

THE Round Table

Summer 2020

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

Love Letters to Karen House...



Why This Issue?

I did not know it then, but the last time I would ever walk through the doors of Karen House was on a Sunday afternoon in early February. I was there for what would be our last in-person *Round Table* meeting before the Coronavirus pandemic required us to practice physical and social distancing. I was greeted the way I was always greeted after ringing the doorbell as Karen House—a warm smile and a quick hello from the housekeeper, children running around, joyfully screaming, and the phone ringing. The smell of Sunday morning brunch still lingered in the air as I made my way through the familiar hallways.

Our meeting that afternoon was under an hour. (Definitely the shortest *Round Table* meeting in my five years on the committee!) While most brainstorming sessions take multiple meetings to reach a consensus, the four of us who had gathered that afternoon quickly agreed on the idea of “Love Letters to Karen House.” We extended an open invitation to anyone who wanted to write and share a reflection on what Karen House has meant to them.

I could have never imagined the impact Karen House would have on my life when I first walked through its doors eight years ago. While I grieve the loss of Karen House as a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, I am simultaneously filled with gratitude for the memories and the stories that will live on in these pages and in the hearts of the thousands of folks who spent time on the corner of Hogan and N. Market. I take comfort and am joyful that Karen House’s beloved building will be passed on to City Hope STL, a local group, led by people of color, that does grassroots-style hospitality and shares many of the same values.

Friends of Karen House and readers of the *Round Table*, thank you for all of your love, support, and encouragement throughout the years. What a journey it has been! Reading this last issue of the *Round Table* brought a smile to my face and tears to my eyes. I hope you experience the same.



- Sarah Nash

Cover: Jeff Finnegan
Centerfold: Kristina Vidovic

This is the last issue of *The Round Table*, the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. To view previous issues, check out www.newsitem.karenhousecw.org/about-karen-house/the-round-table. People working on this issue include: Sarah Nash, Jenny Truax, Mary Ann McGivern, and Sean Ferguson.

Dear Karen House...

by Gil Weyhaupt

It’s been nice having our Friday night date for the past 10 years ... even though we had our ups and downs. It was always party time when a Lenten fish fry would drop off their leftovers! Or there was leftover cheesecake or pastry. The power outages were a challenge at first, but after a few, we got the hang of it. Gathering everyone in the basement during a tornado warning was a little less than fun.

But we met a lot of wonderful people, guests and their kids, neighbors at the door, cooks, volunteers and, of course, the Catholic Workers themselves. We made some good friends, got scammed a few times at the door, and I still don’t understand how the front room air conditioner

was stolen while we were sitting right there! The liturgies were great! Answering the phone and telling a crying, homeless woman that we didn’t have any room but we could offer some other phone numbers was difficult.

I’m sorry it has to end like this, breaking up is hard. But it’s not you, it’s me. You always offered your best for everyone. I just ran out of steam. You taught me a lot about life and love and I will never forget you. Please keep me in your prayers, as I will for you.

Much love,
Gil Weyhaupt



The Minute We Are In

by Teka Childress

I am sitting here thinking about life in the time of the Coronavirus crisis. It is hard to consider how to address my amazing life at Karen House, in this context. Additionally, I spent a good part of my day looking over Ellen Rehg’s book on Ann Manganaro, a book Ellen had come close to finishing when she died.

In her book, Ellen told a few stories about Ann’s time at Karen House and it brought back wonderful memories of the most amazing time in my life. I have never been one who looks backwards or forwards a great deal. I think the minute we are in is the one when we are called to do our best, to be who we were made to be. This doesn’t mean I have always done that, but it is what I know to be true. I think of that now, with this Coronavirus, and I know that about my days at Karen House. I didn’t choose this time. I would never have said, “Let me live during a pandemic.” But nonetheless, this is our time and this is when God is



Teka walking the halls at Karen House.
Source: Karen House Archives

present among us. I might, however, have chosen those wonderful, precious days at Karen House.

I resonate with Dorothy Day’s words about the Long Loneliness. Isn’t that at the heart of everything? We are separate, and we long to be connected. Karen House was the most amazing place for connection for me. It allowed a girl out of St. Louis Hills, who loved to read Russian novels, and had plenty of angst about the meaning of life, to find an answer. Getting to live with people at Karen House (those in our Community and those among our Guests) who knew what mattered, who knew people

mattered, took away my loneliness. Sharing with them, believing in and with them, struggling with them, and eating with them.

For a moment now, as I remember those days, I think, “Will we ever be together again, as we are told to isolate from one another?” But these days will not go on forever. and we can support each other through them. It is my time at Karen House that made me the truest believer. I will never be the same because of the house, the people, and all those who made our life there possible. For this and all of you, I am forever grateful.



Co-foundress Ann Manganaro with long-time Catholic Workers Teka Childress and Ellen Rehg.
Photo by Mev Puleo

Karen House Gave Me

by John Carroll

- Shelter
- A place to learn how to do community
 - Friends (near and far)
- My first neighborhood-of-choice
 - Hugs
- Food runs and too much bread
- Conversations that I still think about more than a decade later (and for decades to come, I am sure)
 - Love
- Practicing consensus
 - Rehab skills
- An organizing community, and model
 - Laughs
 - Tears
- Learning to drive stick the hard way

- Learning to cook for large groups
 - Humility
 - Existential crisis
- Questions about systemic racism, and a learning community
 - Gardens
 - Neighbors
- A sense of grounding, a touchpoint, a foundation
 - Hope
 - Energy
- A clear sense of being part of something bigger than myself, older than myself, a connection to a lineage of people who want to make a world where it is easier to be good
- Oh, my little heart, so so many things!

The Beginning

by Sue Lauristen

I can’t talk about Karen Catholic Worker House without first referencing Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement in Manhattan, New York during the Great Depression. The Catholic Worker Movement changed my life. I wanted to find a purpose other than making money and having a stagnant routine.

My exposure to St. Teresa Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in Omaha was a pivotal juncture in who I was to become. I was introduced to the workings, writings, and activism of the Catholic Worker by the folks who were living in community at St. Teresa CW House. Their mission was to open the doors of the home they shared to offer hot meals and overnight beds to the unhoused men who wanted to participate.

Before deciding to move into the community, I wanted to experience just what I was getting myself into. I went down to help serve a hot meal during the nightly soup line. I approached the door, hesitated, walked in, and immediately turned around and walked out. It was a reality that I had never come close to experiencing before. There was a small room with about ten tables and every seat was occupied with hungry men. There was also a line waiting to be served. When I walked out of the door to get my composure, I knew this was a breaking point – walk away and not return or get my act together and meet the men one at a time. Thank God I chose the latter! I never looked back.

I read everything I could get my hands on about Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and the CW Movement. I was totally immersed. I learned what it meant to walk the talk of the Gospel teachings. The words of the Gospels became a living, breathing testament on what Christian activism looks like in a hands-on way. It became apparent that liturgy was only one small component of the bigger picture.

