasis on this when they state—"We believe in challenging oppression at the systemic AND personal level in an ongoing way." and "We believe that our liberation is tied to each other . . ." These show the importance of challenging oppression in the world and in community and they recognize that we are all on an equal plane in our need for this liberation. White people with a history of privilege will miss the liberation if they do not acknowledge their unjustly held privilege.

The idea of sharing resources is a new way of looking at voluntary poverty so as not to put an undue and unjust burden on those already without. It makes room to focus on finding ways to share resources more justly together and acknowledges ". . . the differences between voluntary downward mobility for middle class folks, and achieving economic stability for poor and working class folks." The statement on nonviolence retains the same active stance as in Dorothy Day's time, yet also makes an effort to respect and appreciate the perspective, burden and suffering of those living under oppression. I am grateful



Teka Childress is in the midst of re-habbing a place in Little House on the first floor and remembers just how fun manual labor in the summertime is!



Even the sunflowers wilt a bit in the St. Louis summer sun. Photo by Chloe Jackson

for the community and Catholic Worker's growth in understanding in each of these important areas and their efforts to authentically live out what they have learned.

I sometimes note a tension between those who feel more drawn to the service aspect of the Catholic Worker and those who might champion fighting oppression. I therefore want to take this opportunity to elaborate on the Catholic Worker aspect that has always been dearest to my heart—the Catholic Worker tradition of seeing the Works of Mercy and the works of Justice as irretrievably intertwined. To use a play on words, I would call them “two tenets in one personalism.”

The philosophy of personalism, handed down from Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, (who learned from the French personalists such as Emmanuel Mounier) has given us a tradition like none other. The beauty of personalism is its recognition of God's presence in each person. This allows us to see a person's irreplaceability, the possibility for their growth in love and fulfillment, and their dignity. This in turn, allows us to recognize a person's absolute claim to mercy and to justice. We cannot truly love a person if we do not feel incensed when they experience oppression or injustice. If you doubt this, imagine you own child being unjustly treated and the anger or rage that you would feel on their behalf. Yet we cannot truly love anyone if we do not long to provide them the same mercy that we ourselves and all others need. The source of the tension between mercy and justice might flow from a misunderstanding of each. Mercy is often equated with a version of charity that (although often

provided with good intention, since we are all still learning), is disconnected from the receiver's reality. Things might be given to a person in need who is seen (perhaps unconsciously) as more lowly than the giver. The giver may have very little understanding of the variety of injustices that have led to the situation in which the person is, to whom the giver offers support. They may not acknowledge the host of privileges that caused them to be the giver rather than the receiver. True mercy, though, is based on an identification with the other. It is based in the greatest humility because it recognizes the reality of the other, has no illusions about the ego and knows how wholly interdependent we are. True mercy demands justice. And, it wants to go beyond the bounds of justice in its actions toward another out of the desire to love without measure.

Justice is mercy's companion and just as important but for a different reason. It is the minimum of what is fair. We have no mercy if we do not seek justice. Seeking justice, in the area of systemic change, demands that we understand and be informed. It asks us to re-examine situations from the perspective of the oppressed so that we may see what systems have been designed that continue their oppression. Justice requires us to work toward changing those things that keep access to resources in the hand of the few, while forcing others to beg.

These two--mercy and justice--flow together and exhibit true love when they exist together. When we love in mercy and in justice, we are not only rightly seeing God's face in others, we are embodying God's longing for justice and mercy in ourselves. †

Being Human and Being Changed

by Sarah Nash

I first walked through the doors of Karen House almost four years ago. It was just my third week as a student at Saint Louis University and I had decided to sign up to spend my Saturday morning doing service work in the city. Because I was connected to the Catholic Worker in my hometown of Louisville, I knew that I wanted to quickly become involved with the St. Louis Catholic Worker community. After that first morning of service work, I began attending the weekly potluck meals and community prayer nights on Tuesdays, I was trained to "take house" and I signed up for the weekly Sunday morning shift, I cooked brunch for thirty-ish people and finally mastered the art of flipping a pancake, and I participated in regular round table discussions at Kabat House, the Catholic Worker house just down the street. While many of my college peers were joining on-campus organizations, I found myself spending three to four days a week in the Karen House neighborhood, three miles from my campus. I soon immersed myself in the writings of the Catholic Worker Movement, reading Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin as well as dozens of old Round Table publications. I was convinced that I, Sarah Nash, would change the world, and that I would do so by being a Catholic Worker.

Four years later, I am still very connected to St. Louis Catholic Worker. I still "take house" at Karen House every Sunday, although now I do the evening shift, I joined the Round Table committee and write, edit, and publish articles to be read by people like you, and I even moved into Kabat House a few months ago. However, as my life intersected and became entangled with so many beautiful people throughout the years, I have come to realize that the transformative power of the Movement is not that I will be able to change the world through the Catholic Worker, but that through the Catholic Worker, I have been changed by the world.

Thomas Merton beautifully articulates this in his "Letter

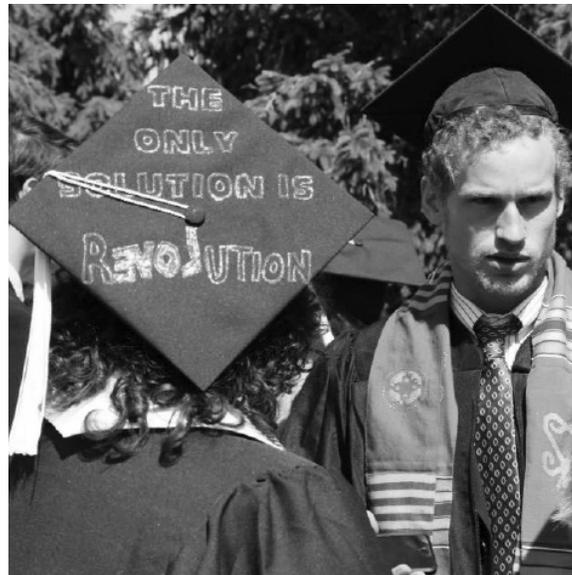
to a Young Activist," a letter written in February 1966 to Jim Forest who, you guessed it, was a Catholic Worker:

"Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on...you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. And there too, a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything."

Although it is impossible for me to put into words everything that the Catholic Worker means to me, I believe I can best sum it up with the following four words: It means being human. It means knowing, and being known by, people. It means accompanying and being accompanied. It means showing up and being present to the brokenness of our world, our city, our communities, and each other. It means getting to know "the other," realizing that there is no "other," and moving forward as one, united, "us." In the postscript of her autobiography, Dorothy Day reminds us: "We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other...We

have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

Karen House's Values Statement, like Thomas Merton's "Letter to a Young Activist" and Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness*, challenges me to live authentically and unapologetically as I pursue Truth and Justice. It reminds me as I do so, I must remember that we are all human, that our liberation is entangled together, and that knowing each other and loving each other is the only solution. ✦



Sarah and Jason plotting for the rEVOLution after their graduation in May. Photo by Bob Gourlay



Sarah Nash moved into Kabat House in May and is currently trying to figure out how to survive the St. Louis August heat without air conditioning!

Faithful to the Evolving Tradition

by Ellen Rehg

As a newcomer to Karen House back in the early '80s, I remember opening the wide, crinkly New York Catholic Worker paper and reading the Aims and Means, annually reprinted in the May edition. These are an analysis of our society's problems in the areas of labor, economics, politics, and morals; answered by the CW response to these social ills. It took me awhile to read through the careful and intellectually crafted language. Yet as I did, I was internally doing a "fist-pump": Yes! How wonderful to read such an intelligent and compassionate program for change! Drawing on the gospels, first and foremost, and steeped as well in the philosophical traditions that formed the Worker, I was so proud and happy to have such an articulate statement of what we believed.

Now Karen House has a new values statement, and this time I read it from my computer. I find my internal reaction as I read it telling: my heart melted. Not so much "awright, let's do this!!" as "oh my gosh how beautiful." The simplicity and generosity of the very first sentence took my breath away: "We believe in welcoming all people and creating a space that feels like home." A space like home! How direct and lovely, and how much that phrase articulates the heart of the Worker. In some ways, that's all you need to say. To bring someone into your home is to open yourself to another, to make yourself vulnerable, even, possibly to a stranger. A shelter is indeed a refuge, but home is where I can most be myself. If we are there together, then all are invited to be who they are. When we form community we break down the walls that may exist between us. These may be walls constructed by class, race, sexual orientation; you name it. (And the values statement does! See #4.) It's to say that you, a child of God, matter more than my fears or my persuasions. You deserve a place at the table, just as I do, and I tie my work and my dreams, my successes and failures, to yours. Each statement that follows further expresses what it means to live in community with others in a shared home. In my opinion, the Values Statement is a beautiful re-articulation of Catholic Worker Aims and Means.

Both this statement and the restructuring of the house represent to me the evolving tradition of the Worker. A big mistake that is sometimes made about tradition is the belief that it should never change. In reality, if it doesn't change, it isn't alive. All living things grow and respond to new challenges and situations. Tradition is formed through a "dialogue" between our founding documents and our contemporary realities. The renowned theologian, Walter Brueggemann, wrote that tradition is "generative" in each age. In his case, he thought the scriptures, a foundation of the Judeo-Christian/Islamic faith, generate new possibilities of revolutionary thought and action as believers respond to new realities from their understanding of their faith.

St. Louis Catholic Workers were directly involved as allies and

participants in the response to police brutality and racism in Ferguson and other communities. In doing so they had to integrate new knowledge about white privilege and how white folks are tied to it. They (we) are living through a revolutionary new movement, led by queer culture, regarding the understanding of human sexuality, gender, and relationships. These are just a couple of the new realities confronting those of us who want to remain faithful to our values. The St. Louis Worker has drawn on its tradition to respond to these new realities, and in turn, these realities have informed and re-imagined the St. Louis Catholic Worker.



Chicken by Rita Corbin

For me, the Catholic Worker tradition should always be grounded in faith and spirituality, in an appreciation of the sacred, and in our identity as children of God. (And I read the Values Statement as having this ground.) Yet, I deeply respect and admire those who question what this means. We all make our own journey with these questions.

An on-going issue concerns the role of Catholicism and the Catholic Worker, as many young Catholic Workers no longer identify as Roman Catholics. However, I feel that in many ways the Catholic Worker is doing the task of re-imagining what it means to be faithful, heeding the call of the times that are "a changin'," something the institution of the Catholic Church has failed to do for these past 30-40 years. In so doing, they are squarely following in the footsteps of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, who did the same and transformed the social justice ministry of their church. It's only a start, and not the last word, but I am grateful, most impressed, and joyfully encouraged by this re-vision. ✦



Ellen Rehg is thrilled to be just about to complete her first year as a nurse! Don't ever tell her that you are too old to do what you want!

We confess to being fools and wish that we were more so... What we would like to do is change the world- make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for the rights of the workers, of the worthy and unworthy poor, we can to a certain extent change the world.

- Dorothy Day

Catholic Worker Inspiration

We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness & affection.

Love is not something we give or get; it is something that we nurture and grow, a connection that can only be cultivated between two people when it exists within each one of them – we can only love others as much as we love ourselves.

Shame, blame, disrespect, betrayal, and the withholding of affection damage the roots from which love grows.

Love can only survive these injuries if they are acknowledged, healed and rare.

- Brené Brown

Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.

- Pema Chodron

We promote active, risk-taking, powerful acts of nonviolence (both big and small) that promote love, connection and justice.