There was about a year and a half between my introduction to the St. Teresa CW and the day I moved to St. Louis to see if there was enough interest to start a Catholic Worker House there. The



Dorothy Day awaiting arrest in California in support of the farmworkers' union in 1973.
Source: Bob Fitch Photography Archive, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University

process began with me corresponding from Omaha to people in St. Louis who I was told might be interested in exploring the possibility of a CW House. Please forgive my memory if I leave out any of the initial contacts. I wrote to Ann and Bolen Carter (members of the first CW House in St. Louis, years ago when the CW was just starting), Al Sprehe, Ann Manganaro, John Lightle, Sr. Frances Padberg, Kopavi Community, Mark, Michael, Mary Beth, Judy, Trish, Mike G., Sharon and Luanne Schinzel.

I took a leap of faith and moved to St. Louis in

December of 1976. The initial meetings took place in my little apartment on 11th Street and Salisbury. The meetings grew exponentially with time. I guess we went from about eight people to a roomful at the convent of St. Alphonsus Rock Church. Lots of interest and enthusiasm, but no one to move into the building we would eventually be a Catholic Worker in St. Louis.

Over a period of just a couple of week in March or April of 1977, four brave, dedicated, and determined women emerged as the future St. Louis Catholic Worker community: Kathy Derby, Luanne Schinzel, Virginia Druhe, and me. Game on.

Virginia came to live with me on 11th Street and the planning continued. I spent most of my days calling and meeting with any resource that anyone sent my way. There wasn't a building, or any money, but there was the will and determination to see the House become a reality. After a great amount of discussion about who the House would serve – men, women or families – we came to a consensus that we would cater to the needs of women and children. Back in 1977, there was literally no place for women and children who were in need of emergency shelter.

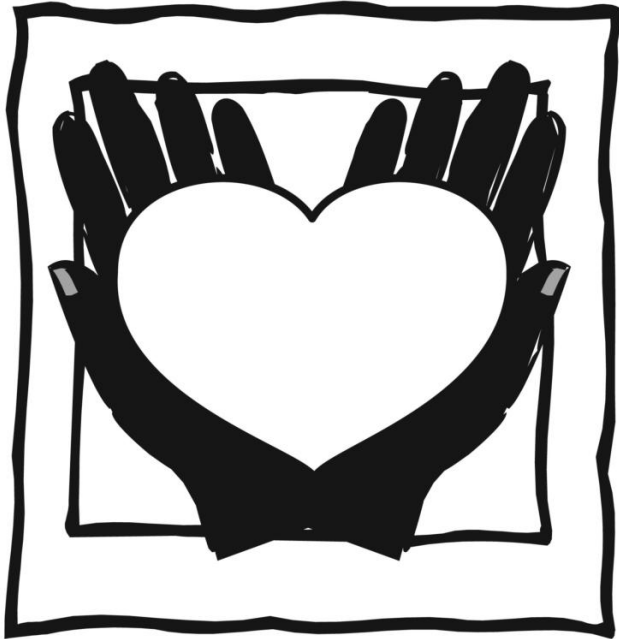
Now we had our mission, and if I'm remembering correctly, the next step was to find a building for our new home. During this time in St. Louis, many of the parishes were operating on a shoestring budget, with few parishioners, no active schools and sometimes, a priest serving two parishes. Someone gave me the name of Fr. Martin (Marty) Mannion, the priest stationed at St. Liborius Parish. Meeting Marty was truly a Godsend. Our interest in using the vacant convent for our House of Hospitality was received with open arms. The convent located at 1840 Hogan was in an area of St. Louis riddled with vacant houses and empty lots and located just a few blocks away from a federal housing experiment gone terribly

wrong – Pruitt-Igoe. There was only one hurdle to get over, and it took some time and lots of patience. We had to get permission from Fr. Richard Gallagher who oversaw all the church property in the Diocese. Fr. Gallagher finally agreed and put some sort of formal agreement in place, wanting to charge us a mere \$900 a month. Since we were doing all this on an extraordinary amount of faith, we signed it with absolutely no money. I believe we were able to get it down to \$100.

While still in our apartments and working daily to get the old convent and soon-to-be CW House open, Virginia and I were asked to take a young woman into our apartment who desperately needed a place to stay. Karen was a young, single, and very pregnant woman who came to stay with us. If I remember correctly, I don't believe Karen even spent the night before she went into labor and had her baby. I reference this story because when discussing what we would name our CW House, Virginia said, "Let's name it after our first guest – Karen." Hence, Karen House was born.

That was a short history of the beginning of the Karen House Catholic Worker. Karen House was what I would call the perfect storm. It seemed like whatever we needed to make KH a reality was sent our way. We got the startup money we needed, we had a home, we had a name; the community support kept growing and growing and the live-in community emerged from many different places. By the time the doors opened to receive our first guests, three other remarkable women had moved in to community – Sisters of Loretto Ann Manganaro and Mary Ann McGivern, and JoAnn Silva.

For me personally, Karen House was a privilege. The accomplishment of seeing a dream become a reality was awesome. The women and children that came to share our home gave so much more to me than I gave them. To love unconditionally was relatively effortless for our guests, but when it came to



Source: Unknown

our community of seven, it was more difficult. The accomplishment of starting, founding, and planning a CW House was a major accomplishment for a 26-year-old who hadn't done anything of this magnitude. I experienced a level of power that I didn't know how to handle and subsequently did a poor job managing it. I was ill-prepared to step back and let go of the power I had.

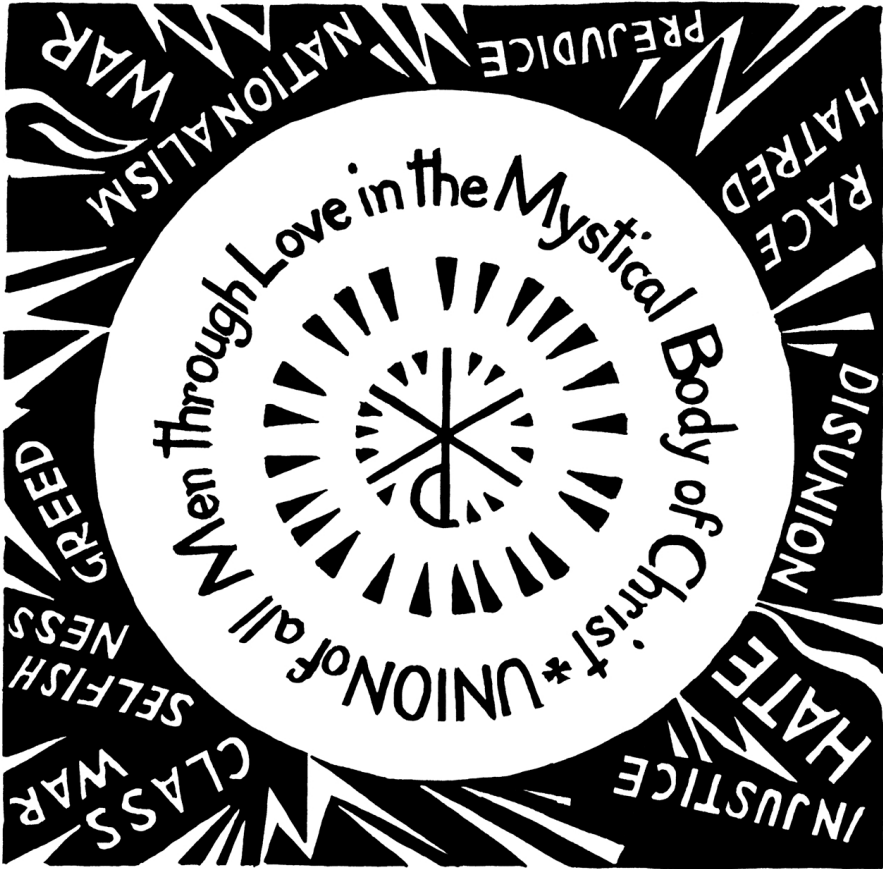
Karen House was a building block for me. I fought for a year to expand the CW House to what was then the Vincentian Provincial House three blocks from Karen House. I wanted to move the whole operation into what would be called Cass House. We could have a separate area for women and children, a designated area for a soup line, plus overnight hospitality for 17 men. I dug my heels in and the consensus was to have two CW Houses – Karen House and Cass House.

I spent so much energy growing up in both endeavors that I lost sight of our mission. It took me a long time to realize that doing the leg work to

see a dream come to fruition is nothing compared to the mission of being present to our guests and community members.

Karen House survived because of the love, dedication, and perseverance of the people who continued to support the mission of caring for the women and children in need of shelter. Not only did they support the guests, they continue to fight the social justice inequalities we face as people daily. Karen House was a bricks and mortar accomplishment, and I was afforded the tremendous opportunity to live with and meet people who taught me what generosity and selflessness look like.

I want to thank all the people who have been guests and community members at Karen House for living true to the spirit of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Mary Ann, Virginia, Luanne, Ann, Zack, Barb, Maureen, Carol and so many more, thank you for not letting my immaturity deter you from the mission of the Catholic Worker.



Source: Dorothy Day Guild

Dear Karen House,

by Kathryn Jabek

My favorite (and only) memory of you is when I spent an overnight with some other young adults and the residents at Karen House. I loved the welcoming atmosphere, and when I walked in, instead of doing an icebreaker to get to know each other, we were fixing windows and blinds together. I should have known we were going to be doing hard labor! I felt right at home, quite literally, as we assisted in changing blinds and mingling. I enjoyed seeing children run around while their mothers would run after them and I enjoyed the messy uniqueness of each room as I wandered around.

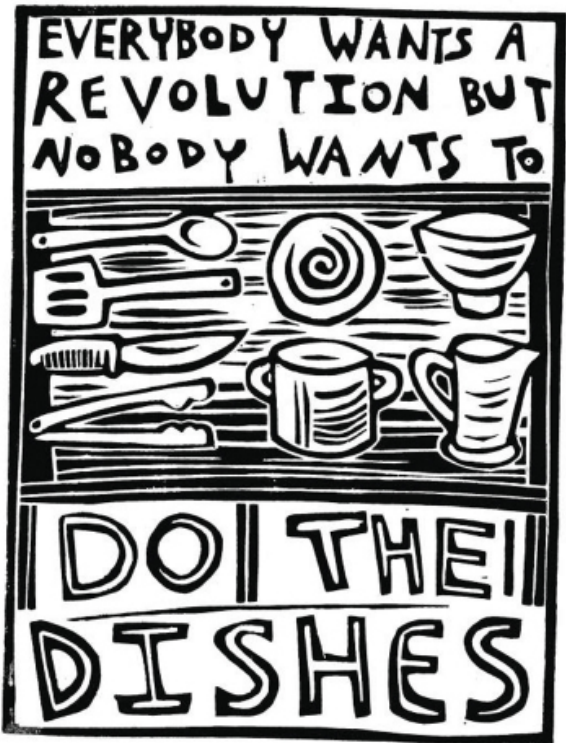
I am grateful for all the people who have passed through Karen House. Each person has left their imprint and impact (no matter how large or small). Hearing various stories throughout my time in college up until the night I spent at Karen House has been nothing short of meaningful impact for the residents and volunteers. I am especially grateful for everyone I met at the overnight and getting to experience what it is like to live at a Catholic Worker Home. I am grateful for the family I met the next morning making pancakes and joking around while we were trying to figure out how many pancakes fit onto a small griddle. I loved see-

ing how wonderfully Karen House welcomed those who are unhoused through its doors for breakfast on Sunday morning, and the compassion and openness those individuals felt that morning as well. Being able to explore the house was such a freeing experience—there are so many hallways to walk through and discover!

As I think about this next chapter of Karen House, where it has been, where it is, and where it is going, I have nothing but positive thoughts of it. Karen House has assisted many individuals whom I have known and have not known personally. They have taken in those living unhoused and have taken on issues, such as immigration and the Black Lives Matter Movement. I will miss reading the *Round Table* every quarter but feel especially lucky to be able to contribute to the very last one.

I am sad I will not be able to explore more of Karen House, but I know that the legacy of Karen House will live on in Saint Louis and will continue to create positive memories for all individuals who have and who will pass through the building.

Peace,
Kathryn Jabek



Art by Sarah Fuller

Opportunities & Possibilities

by Mercedes Adams

I grew up in a large family of five brothers and two sisters and my amazing, strong mother, Lorraine, who recently passed to a greater place. When mom fell on hard times and looked for help, we lived at Karen House a number of times.

Hmmm... Karen House. When I think of Karen House, I think of a second chance at life. I regret my limited knowledge on Karen House and how it started. But it was started by a woman named Dorothy Day who helped women and kids.

My first memory of Karen House is actually a vivid dream I had as a little kid before we were even introduced to Karen House--a dream which then came to life.

Karen House has been a safe haven for my family and SO many other wonderful families for years. KH con-

sists of volunteers and people I like to call God's little helpers. Many were probably struggling themselves, but were called to duty.

Karen House showed me & my family LOVE! It helped us in many ways. We took trips, went camping, fishing, etc. KH gave us opportunities, showed us possibilities, and tutored us. We went to places we never would've dreamed. We have so many memories.

If I'm not mistaken, Karen House is looking to close. I would LOVE for Karen House to stay open. If I EVER win big, KH would be the FIRST place I would donate to.

I would like to thank EVERYONE who had ANYTHING to do with helping me and my family through a rough phase. Karen House, you are appreciated, loved, and we are grateful! Thank you!

Dear Karen House...

by Bola Akerele

This is a place I will never forget in my life! You opened your doors to me and my children when our accommodations fell through and I was so full of fear: How will I feed my children? Especially my child with special needs? How will I provide a roof over their heads? Clothe them? All these kept pounding in my head because I used up all the money I had in my life to catch the plane from Nigeria to New York and then an 18 hour journey by road to St. Louis, Missouri. No one would have blamed you guys for saying no, given such very short notice, yet you decided to let us share a place in the house. Our trip from Africa to the United States wouldn't have been an amazing experience without you

guys. Your friendly, hard-working, organized, easy-to-get-along-with volunteers showered my children with love.

You put good food on the table when we were hungry, clothed us in the cold, provided a roof over our heads, and made us feel at home! You made us feel so welcomed! Words can't express how grateful I am. With my special needs child, you made me feel she's no different from any other child.

Ese gaani, mo dupe!
(Thank you so much, I appreciate!)