- KH Vision Statement: Further Readings

If you have come here to
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with

ations

*Foundational readings
that inspired the new
Karen House vision
statement*

"To feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the harborless without also trying to change the social order so that people can feed, clothe and shelter themselves, is just to apply palliatives."
- Dorothy Day

Houses of hospitality are centers for learning to do the acts of love, so that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs, the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table.
- Aims and Means of the CW

By placing our bodies on the cross of a militarized police, deep infrastructural racial bias and a system that profits from human misery, a new way of being and seeing America and all its promise is being born. A willingness to be bruised, broken or detained for the sake of the gospel is our only option.
-Rev. Osagyefo Sekou

The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us? -Dorothy Day

What Makes Us Human
- Peter Maurin

To give and not to take that is what makes us human.
To serve and not to rule that is what makes us human.
To help and not to crush that is what makes us human.
To nourish and not to devour that is what makes us human.
And if need be to die and not to live that is what makes us human.
Ideals and not deals that is what makes us human.
Creed and not greed that is what makes us human.

help me, you are wasting your time.
mine, then let us work together. -Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activists group

Karen House Is...

by Antajuan Adams

I was asked to write what Karen House has meant to me. Karen House and its workers have played the role of a parent at times and a friend. The role of something steady that's sure to be there the next day. With that confidence and sureness it's fine for now. It helped me to relax and be a kid.

When I was a kid around 7 or 8 I used to see a white woman jogging around Rauschenbach Park every day. I would sit in the window and see her run laps around the whole park. I never saw a real JOGGER before let alone a white woman doing it in this hood. I thought this was brave and strange though I wondered where she came from and why she did it.

I'm Antajuan Adams, Sr., oldest of the 6 boys and 2 girls Lorraine Stewart brought to life. My mother is the strongest woman I know, struggling with addiction, and an absent father to her children. She had to battle racism and poverty alone. He himself having addictions, an abusive mother and absent father of his own. I learned (from his siblings and my momma) that he had huge responsibilities at a young age, being the oldest. He started working for a salvage yard at the age of 13 to help feed his family the bare minimum. So he was a hard worker, funny and a good cook. But when he drank heavy alcohol he was absent or when he was there he was mean and physically abusive to me, but mostly to my momma. This went on for seven years and five apartments. We had to move from the fifth and best apartment across from the sprinkler pool at Rauschenbach Park off St. Louis Ave. My mother, on the other hand, came up a little different. She grew up in a two parent home with a father who worked sometimes three jobs to provide. My mother is the smartest woman I know, yet lucky to get a high school education. She sacrificed always for us. She just used to say when she got discouraged, "I just gotta keep y'all together."

Eviction date was approaching fast at the Rauschen-

bach apartment. She was wondering what she would do with herself and her babies. My mother heard of Karen House from a friend. At this time Karen House's big room was being used and only a single lady space was available. So she left us with our father and moved in for awhile or so. Yeah, I didn't get it as a kid at all--none of it. She would wait 'til we were asleep then go over to Karen House at night. Momma took us to this big mansion place that sat on the corner of North Market and Hogan. I had been there before with my dad or uncle, getting sandwiches from around the back. This place where you can ring the door bell and people will give you sandwiches. They had peanut butter and jelly and cold cuts with cheese, but sometimes they had pickle loaf. Cold cuts, I disliked but had to eat. There were two dogs back in the yard there. One of the dogs was three-legged. I had seen this white long-haired skinny guy walking them before in the park. "Man, what's this place momma brought us too?" Plus, she says we gotta stay here for awhile--but at least we can be with her. So we get to a small little room, especially when the Adams 6 is in there, with the jogging white lady Teka sitting behind the desk in a makeshift room they use as an office with a phone that won't stop ringing. Teka the jogging lady read from

this huge rule and regulation book that Karen House had for the residents.

This is where and when I started to learn that it's ok to love other races the way I want others to love mine. How to respect ones' sexual orientation because everyone deserves to love and be loved. I learned the love of learning about earth and the dark matter and energy that suspends in it from Sister Mary Ann. She let my 3rd grade class take a field trip to her garden to plant tulips that're still there today. From Timothy P., showing how camping is not just for white folks, which I thought for most of my life until then. From Teka, kindness and generosity devoting her life



Summer means getting to come to New Roots with Dad!
Photo by Jason Ebinger



Antajuan Adams is a father and member of the New Roots Urban Farm. He has begun breeding rabbits and ducks. Since he is always open to something new, we wouldn't be surprised if we see pigs or goats the next time we go to visit him!

to help others. She showed me that I wanted to be more like her rather than mean and cruel like others could be. Karen House is Virginia's big smile. Jim and Katrina reading to me in the book room. It's the side door buzzing all day and the phones ringing. It's the first time I can call my cousins from a telephone. It's the smell of coffee and toast in the dining room while I'm eating nasty food. It's where we used to sneak good food. It's where I took my tooth out myself. Or where I got bad injuries playing on the staircase. Karen House is not having to worry so much. It's where I met tons of cool people, some I still know today, some I so wish I could see just once. It's the relationships and lives we lost over the years. It's being safe finally and having some space and clean bedding to use to sleep comfortably. Karen House was embarrassment--having to walk out of school down the street and walk through the front door of Karen House.

Still today, Karen House plays a role in my life. I have tons of those old friends and many more new ones. I volunteer at New Roots Urban Farm (NRUF) on Hogan St., affiliated with Karen House. This is where I help grow fruits and vegetables of all kinds with some of my friends affiliated with the Catholic Worker hot spot: Mary, and Jason, Sarah Nash and Te. You can come join us--we accept volunteers of all kinds at NRUF. +



No one is ever really sure whether Lucy or Antajuan is more excited to see each other.
Photo by Jason Ebinger

Receiving and Giving Compassion

by Miranda Prince

The St. Louis Catholic Worker has been an amazing, eye opening experience. I was introduced to the Catholic Worker in December of 2014. I was homeless and living in a car with a two year old and without a support system. I came to Karen House and asked if we could stay the night and they willingly gave us shelter. The next morning, I spoke to a Catholic Worker and she informed me that there was a room available for us. After we were done talking, I cried tears of joy. I was so overwhelmed by everyone's compassion and love for total strangers. The St. Louis Catholic Worker makes you feel like family the way that they help their community and families in crisis. There is a wholeheartedness about the movement and such compassion from ordinary individuals that have so much passion to make a difference for others.