Source: Unknown

The River of Hospitality

by Mary Ann McGivern

When we opened Karen House, I was nervous for many reasons. I was nervous that I wouldn't know how to greet people, I wouldn't know what to say to someone needing shelter, I wouldn't know how to give without seeming condescending. My nervousness was all about me, not about how someone in need might feel asking a strange lady for help. But when I met our first family, Dean and Connie and Connie's five-year-old, Connie Sue, that unease receded.

Somehow we quickly set the style of shaking hands and introducing ourselves. It always felt right and I've been pleased to be greeted that way myself when I come to the door and it's answered by someone I don't know.

I learned to ask first, "Where did you sleep last night?" – a question I still ask sometimes when someone on the street asks for help. It's a factual question that provides immediate information about the person's need – and yet people don't seem to consider it intrusive. I think they're grateful I want to know their situation.

But Karen House was too big. I wanted someplace smaller, and St. Liborius associate pastor Marty Manion heard me. Marty visited the sick in the parish frequently and when he said to Ella Dickson, "You should be in a nursing home," she said, "I couldn't face my mother in heaven if I let the building fall down." Marty said, "Give it to Mary Ann," and she did – the start of the Little House, a four-flat, small only in comparison to Karen House.

Paul and Elijah Sutton were 13 and 15 when they moved into the Little House, their mother Helen generously allowing me to be a foster mom. I never expected I'd have children, much less grandchildren. One of Paul's daughters had a fierce argument with her 3rd grade teacher that yes, her grandmother *was* a nun. Paul and Elijah are in their 50s now with grandchildren of their own.

It's a great joy that Mike and Teka live in the Little House. Their summer fire pit nights open the Worker community to neighbors, politicians, story tellers and passers-by. It's like I've spent 42 years standing in a river flowing with people of good will.



Dear Karen House,

by "Joe Joe" Eggleston

Especially Tony, thank you. You opened my eyes as an 18-year-old and forever changed how I would see and interact with the world. My experiences at Karen House have had a profound impact on how I have evaluated every major decision in my life.

Love,
"Joe Joe" Eggleston



Art by Sarah Fuller

Dear Memories

by Suzanne Lindstrom

I want to take this time to reflect on memories that I hold dear. In 1996, I was homeless with a two-and-half-year-old and I was pregnant with my second. Karen House opened their doors to me. I was there a few months and welcomed my second son during my stay. The staff (now my friends) were so helpful during this time. Then, I moved into an apartment at the Little House. My first very own place. I spent 5 years there, still with some help from Karen House. I didn't make a wise decision when I moved on and I regret leaving. I have learned so much over the years, and I feel like it all started with the kindness of wonderful people! Thank you so much for everything! Teka, Rebecca, Jenny, Annjie, Tim, Mary Ann, Mitch, and Virginia – I will never forget you!



Source: Unknown

Caring House

by Tammy Moore

What Karen House means to me is more than anyone could ever understand. Yes, I understand that they've helped thousands of people. Yes, I understand that they are important to many, but Caring House is literally the definition of family to me, the definition of love they gave us: no limit to what they would do for us.

We were invited to their personal homes. We were invited into their personal lives. The family members of Caring House Catholic Workers opened their arms and hearts to us. To me and my family, and it did not end there. After we left there, they kept in touch; they made sure that we were okay and we were safe and we knew that we could always come back. They made sure we had food and a place to live, a stable place in a safe environment.

They loved us when we did not love ourselves, when we didn't know how to love ourselves. The love and the help that they offer from and through Caring House is much more than physical help. Some families need a little more than just a roof over their head. When I think

about Karen House and everything they've done for us, for me and my family, it makes me cry tears of joy, literally.

I grew up and I came from a large family; when I say large, I mean large. So how could we end up homeless with nowhere to go and no one to turn to? I hear a lot of people use the reference that blood is thicker than water, but it couldn't be. Simply because these people were no relation to us, and they showed us more love than anyone that we have ever grown up, with anyone that we shared the same bloodline with. They took care of us, they loved us, they built us up. They taught us how to love ourselves. It made us feel like everything will actually be all right. They made sure that it was alright, and for that I'm truly thankful. I will always, I mean always, love the Karen House and their staff and the families we bonded with during and after our stay. This is why I, Tammy Moore, love and honor Karen House.



Being Friends of Karen House

by Jerry & Marty King

Our relationship with Karen House began in 1980, after Marty and Virginia met when they were doing directed retreats in Sedalia, Colorado. How they connected while on "silent" retreat remains a mystery, but what a gift for our family that it happened.

Shortly after Marty and Virginia met, Virginia moved into a little room above the chapel at Cass House to begin a period of hermitage. But before she did that, she introduced us to Karen House and the Catholic Worker movement. The event that really cemented the relationship was when our sixth child, Peter, our surprise baby, arrived in 1983 and Virginia and Marty worked out a deal--Marty would come to Cass House to pray and meditate while Virginia watched the baby.

Our other, early connection to KH was our relationship with John Kavanaugh. John was a classmate of mine at SLUH and was doing spiritual direction for both Marty and me. He and Virginia talked us into coming down on Tuesday evenings for Mass. There we got to know Mary Ann, Teka and Ann better, and were introduced to Mev when, as a SLU student, she brought a group of Visitation High girls to the Tuesday liturgy.

From there, we became "friends of the house" and the Karen House community returned our support in so many ways. Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve was an anchor of the holidays for our growing family. Preparing and serving meals became a way of growing closer to both the Karen House residents and our friends with whom we worked on those meals. And finally, after our kids grew up and moved away, we were able to "take house" in the evenings until Jerry started falling asleep on the job.

One part of Karen House's history that I was privileged to participate in was the acquisition of the building from the Archdiocese. After a notoriously nasty Director of Real Estate for the Archdiocese threatened to sell the building to a developer, I was asked to negotiate with his successor to acquire the property. The new Real Estate Director insisted that we had to acquire the entire property including the church building, which was an albatross for many reasons. So, we decided to reduce our offering price to \$1 and I arranged for an engineering company to survey the property for the purpose of



Karen House and the former building of St. Liborius Catholic Church.
Source: Information St. Louis, Inc.

separating the ownerships of the church and the Karen House building. The Archdiocese relented on the price, since they wanted so badly to rid themselves of the old church building, and we resold the Karen House building to a newly-created Land Trust for the same \$1 (which I am still owed, by the way!) and created a new corporation (A corporation? Teka was aghast!) that took ownership of the church.

I cannot imagine our lives as a couple and as a family over these 40 years without Karen House. Your community is imbedded in our hearts, our souls and our very bones. The friendships with Virginia, Teka, Mev, Ann, Mark Scheu, John Kavanaugh, Mary Ann, Tony and Julie, and so many others have enriched our lives beyond measure. Even though we have not been around much in recent years, we are moved by the ending of an era with the passing on of the building and the ministry. May the blessings continue in the work and in the lives of those who have been in the work and in their children and grandchildren, and in those who follow in the footsteps of the saints of the community.



An Imprint of Love

by Jenny Truax

I have an old picture from 1998 of some KH community members and guests in the front room. It's a grainy, off-centered, poorly-lit picture that you'd never hang on the wall, and yet it's the first thing that came to mind when thinking about this article. In the photo, everyone is doubled-over laughing, there may have been a dance party happening, and I can almost hear the uproar of kids and adults hollering and laughing. That summer, Karen House took hold of my heart and I'm forever grateful.

As I reflect on my time with Karen House, there's volumes of memories flooding in and a lifetime of meaning that could be drawn from them. Both major and personal events spring to mind: organizing in community after the 9/11 attacks and ramp up to war, experiencing all of the delightful and exhausting Karen House rituals around Christmastime, planning our Catholic Worker wedding, working with the Round Table committee for 20+ years, supporting the Ferguson uprising, doing anti-racism organizing in the Catholic Worker movement, attending Catholic Worker weddings, funerals...the list goes on. Karen House has been a primary force in my life, influencing who I am and how I continue to grow in the future. I'm so grateful.

When I used to give talks about Karen House, I'd always mention that we were a place where direct service and justice work co-existed. This has meant the world to me. It's truly a place where people put values into action. It's bones create a magical space where people can meet, chat, laugh, disagree, clean together, cook together, and eat together across many differences. The deep relationships between community members, guests, volunteers, and supporters are the "success" of Karen House. And Karen House will live on in all of these connections. The imprint of love from these relationships - on each of us and on the world - feels like immutable, holy, and profound truth.

As we close our Catholic Worker experiment in this space, I think of the building itself: the worn banister, the spacious dining room, the handcrafted wood cabinets. I know this building's quirks and history better than I know the house I live in now. Its bones were created

to house communities of people. For over 100 years, people have lived, loved, worked together, and eaten together in this space. Even after our experiment has concluded, these bones will be saturated with the love that has filled it for so long, ready to support the next group of folks.

Tony used to say that everyone who walked through the door (including guests, community members, volunteers, and cooks - everyone!) came to Karen House with some need. This pandemic has exposed the fact that our capitalist society is intentionally designed to extract resources from certain groups of people (people who are poor, working class, people of color, people with disabilities, and other targeted identities) and funnel wealth to the elite. Trapped in this set-up, our guests came to the house with certain material needs. On the other hand, community members and volunteers came with different needs that are talked about far less often. These needs are no less central to living - the need for connection, belonging, meaning, and an antidote to isolation. No one was a saint at Karen House, and, everyone was a saint, with different experiences, anxieties, beauties, and challenges. We all needed each other.

I'll keep that photo and treasure the 20+ years of memories I've accumulated, beginning with that first summer in 1998. The love that's sprung from Karen House will always be a grounding, defining part of my life. And love is always in motion, changing forms, and adapting. Octavia Butler said that "Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe." As we move through this particular change, I know that Karen House's imprint on the world endures, embedded in the deep love it has gifted to so many people. I'm forever grateful.



A photo from Karen House's 35th anniversary celebration.
Source: Karen House Website

Bringing Students to Karen House

by Sue Shostrand

Karen House was a place of warmth and compassion. As a volunteer cook who brought Christian Brothers College High School students with me, I am grateful to the Karen House community for illustrating that compassion toward others in need is a wonderful philosophy to live by. Our students, many of whom led privileged lives, observed that there are people who lack basic necessities so they need a helping hand. The students realized that they could be the ones to help lighten the load of others and bring some happiness into someone’s day. The joy of cooking and serving a hot meal and making conversation with the folks at Karen House was such a good experience for all involved.

Volunteering at Karen House from 2007 – 2015

helped me to appreciate the little pleasures of life that are so often taken for granted...a smile, a kind word, good food, and good conversation. My time there made me grateful for the many blessings in my life that God has bestowed upon me. Feeling so fortunate, I was glad that I could help others and teach our students to serve others. The community members of KH who helped others tirelessly have my admiration and sincere appreciation. They dedicated their lives to serving the women and children staying at Karen House. Although I stopped volunteering at KH five years ago, I will always remember my time at Karen House with fondness. I still teach at CBC, and I pray for the success of City Hope STL as they carry out their mission using the convent of Karen House.



Karen House Love Letter

by Billy Critchley-Menor, SJ

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, has some odd instructions for praying over the Nativity. After his usual advice to use all five senses to imagine Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus in a stable, he gives another step: “embrace and kiss the places where such persons put their feet and sit.” To embrace and kiss the dirty ground of a stable? What a prayer.

The first words I ever heard at Karen House were, “Welcome! Just so you know, we may have bed bugs.” I walked in to see a statue of the Virgin and Child on the same wall as a “resist police violence” poster; a portrait of Dorothy hung across from the trans pride flag. I saw a small shelf holding up a picture frame of community members, a dusty fern plant with a rainbow button pinned to it, and a small, raggedy copy of Thomas Merton’s *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Below the shelf sat an “inn-keeper” far more generous than that one centuries ago,

with her feet on the desk.

After a few years of being away from regular contact with the Catholic Worker, I felt at home. It was not the institutional religious life I had in my beloved Jesuit order. It was the type of religious life that was existing, self-consciously or not, merely on Divine Providence. It was like God: *down to earth*.

I found Karen House when it was old, smelly, and ridden with bed bugs. It had broken doors, windows that could only be held open with mason jars or old 2x4s, and a fridge certain to contain some moldy food. It was filled with people laughing and crying, hugging and fighting. I experienced it as a place of distress, a reminder of broken systems, and an uncomfortably close vision of desperate situations. Grandmas, dads, and moms are always knocking on the door looking for sandwiches, fruit, bread, “anything you’ve got,” for themselves and a

family. People come to Karen House in their neediness, asking for what is rightly theirs: food and shelter. They come smelling of smoke, alcohol, fresh air, goodness, loveliness, and clothes that have weathered too many nights in the damp cold.

But, I also experienced Karen House as a space saturated with grace, brimming with possibility, and shimmering with touchpoints of divinity. It is a place of nativity where God is being born to fill in the gaps. And like the nativity, it was not glamorous, efficient, or stable. It was messy. At Karen House, I felt hope--what Emily Dickinson says is “the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.”

I felt it in the mundanity of dishwashing and in the handing off of sandwiches amidst wafts of alcohol and drifts of frigid air. I felt it when I tossed out moldy bread and when I smelled the dankness of the nonperishable food room in the basement. I felt it when, despite being homeless and tired, a young mother and her young boy hula-hoop together with an older woman, and they laughed and laughed and laughed. I felt it when I read in the house log, “Miss Sharon moved out today and donated her DVDs to the house.” I felt it when I saw crew members just do what had to be done when toilets were breaking and wallets went missing and human feces had destroyed beds and chairs.

I felt hope because none of it *had to be*. The broken house, the crew members who chose to live there, who *chose* to get involved, the moldy excess of food, a dank room in the basement filled with giant cans of jelly, the guests who brought life with their laughs and their struggles and their DVDs. None of it *had to be* and yet, it was.

Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ wrote, “The Incarnation does not give us a ladder to climb out of the human condition. It gives us a drill that lets us burrow down into the heart of everything that is and, there, find it shimmering with divinity.” Without romanticizing the harsh reality that this world heaps upon the poor and marginalized, Karen House helped me burrow into the heart of everything

that is and find it shimmering with divinity.