A lot of things have been included within the values of the St.

Louis Catholic Worker since my first experience. They have added a sense of security for families in crisis, a safe place to be you. As a person that has experienced a lot of crisis, I know that during that you can forget about yourself. But with the new values of Karen House, it gives you a sense of light and freedom during your trials. Being at Karen House feels like home because of the new added values and the minor changes to the house rules. It gives you a home during the trials of homelessness, if that makes sense.

I've recently joined the Core Community at Karen House to be a St. Louis Catholic Worker because of the huge impact that Catholic Workers have had in the community. I want to be able to give love to others, to help them during their trials, and to be a part of the progression at Karen House. +



Miranda Prince joined the Karen House Core Community this summer and tries to always live by the quote: "I believe that self love is more important than anything. When I love myself I love others."

Living in Relationship

by Pat Poehling

This September marks my 15 year anniversary of "taking house" at Karen House. When asked "How do I experience the STL Catholic Worker?" one word comes to mind...relationships.

Over the past 15 years I have watched communities change; community members come and go; and guests move on to different phases in their lives, however, through all of the change and movement, relationships have been formed. Relationships rooted in love, hope, honor and respect. When I'm not at Karen House, I work as an outreach minister at St. Vincent's church. I meet

a lot of homeless people and help place them into various shelters for the night or nights. Their experiences at those shelters do not compare with the experiences of our guests at Karen House. It isn't just a warm, dry, safe place to spend the night. The women at Karen House come for that warm, dry, safe place but leave with a lot more. They leave knowing that they are loved, good and worthy of respect. Their lives matter. They know they can always come back just to talk or find a friendly face; they know they will

always have a home. Karen House offers that comfortable, familiar place to all who live there through relationships built on mutual love and respect. Relationships don't come without work, determination, sharing, expectations, and sometimes a little turmoil but they always come with love. Karen House offers relationships.

In reading the new mission statement several things shouted out, "relationship!" "Welcoming and creating a space that feels like home." Every time I take a house shift, welcoming is a part of that shift. Whether it is volunteers, a new guest, folks at the door for sandwiches, or people using the clothing room, we are constantly welcoming people in our home and at our door. Not always an easy task, but if we profess to see the face of Christ in all and we do, it is a very necessary one. And over time we get to know the volunteers, the new guests become old guests, the folks at our door for sandwiches have names, people using the clothing room bring their children and we form relationships. We listen to their stories...we laugh with them...we cry with them... we have expectations of them...we

love them...we form relationships. We share our resources... maybe that is a bar of soap or a tube of toothpaste...maybe that is a bag of bagels on the table in the dining room or a bag of apples or oranges. We strive to share what we have with those who are in need while trying to preserve their dignity; trying to imagine how hard it was for them to humble themselves to even ask for a basic need. Meeting those direct needs of others...not so hard...but confronting the reasons why they need shelter, food, basic needs is very hard. It is a challenge

for all of us. Sometimes it may mean confronting our friends or families who don't feel the same way we do. It may mean taking a political stand however that may look for each of us. Sometimes it means being outspoken and verbal but sometimes it means being quiet and listening to each other and respecting all views...it means living in relationship. We promote connection...another word for relationship. I cannot tell you how many times I answer the phone and it will be a former guest and her question is "do you remember me?" and

many times I do. We have a connection. I remember Sharon, and we will talk about her new home or when she is coming to visit; I remember Sherrie, crying with her at her daughter's funeral and a few years later attending her funeral. Many of our former guests call us for various needs because they feel safe and loved...because we lived in community and relationship.

As Karen House grows and changes, as a house taker there are many challenges but there are many joys. It warms my heart to come in and find Miranda taking house with Charlie at her side...or to see one of our guests cooking a meal for themselves and their children all the while exchanging recipes. We are on more equal footing; we are sharing all of the responsibilities of running the house while recognizing everyone's gifts and talents. We are trusting, working, communicating, voicing expectations, and loving. We are building community...seeing the face of God in everyone...we are living in relationship.



Works of Mercy by Rita Corbin



Pat Poehling is one of Karen House's most faithful house takers and can cook a dinner for thirty people by herself without even batting an eye.

Continually Amazed by the Catholic Worker

by Tahesia Little

I was asked the question, "What is the Catholic Worker to me?" I have to start by saying that I am amazed by what I labeled Blind Charity. I mean that in a good way. I saw that whoever came to the door, no matter the color, size, or seemingly status, being helped. Whatever could be done about their issue, people at the house would do, without a lot of questions and apprehension.

That is amazing because with a lot of help entities, you go to them, spend hours waiting, answering questions, and filling out paper work, only to leave not helped at all or less than half helped but at Karen House, I saw people come in and get what was available. They were met by somebody interested and willing to help with what they could. Amazing, right? I say amazing because after the rigmarole of state and government agencies that end up deciding (for some unexplained reason) you are someone they can't help, even though they will use the record of your encounter as one of the many files of people they have helped. WOW! Right? At the Catholic Worker there are no forms to fill out, no special requirements that you ever need to meet. Karen House is like a neighbor that will more than likely have a cup of sugar, milk, or the one egg that you need to make a meal for your family and won't mind you asking. Amazing!