It is not possible for me to share the many graces I’ve received in my two years volunteering with Karen House; to express what it has meant to me. There is no doubt that I have received much, *much* more than I ever gave. Dorothy Day writes about the seminarians who used to come follow her around at the Catholic Worker, trying to drink in the wisdom she let become incarnate in herself. I have reflected on this many times in the last two years as I beheld the generosity, tenacity, grit and, most of all

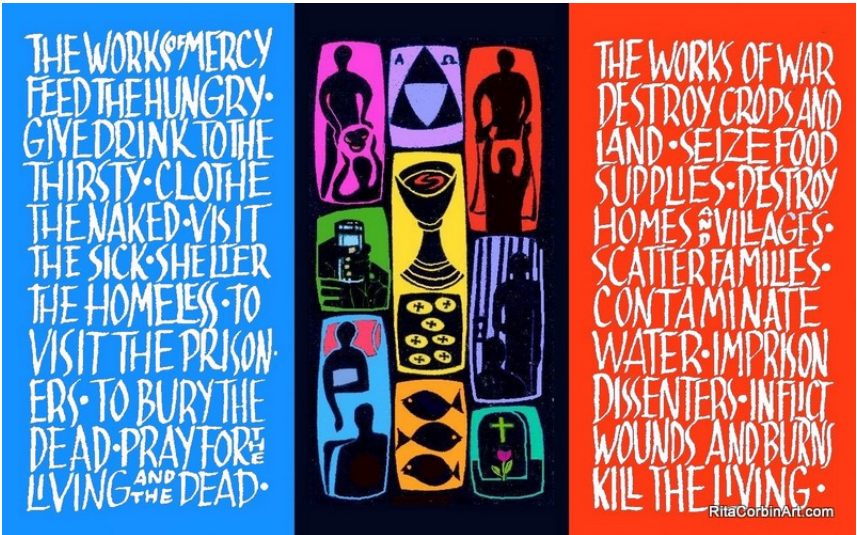
love, in people like Sheila and Sai and Sam. I know my life as a Jesuit and as a human will be enriched from all I have learned from them, from the opportunity to share space with people of such great love. And I am forever grateful to them.

In the Catholic tradition, we sometimes celebrate the liturgical feast days of holy buildings, as well as holy people. On November 9, for example, Catholics celebrate the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica. Perhaps it is odd to celebrate a building.

After all, it is just concrete and marble. But of course, for those who use them, we know that our respective houses of worship are sacred; they are places where extraordinary things happen and where extraordinary encounters take place.

As I have reflected about the sacredness of Karen House and all that has taken place within and because of it, I thought of this tradition of celebrating basilicas. It is a place of extraordinary encounters. With its duct-taped stained glass, overflowing clothes room, and a whiteboard that carries messages such as “Bed Bug count: 1” and “Jay graduated today!” alongside each other, Karen House points to another way humans can dwell together.

I am grateful to those who founded this house years ago. To those who have kept it alive through the years. To those who will bring it into a new chapter of hospitality. At the risk of even more pious pap, I will say that we ought to embrace and kiss the places where such persons have put their feet. It is indeed holy ground.



Source: Rita Corbin Art

KAREN HOUSE COMMUNITY

A DIFFERENT PATH ■ LIFE- SAVING
■ A LIFE-CHANGING ■ TENACIOUS
■ LIFE-OF RESPITE ■ GENE-ROSITY
■ A PLACE OF RADICAL ■ LOVE IN ACTION
■ A ROOTED ■ A PLACE TO FIND FRIENDS
■ HISTORIC

A stylized illustration of a group of people, including a man with glasses and a woman, in a warm, orange-toned setting. The illustration is partially obscured by a large, dark, curved shape that frames the text on the left. The people are depicted in a simple, graphic style with bold outlines and flat colors. The background of the illustration is a warm, orange-yellow color with some darker, textured areas. The overall composition is dynamic and visually engaging, with the text and illustration working together to convey a sense of community and support.

Thoughts

by Marilyn Lorenz

Karen House invited me into a world of friendship, caring, and challenge to continue to rethink and reshape my life with *all* my siblings in mind.

Favorite memories: Tuesday liturgies, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve... I loved to bring Nerinx students during Urban Plunge so they could meet Teka and learn about the life and mission of Karen House.

I am grateful that my daughters were leaders from their schools organizing dinner preparers when they were in high school. I am grateful for all the wonderful young (and old) people who lived at KH and who took house over the years.

Karen House brought the Catholic Worker ideal of

personalism to our work at the Interfaith Committee on Latin America. It challenged me to be attentive to how and why I organized and how I tried to be inclusive, non-violent, and fun-loving in my work.

I am grateful for the community KH created and I'm challenged to be consequent in my lifestyle and actions.

I was part of the planning to create Karen House. Then, I received funding to go to seminary and Ann Mangano moved into Karen House as the house opened. Over the years, I contributed financially and enjoyed sharing life with the community for liturgy, cooking meals, and coming with our family for Christmas Eve celebrations.



Lucky Invitation

by Andy Linsenmeyer

I was lucky enough to join the Karen House community during medical school in 2006. Tony let me skip the usual get to know the community period before moving in, maybe because I was so fervent following a summer living in a Sisters of Charity convent in El Paso. At that time I was determined to join the Jesuits. A few guests that have stuck with me include Stephen and Gwanzetta, young Michael, and a woman suffering from psychosis.

The community meetings were always a powerful experience, with wonderful meals scraped together and hearing everyone's thoughtful input, soaking in Teka's gentleness. And I always took the opportunity to guzzle the church wine. Another great memory is Father Kavanaugh belting out gospel

hymns during Tuesday Liturgy. I thought I was pretty tough for living in the attic with Laura Ragan and Jerry.

Major life events intervened for me at that time including finding my future wife at SLU and a brother with terminal cancer. I took shelter at Grace House with Becky and Lauren during my third year of medical school. Karen House made my several years practicing as a psychiatrist with Boston healthcare for the homeless program a breeze. Although I didn't know Dan Horkheimer well, his tragic passing remained with me when I left St. Louis in 2008. I now have three young children, Francis Michael, Mary Therese, and Anne Rebekah with a fourth due in June; they keep me on my toes.



Source: Unknown

An Immigrant's Arrival

by Ebehitale Ogbebor

Today, I am a proud homeowner in this great country of ours because Karen House, among others, opened their doors for me and received me with warm, open arms. I cannot possibly forget the day I moved into Karen House on August 8, 2016. Entering into the building for the first time as a person with disability, I was bothered about a lot of things, both little and big. I was concerned about how to navigate my way around the very huge building. I was concerned about not being able to find things

in the refrigerator. I was even scared of starvation, primarily because I thought I would never be able to find things around the house on my own. Essentially, for persons with eye sight, my fears described above would seem trivial. But for someone like me, these are very critical issues that can retroactively influence my stay in a place, and can even make my life in such a place miserable. Little did I know that the very thoughtful and incredible management team of this unforgettable shelter made preparations to accommodate a blind lady like myself and made particular changes to make my stay memorable, even before my arrival. Without mincing words, I can say that all the fears I had the first moment I moved into Karen House were turned into testimonies.