I say this because I know what it is like not to have some of those things. I have three children: two boys and a girl. They are grown now and the boys have children of their own. My oldest lives far away and I have not met his children yet, though I am hoping to soon. I know what it is like to have a family member next door to whom you cannot go to for those things mostly because they don't have much either and you don't want to ask. The Catholic Worker's stance should be the norm for all state and government entities. It would then be as if helping people was the real goal. When I came to Karen house almost four years ago, I had big fines in five municipalities. I had over five thousand dollars of fees, a thirty thousand dollar student loan that was already in default, utility bills, and my second son was awaiting trial for attempted murder two counts and two

counts of armed criminal action (trumped up charges) from other government entities designed to keep me down in the name of helping. I was really needing to find a place to get some rest while being homeless. I was in a place where I had tried all that I knew, all that I could.

I have worked hard, and been through a lot, more bad than good. After all that, nothing adds up to anything but experience that I can't use on any application anywhere. What can you do when you feel like going to dig a hole not as big or as deep as a grave, but just big enough for me to fit, get in, cover it over and stay there until everything stops? It's wild to remember how in the midst of all that, that this thought was naturally recurring. It had the power to push other thoughts out and take over my mind. It took a lot of time and a straight out battle to get over that thought, but I did. I Love Life, Life Loves Me! The Catholic Worker gave me that and I am grateful to this movement. I say movement because I wasn't always at Karen House. I spent about half the time since coming here with a wonderful family, in their home. They were very good to me. I spent most of



A Zinnia from the garden! Photo by Chloe Jackson

that time unsure of things, afraid, waiting for the other shoe to drop, but as the CW would have it, I learned a lot. I appreciate all the family did for me and everything that happened. Blessings always, WM Family! I love them near or far, no matter what, always. I trust in Faith for them, in the same way that it brought the Catholic Worker and them to my life.

What do I think of the Catholic Worker now? I am still amazed, but now it's because the CW is giving me the opportunity to be a Core Member. I am the person answering the door now. It is awesomely amazing and I never would have thought it would happen like this. I only wanna make the best of this opening. I still got a lot of learning to do. I am still a little afraid, and still a little unsure. But, I do know where the shoes are! LOL! Blessings Everyone!!!



Tahesia Little joined the Core Community at Karen House this summer and is excited to have her first article published in the Round Table!

How I Found My Way to the Catholic Worker

by Greg Fister

About six months ago, I was filling out an application for a summer internship at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, and one part of the application made me pause--I was asked to write about my "faith journey." This sounded a lot like a high school Theology assignment, which did not excite me whatsoever. As far as I was concerned, my faith journey ended right after I graduated high school and decided I didn't want to be a part of organized Christianity. But there I found myself, a non-Catholic Catholic Worker, struggling to think of what I could write.

Of course, the term "faith journey" is so wonderfully vague, so I simply wrote about how I came to the Catholic Worker Movement. The faith of my family has always been important and influential to me. In high school, when I was at my most conventionally "Catholic," I was drawn to the Church's social justice teachings, the morals of Jesus, and importance of religious faith in more recent activists and social justice heroes like King and Gandhi. I always struggled with--or completely ignored--the external aspects of being Catholic, like attending Mass, going to confession, praying daily, etc., but I always felt deeply that the politics of Jesus were something I wanted to emulate.

When I was 17 however, I realized that outside of the social realm of my Catholic high school, I didn't want to continue my relationship with the Church. I had never felt any close relationship with God and was excited to incorporate the hastily chosen marker "atheist" into my identity. I was also just beginning to accept and come to terms with my bisexuality, which was something that I had to work on for myself completely outside the Catholic world. And so I went away to college, a happy, hopeful, queer kid who never went to church.

Through conversations I've had with friends and mentors, I've learned that each person has to find their own personal truth, meaning and place. I searched for mine when I was at school, but felt hopelessly lost far too often. Being Catholic was safe and it often was comfortable, but life beyond my Catholic St. Louis bubble was confusing, frustrating and seemed overall directionless. The college I went to was in a small town that was mostly white and definitely catered to the white, middle-class, out-of-town college student demographic. While there I struggled with some anxiety and depression, along with many other growing pains that come with being a teenager living in a dorm away from your family for the first time. I was a part of many social justice-oriented groups and stayed very active on



When not taking house or cooking a meal, Greg can be found at New Roots picking carrots! Photo by Jason Ebinger

campus for our causes--though often it seemed like it was just my friends and I who were trying to care about the world outside of our GPA's.

The first time I really felt strongly that I wasn't where I should be came in October of 2014, when I visited St. Louis to join in the Ferguson Uprising's weekend of resistance. At a protest action on the South Side protesting the St. Louis Police Department's killing of VonDerrit Meyers, a close friend from school and I were forcibly arrested and detained for 16 hours with over a dozen other youth activists from across the country. It felt very empowering to take a stand for Black Lives and share and grow with my new activist



Greg Fister spent a good chunk of the summer at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. He sorely missed Ted Drewes, his family, and rain.

friends in jail, and also to bring back our story and tactics of resistance to my college campus. But as I settled back into school life, and as justice continued to be delayed in Ferguson, I felt a malaise and discomfort which had been growing in recent years come to a head. My heart was breaking over what was going on in my city.

After getting arrested and sharing so much with the brave activists I had met in St. Louis, I could no longer ignore the fact that Black people in my hometown were suffering at the hands of the police, and that white culture in St. Louis was the main factor upholding that oppression. I wanted to be home--to see if I could do anything to challenge that unequal power structure, or at the least to simply learn more about racism. And so, after two years of struggling with classes and grades and rent and work and all of the other things you're expected to stay on top of in college, I moved back in with my family in south STL.

Though I don't think I realized it at the time, I think one of my main reasons for moving back home was that I would get to spend time at Karen House. Through bonds I had made from volunteering in high school and protesting in college, I found myself spending more and more time at Karen House and growing more deeply appreciative of its presence with every visit. The Catholic Worker turned out to be the perfect place for a clueless, yet well-meaning white person like me to learn more about systematic oppression and lively resistance, while also helping the community I grew up in and forming meaningful human relationships.

Through my Catholic Worker education and other experiences, a personal philosophy has taken hold in my heart: that philosophy, which feels intrinsic to my very existence, is that our greatest

resource as humans--perhaps even our ONLY resource--is each other. That never-ending, constantly renewable resource manifests itself as love, as sharing, as compassion, as understanding, as the struggle to meet with another human on level ground, and a million other ways. All of these moments affirm our identity as living things and human beings, and connect us with something greater than our own singular identities. I'm not sure what exactly I believe about God--I know that the top-down, authoritarian God of Roman Catholicism isn't who I believe in, and I also found that living pure atheism with no thought towards a higher moral obligation does nothing for me--but I know that when we show love, God smiles. And so, I try to live my life humbly: keeping in mind that as privileged as I am, I know very little about how systematic oppression operates and affects people in the world. I try to constantly realize that I have so much to learn about how to make the world a better place, but while I am learning how to do that, it is my mission to grow in love and companionship with the people I come into contact with every day.

And so now, when I tell my friends what I'm up to and mention the Catholic Worker, I can sometimes see the surprise or confusion at the word "Catholic." Most of my peers know me as someone who challenges authority, queerphobia and misogyny--three things that I'm sure many Catholic Workers would be happy to explain that the Catholic Church helps to perpetuate worldwide. But despite my opposition to all things "organized Christianity," I have found something very much like a home in the Catholic Worker movement, and there's no other place I'd rather be. ✦



Greg playing some ping pong during his time at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. Photo from the LACW

Finding Home at Karen House

by Chloe Jackson

I lugged my clothes, books, and Grandma Olive's quilt up three flights of stairs to my room at Karen House in early May. It was not quite hot outside that day as I wobbled up the steps, lopsidedly carrying bags and boxes, attempting to wave and say hello to my new housemates as I passed them in the hallways and on the steps. I was bright-eyed and nervous when I finally sat, exasperated, on my bed. I couldn't help but contemplate what on Earth I was doing here. I had just graduated from college and had left a rural, quaint town a few hours away that I'd called my home for the past four years. North St. Louis was, and continues to be, a shock to my system. It's woken my suburban-bred, middle-class self up, and I can't ever imagine falling back asleep.

While I felt sure I wanted to live in community, my decision to move into Karen House seemed out of character to many of those around me. I spent a week here over my spring break in March and in those seven days felt challenged, inspired, and loved. I met activists, urban farmers, women with hearts of gold, and children who never ceased to make me smile. I was surrounded by people creating a new society within the shell of the old, and I couldn't get enough of it. Like it does for many people, the Catholic Worker movement fell into my lap. But though I've been happy with its sudden arrival in my life, not everyone around me has been. The largely white and middle-class community that I've been surrounded by most of my life continues to tell me to "be careful" and acts as if my choice to live here is either a phase or something that will at most be good to put on my resume. I see it as neither; rather, it's a choice to resist the toxic effects of capitalism and consumerism that have been so prevalent in my life, while still recognizing the importance of economic stability for poor and working class folks with whom I live in community.

One of the toxic effects of our society that I noticed in myself was an intense individualism and a striving for personal moral purity in the food I ate, the things I bought, the conversations I had, and the school work I did; all made possible by my privilege. But I've experienced a great humbling here...a great recognition of my smallness in this world that oftentimes appears giant and overwhelming. My stubborn belief that I know best has been

shaken. My heart has been broken and put back together time and time again. Each day I challenge myself to see God in each person who comes to the door, in the people I live with, and in myself. Sometimes this last one is the most difficult for me. Who am I, as a middle-class college graduate, to be moving into a predominantly Black low-income neighborhood in North St. Louis and claim to be a Catholic Worker? Who am I, as a biracial person who has been handed many privileges, to say I know what it's like to be Black in America? Is it false of me to be living here in the first place? How do I deal with my guilt and shame?

I still grapple with these questions and turn in bed at night wondering what brought me to this place. I've been reflecting on how, in just two months, it has already shifted my heart permanently. I have felt challenged living here, in all of the most wonderful ways. I have laughed hysterically with the kids in the kitchen, who often insist they deserve a second dessert. I have been angry at the catcalls from strangers as I bike through the neighborhood to meetings across town. I have been overwhelmed with joy planting tomatoes in the front garden and talking to neighbors who pass by and tell me about their favorite veggies. And I've cried at times knowing that my life has been changed in such a way that it will be hard to ever go back to the life I was living before. Like many of my peers in college, I was hopping on planes to fly around the world in the name of "volunteering", obsessing over my carbon footprint without recognizing the privilege I had in doing so, believing that I had to produce--good grades, an

impressive resume, a diploma--in order to be successful or loved. Now I have mentors who I know I can turn to and talk about these feelings that are hard, but not impossible, to shake off.

It is July now, and the summer sun is making me sweat through my t-shirts. I have an unopened diploma sitting in my old bedroom at my parents' house four hours away. I've gotten used to the three flights of stairs I go up and down each day, used to the creak of the steps as I attempt to tip toe up them at night, worried I'll wake someone from their slumber. I've gotten used to being questioned, challenged, and changed each day. I've fallen in love with it. It is July now, and Karen House feels like home.



Chloe has done many unexpected things since moving to St. Louis. Processing a bunch of peaches is not on that list. Photo by Jason Ebinger



Chloe Jackson is enjoying watching the sunflowers bloom in the garden at Karen House and is looking forward to the fall harvest at New Roots Urban Farm!