I cannot complete this short piece without stating how different and unique Karen House was, in my opinion, among other shelters that I lived in during my early months in the United States. As a newly arrived immigrant, I lived in three homeless shelters and with individuals before I was able to get a place of my own. There was something different about Karen House as a



A sunflower growing in front of Karen House.
Source: Karen House Facebook page

homeless shelter and about the management team: it was at Karen House where I felt what it means to be free and to have fewer worries for the first time since I arrived in the United States. This shelter, where I got a room to myself and slept all nights in peace, taught me a lifelong lesson which I cannot possibly forget. For the first time as an adult, I learned not to judge others at Karen House. I learned to view issues from different perspectives. Note, I am an individual with a different cultural background from the US. For the very first time in my life, I was exposed to what it actually meant to welcome and respect other people's choices and views at Karen House.

What I know and I am certain about is that the legacy of Karen House will not be forgotten and cannot be erased. Posterity will definitely remember all those that held and contributed to the great works of Karen House until this very moment. Karen House has left an indelible mark in my heart.



Karen House

by Becky Hassler

Karen House literally changed my life. It certainly changed the trajectory of my life, without a doubt. I first went to a Catholic Worker House in 1984; it was Cass House. It was my “volunteer ministry” as a brand new candidate in the Sisters of Mercy. I met Tim and Virginia there, and ironically, 35 years later, before I moved back to Arkansas, I was living in a 4-family flat with both of them on North 18th street, right down the street from KH.

I started volunteering at KH in 1989, taking house, going to Tuesday night liturgy (hard to believe it was 9:00pm then!). I left the Sisters of Mercy and did not take final vows in order to move in to KH in 1992. Once I moved in, I never moved out of the neighborhood until I left to return to Ft. Smith in 2019 to be closer to my aging parents.

Being a part of the community at KH changed everything about who I am, my philosophy, my spirituality, my politics, my profession - everything. I am so grateful for all of it.

I am so, so grateful for my amazing community for these 35 years, both formal and informal, past and present, all stemming from Karen House. And to the guests over all these many years who have forever changed me, I thank you.

There are so many memories that come flooding back as I think over these many years. The building itself, the beautiful building at the corner of N. Market and Hogan was my anchor. I loved the view, especially walking down N. Market toward Hogan. I also loved how there was always enough. People were so generous; we really always had plenty. I loved reading the log. I loved Tuesday night liturgies; it was such a sweet time of community, as was Ordinary time. I loved Sunday night Ordinary Time. I loved community dinners before our meetings. For years, Christmas for me was midnight mass in the dining room with John Kavanaugh. I wouldn’t miss it for anything. Some of the best years of my life were right there at 1840 Hogan and within just a few blocks radius for many years. I am forever grateful.



Virginia Druhe

by Rosalie Riegle

I remember my first conversation with Virginia Druhe. It was back in 1987 and I was interviewing for *Voices from the Catholic Worker*, collecting CW lore to share with others. As we talked, Virginia sorted beans for dinner, moving them rhythmically with her fingers as she had done daily in Nicaragua. I remember her telling me the harrowing story of when she was a member of the group kidnapped by the contras on the river between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

She talked about the “love-hate experience” of those first years beginning the St. Louis Worker with seven other feminists and how she stayed because it was the richest experience she had ever known. Then she talked about her decision to go into prayerful solitude in a room above the chapel in Cass House mansion, a large and ultimately unmanageable house of hospitality, which was finally sold to a Baptist church for a dollar. Virginia lived and prayed silently in her one-room hermitage for six days a week and worked mornings at Karen House and afternoons at Cass House on Thursdays. I learned from her that many solitudes live unknown in the cities, and today I know from the experience of others that it’s still possible to live this way in a Catholic Worker house serving the guests

through prayer.

What else did I learn from Virginia, from subsequent meetings? I remember her sitting cross-legged and enveloped in a serape on the third floor of Karen House, unobtrusively leading a beautiful liturgy, with an ordained priest coming forward only for the consecration. From that experience, I was emboldened to begin women’s liturgies at the Catholic Worker house in Saginaw. And I remember her returning to Karen House as a volunteer after her marriage, and from that I learned that there are all kinds of CWs and that they don’t all live on farms or houses of hospitality.

As a souvenir of that experience, perhaps written by Virginia but perhaps not, I saw perhaps the most dramatic daily house report in the history of the Worker—a purple crayon scrawl on a sheet of notebook paper: “NO PEN in the whole damn house!!!” From that plaint, I learned and practiced that Catholic Workers usually try in their house-notes to pass on what happens on a daily basis, even if all they can do is symbolically scream their frustration. Thank you, Virginia Druhe, for the memories and the learnings over the years.



Karen House Memories

by Tom & Julie Harig

Two overriding memories are with us and will stay with us forever. One is the faithful and loving service offered to the guests by the Catholic Workers; it was the best example we’ve ever witnessed of how to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to live out the message of unconditional love. The second is being introduced to the “have nots” of our society. We’ve met hundreds of guests over the years, and they have touched us in a way that reading books or headlines could never do, and for that we are ever grateful.



Source: Flickr / jimforest

Cooking Once a Month

by Charlotte Hanselman

I am so sorry that Karen House is no more. What a wonderful refuge for all those women who were in desperate circumstances and what a wonderful community of people who helped them. I didn’t keep track of how many years I volunteered at KH, but my friend Joel figured that we, along with 4-5 boys from Christian Brothers College High School, cooked at Karen House three or more times a month for 13 years. Joel and I would research recipes and then cook what we thought the clients would like. Since my background is southern, I made sure we had cornbread and collard greens, along with hot sauce,

almost every time we were there. I remember the first time we served collard greens, a woman came up to me after the meal and said, “For a white woman, you sure do know how to cook greens.” Little did she know that my greens had come out of a Glory can found on a grocery shelf! I will always treasure my memories of cooking at Karen House and be grateful for the Catholic Worker community that served Karen House.



Dear Karen House,

by Fran Endicott Armstrong

I discovered the Catholic Worker movement in St. Louis not long after I returned home in July of 1977 to St. Louis from graduate school at Penn in Philadelphia. I heard of the Catholic Workers from a priest friend, Fr. John P. McNamee, in the City of Brotherly Love. I seem to recall that I went to some kind of meeting at the World Community Center on Skinker Boulevard and met Mary Ann McGivern, SL. She invited me to discover the Catholic Workers in St. Louis. The next thing I recall is that I met with Mary Dutcher, and I ended up helping to paint the walls with a lovely light blue in the soon to be open Cass House. In talking, I discovered that Mary and I had a lot in common.

My involvement with Cass House and Karen House and Little House has been sporadic over the years but also lasting over these four plus decades. I did some mathematics activities after Cass House opened, with a very bright little girl who was there briefly. One time I just happened to be in the office at Karen House when one of the guests, who had a young child, was walking around barefoot on those wooden floors and got a splinter in her foot. I happened to know where the first-aid kit was in the closet right there in the office and offered to take care of the job. So the lady sat down on a chair and I knelt at her feet. The first thing needed was for me to wash her feet. Isn't that what folks at CW houses-- workers and guests and supporters--have been doing in KH and so many other houses for so many decades?

At the College Church religious education program, we started making sandwiches for Karen House in the late 1980s. I figured my Suzanne and classmates in her religion class in early grade school could readily understand that very basic kind of sharing of making balogna and cheese sandwiches for other people who are hun-

gry. It may help their understanding of Jesus' gift to us in Holy Communion. In recent years, I have come over to Karen House now and then to drop off fresh leftover food from an event at church.