A Place for Everyone: Serving and Being Served at Karen House

by Beth Buchek

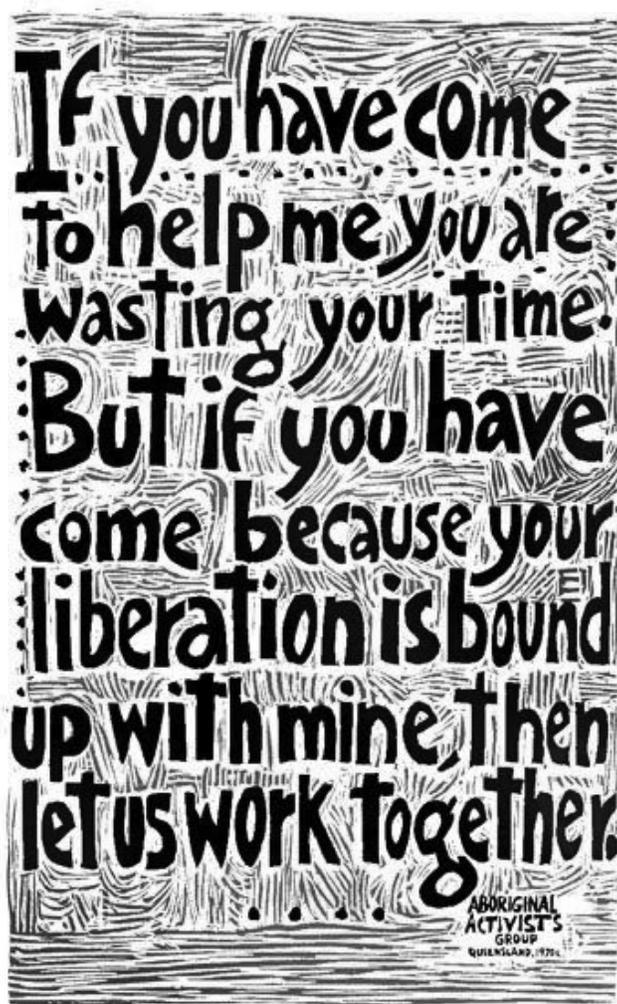
Karen House is a place that serves people. Hearing this, one may draw an image in her mind of a Karen House guest, a homeless woman and her child just arriving to Karen House with a few trash bags full of their personal belongings (all that they could carry when they were kicked out of their apartment after failing to pay their rent for a couple months). When you imagine the work of Karen House you might imagine a man from the nearby neighborhood, coming to the door for sandwiches, canned food and a conversation. It is true that Karen House exists to serve these folks but the scope of those served is much broader than that. It includes you the reader of the Round Table, those who attend Round Table discussions, those who come and cook meals or drop off donations, those who send monthly checks, those who include the house in their prayers, and many others. And, it includes me.

I know personally that Karen House does much more than provide hospitality and feed people. I know this because I have been served and continue to be served by Karen House. I began receiving from Karen House when I moved into the house in 2008. I had recently graduated from college and I came to Karen House to live as a Catholic Worker in community with other Catholic Workers who gave of themselves to serve homeless women and children. Living at Karen House was a truly transformative experience for me. I got to live in a place where it truly was “easier to be good”. I relished waking up every morning in a space where I could practice the Works of Mercy. I enjoyed building relationships with women who grew up in the same city as me but with totally different experiences. I was grateful for the opportunity to break down stereotypes, learn, and deepen my understanding of the many justice issues facing the women at Karen House. I was served at Karen House because the experience I had there truly gave me so much. The lessons I learned there carry through to all of the work I do now.

Karen House is a special place that allows many people a chance to come and learn at the house. Those that can't come and learn in person can access a wealth of knowledge through resources on a variety of topics on the website, and through The Round Table.

I am pleased to say that Karen House is maintaining this service work. The community is continuing to serve homeless women and children, men and women who stop by for food, clothing and conversations, they continue to host volunteer groups, and spread messages of truth and justice to many including me.

The Karen House community wrote a new values statement



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and I read it several times, (I am a big reader). After reflecting on the content of the new values statement I thought to myself, “Yep this is the Karen House I know,” that is to say that while I know this values statement was just written to reflect some changes to the structure of the community, all of it would also apply to Karen House as it has existed for the past 39 years.

The values statement states that Karen House is welcoming to all, rooted in community, works to meet the immediate needs of people and challenges systems that create those needs. It talks about challenging oppression, finding liberation, seeing



Beth Buchek aka Booch missed summers at Karen House without AC so much that she signed up to come every Monday with her students to clean and cook. She even brought her baby Charlie with her to learn about the sweaty joy of being a Catholic Worker.

the face of God in others and so on. These are things that the community, guests and supporters of Karen House have been doing since its founding.

The other thing Karen House has been doing since day one is growing and evolving. In particular, it's been growing in its lived expression of these values. The recent structural changes to the way the house runs were the impetus for writing this new values statement. I am still wrapping my head around what all the changes are and how they are lived out so I won't try to explain them all to you here. What I do know is that the house is trying to acknowledge and minimize the differences community members and guests experience, in particular they are striving to minimize as much as possible the difference in power. This is something Catholic Workers have always strived to do. We would do this by attempting to live in voluntary poverty, by owning less stuff, by caring less about name brands or the latest technology that we might be able to afford that someone living in poverty could not. This worked for some of us (I was not very good at it, but that is beside the point). We tried to remove the divide that wealth and stuff put between ourselves and the guests who didn't have access to these things. This was a good practice because it is always good to simplify one's life - to rid ourselves of stuff and focus on relationships.

But in some ways it fell short. While we could get rid of some of our possessions, or share our financial resources with the house there were many ways we could not eliminate

our power and privilege. I still have the advantage of a college education, growing up in St. Louis and attending wonderful schools that connect me to a network of resources. This set me apart from the guests and nothing I did changed that. So the current community has evolved again and is trying something new. They are working to narrow the gap between guest and community member in a new way, by sharing power with the guests more, by giving them a chance to join the Core Community. Guests are given more access in the house, less rules around things like food. There is more trust and a more equal balance between community and guest. They are truly practicing my favorite part of the values statement, which is "We believe that our liberation is tied to each other." This new way acknowledges the gifts of the guests and empowers them to share them by taking leadership roles in the house. There is less of a "power over" structure in the house now and more of a "power together" model. As a person who comes to Karen House regularly to cook, it is lovely to see the new ownership everyone feels for the house.

I hope Karen House can continue to serve the guests, the folks in the neighborhood, the volunteers, Round Table readers and me. I hope this model can be adapted and used by others looking to live better and in a way that empowers everyone more. As Lilla Watson said "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."



Beth (fifth from the left) standing alongside other St. Louis Catholic Workers during the 2009 MLB All Star Game at Busch Stadium in St. Louis. Photo by Mike Baldwin



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

Being a Catholic Worker: 100 Suggestions Adapted from the Detroit CW

- Take the Sermon on the Mount very seriously.
- Don't take yourself too seriously.
- Convene the kin-dom of God over soup.
- Compel them to come in.
- Ask how far the line goes back.
- Embrace living simply.

Try and figure out where allowance went last month.

Consider vigiling in the hospital emergency room to be an intercession.

Pray in places where it is forbidden.

Organize 'til it hurts.

Reside in the margins.

Receive mail for guests who left years ago. Suffer thievery.

Persevere in non-sequitur conversation.

Bless those who curse you, including guests. Clarify your thoughts.

Be stunned at the phone bill.

Honor conscience in yourself and others.

Swing the mop like a flashy dance partner.

Be skeptical of forms, bureaucracies, institutions, and people who put you on hold. Show up to protests. Draw a line.

Stand on it. Maybe get arrested.

Refuse to be called a saint.

Keep an advent journal and share it with your friends.

Create a tradition, and nourish it.

Plot the demise of small (and large) rodents.

Try writing an Easy Essay.

Find out it's harder than you think.

Learn to say you're not on house today.

Agonize over your church. Rage against patriarchy.

Take your chances on the Holy Spirit.

Hold small children on your lap.

Find love a harsh and dreadful thing. Find love.

Bless the food in the making.

Be civil when answering the phone at 3am.

(You may swear it if rings again immediately.)

Make the run to Crown Candy and try not to bring back too much ice cream. Devise new recipes for zucchini.

Discern the times. Take time. Give time.

Do time. Add Thyme.

There's no such thing as too much garlic, but take it easy on the red pepper.

Dress (tastefully) from the clothing room.

Build a new society in the shell of the old.

Try and figure out who is pilfering toilet paper.

Find a new place to hide on your day off.

Attend just one more planning meeting.

After a while, throw away the I.O.U.'s.

Reach your limit and put a guest out.

Argue over where the limits are.

Keep a stash of banners

(liturgical and political) in the basement.

Don't let the principalities get you down.

Whip up a carrot cake for someone's wedding.

Walk the way of the cross through the streets of your city.

Learn and remember the names of those who ring the doorbell.

Curse the filthy, rotten system.

Marvel at the survival skills of your guest.

Weep quietly in your room when necessary. Stay in touch. Sweat. Beg.

Track down a foul smell.

(Look behind the couch).

Pick through crates and trash at Soulard Market for edibles.

Be a go-giver. Loan your car to excess.

Call yourself a personalist. Clean wounds.

Figure out who keeps turning up the heat. Scrounge for pampers in a crisis.

Think critically about non-violence.

Acknowledge your privileges.

Read *The Long Loneliness*, again.

Refuse to keep records to get government money.

Refuse government money.

Hell, refuse to pay taxes.

Argue economics over coffee.

Argue over economics of coffee.

Pray more or less faithfully.

Be a part of the Green Revolution.

Do things for the love of God.

Have a painting party and serve burritos.

Put a candle in a jar. Take it to a missile factory.

Wait for people to come and go.

Negotiate a household truce.

Scrub soup pots as an exercise in contemplation.

Visit prisoners. Be one.

Buy a farm. Learn to juggle.

Layout the paper with a flair for graphics.

Mark anniversaries.

Celebrate the Incarnation.



Graphic by our own Greg Fister!



The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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St. Louis, MO. 63106

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Ella Dixon "Little" House

1540 N. 17th St.

St. Louis, MO. 63106

314-974-7432



Carl Kabat House

1450 Monroe

St. Louis, MO. 63106

314-621-7099

Teka Childress House

1875 Madison

St. Louis, MO. 63106

314-588-9901

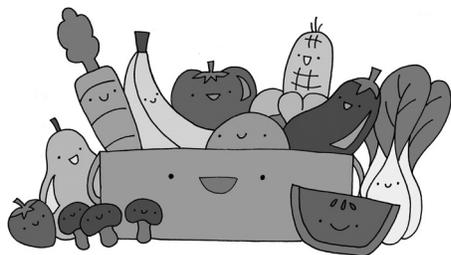
www.KarenHouseCW.org

Karen House Updates!

We are slowly accepting new guests and could use help with the following donations:

- Pillows, blankets
- Bowls, spoons, forks
- Big bottles of shampoo, lotion
- Bar soap

We could also use DINNER COOKS! Cooks can either prepare the meal at home and bring it to Karen House or cook at KH using our food. Give us a call to sign up!



Round Table Discussion at Karen House!

Our community is continuing to think about how racism shows up in the world around us, including how our work at Karen House may inadvertently reinforce oppression.

Join us at Karen House on **Sunday, October 9**, for a Round Table discussion exploring how the ideology of white supremacy influences the work of direct service (whether that is in the realm of housing, medical care, education, mental health, food, etc.)

Potluck dinner starts at 6:00 pm and the discussion will begin around 6:45 pm.

We hope that you can make it!

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

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