The Tuesday evening liturgies and the one Christmas Eve Mass (1996) that I was able to attend, were always helpful. I distinctly remember one Tuesday night Mass, Ann Manganaro and I were sitting on the floor next to

each other and our voices blended quite nicely when we sang "Keep in Mind." And so many people (if I start to name you, I'll surely miss some—you know who you are, those of you still here in the Church Trying-Our-Best and you in the Church-We-Got-Home-Safe), more courageous and self-giving than I, who have inspired me nonetheless to try my best in what I do.

Deo Gratias.

P.S. from Fran and Rick's adult daughter, Zan:

Those visits to Karen House did matter to me. I remember the sandwiches. And the dark, tall-ceilinged hallways. I hazily remember some cozy-seeming Tuesday evenings. Most of all I learned that service is part of life and to see the poor as people just like us.



A community meal enjoyed by all at Karen House.
Source: Karen House Facebook Page

When I Think of Karen House

by Theo Kayser

When my friend Martha from the LA Catholic Worker first saw a picture of the grand former convent that we have come to love as Karen House, she exclaimed, "Theo! I didn't know you lived in Downton Abbey!" However, the beauty of the physical space at 1840 Hogan Street pales in comparison to the beauty that has been Karen House for 43 years.

When I was first invited to contribute to the tapestry of love that is this final edition of the *Round Table*, I immediately started wondering if I had anything worth saying. Maybe that's the thing about Karen House though—by itself, my small bit could never do. All of us who came through her have a piece of the puzzle. You couldn't know what you were looking at if you only saw one person's piece. Some are bigger, some are smaller, but they are all part of a whole. There is nothing so dissatisfying as finishing your puzzle only to find that you were missing pieces.

When I think of Karen House, I think of chilly early mornings when I was the first person on house, opening the office for the first time that day, the quiet time before phones or door bells would ring, before voices of children running through the halls. Sitting at that old desk with a cup of cheap, strong coffee, I'd flip the log book open to read what I had missed from the evening before. In my mind, it's always autumn at Karen House, sweater weather, my favorite season.

When I think of Karen House, I think of Virginia pulling up, car stuffed to the gills with all the delicacies Trader Joe's had thrown away. I think of reams of meat and cheese sandwiches. I think of special dinners when Sharon cooked chicken and dumplings. I think of volunteer groups helping to put up window coverings to combat the coming winter months. I think of 8 different open jugs of milk in the fridge. I recall days spent cooking large meals followed by nights outside the Ferguson PD. I think of carrying bundles of Christmas presents down from the third floor after all the kids were safely tucked in for the night. And, I think of hours spent working in the basement bike shop, piecing together a hundred used bikes to be given out to whoever could make good use of them.

Like Karen House, that bike shop would seem to many a haphazard operation. We made due with repurposed or second-hand materials. It seemed like no matter what, there was always piles of stuff in the corner. There weren't any professionals around, but transformations still happened. I think maybe all of us who came through

Karen House were like those old bikes, a little worse for wear. Some were missing brakes, some had a hard time getting moving, some were mostly fine, if not a bit rusty, some handlebars needed aligning, and some had wobbly wheels here or there. Maybe all that was needed was the smallest of patches, but without it, nothing was going anywhere. They showed up from different places and with a little bit of love, hopefully went off better than they'd come in. None of them were ever perfect, and they all carried marks of where they'd been before, but some worked almost like new.

Everyone I've talked to about Karen House has mentioned their sadness at its closing. But most folks haven't let sadness be the final word. Instead, folks have celebrated everything Karen House has given the world. All the best funerals I've been to have been parties, a celebration of the

person we were beginning to miss, a remembrance of the gift they had been to those of us left. The reflections I've been privy to on Karen House align with the best of this type of remembrance.

The truth is, when Karen House officially ends its run this summer, it won't really be its demise, but more like a transformation. The building at 1840 Hogan will still offer a place for those who need it, though under a different banner. However, perhaps more importantly, Karen House will continue on everywhere her family goes. Everywhere we share the love we learned at Karen House, her legacy continues. Catholic Worker foundress Dorothy Day wrote: "A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions." The ripples of Karen House are immense and they reach far. They've transformed St. Louis, the world, and our lives in ways we could never comprehend. They'll continue for a long, long time.



Graphic by Gregory Fister

Cooking at Karen House

by Joel Delpha

My dear friend, Charlotte, and I would bring around 4-5 Christian Brothers College High School boys to Karen House to cook 3 or so times a month for 13 years. We were later joined by Pat Watson and Sue Shostrand. We committed ourselves to making quality meals that the guests and the staff would thoroughly enjoy. There were days when I was tired and really didn't want to go down there to cook, but I never regretted it! I have fond memo-

ries of so many people. I remember cooking on 9/11. It seemed a simple good thing to do on a day of profound evil. Dorothy Day remains a significant influence on my life. My daughter's middle name is "Day" and we visited the original CW house in NYC. Two days before her wedding, my daughter, my wife and I, and others cooked a meal at Karen House. Gosh, so many graces and blessings and warm memories!



My Dearest Karen House,

by Ellen Buttitta

Thank you for changing my life forever. Like many of those before me, I met you while studying at Saint Louis University. The classrooms and campus activities never felt right, perhaps due to the tangible lack of warmth and familiarity in the menacing Church doors. There was, however, a comradery I found with a fellow student who shared my loneliness and discontent—Jason Ebinger. Acting as each other's sounding boards, we took a chance and left SLU for the Catholic Worker.

We started off at your neighbor, Kabat House. It was a small community with only Jason, Mark, Danny, William, and I in the house. While I enjoyed our community dinners, food runs, and round tables, I found myself attracted to you. You and your heartiness. Your warmth. Your familiarity. I had to see for myself, and so I left Kabat House and moved next door.

For me, Karen House is a dream factory. A place where people come to realize and call out their passions, desires, and dreams for the future. It is the first place where I felt free to speak my mind and try out ideas without a fear of dismissal or rejection. Where people are valued and loved and embraced for who they are and where they are. Maybe my memory is romantic, but this is how I remember you.

Within a few months of our relationship, I discovered I was pregnant. I was nineteen and terrified. After finding a community that felt like home, I had to make the

heartbreaking decision of staying with you or leaving for Chicago. In the end, it wasn't my parents or even the baby's father that led me to the light. It happened in the back of Jenny and Annjie's house with you. In a room with Jenny, Annjie, Teka, Mary, Carolyn, Kristina—women who barely knew me and undeniably loved me. In each of them was you. I left for Chicago a few weeks later with a piece of my heart broken and buried into the walls of this place.

I was lucky though. I knew that you would welcome me home with open arms whenever I was able to return. And when my son was born, his family included pieces of you—Jason and my brilliant and beautiful sister Kristina Vidovic as his devoted godparents.

It has been over five years since I have lived in Karen House, and I have strived to find a place that comes even remotely close to the community there. As of yet, I have come up empty-handed. It is hard, if not impossible, to create a place so freeing. Free of societal norms and dictated roles. Free of hierarchy and ego. A place free of charge, but unfortunately not free of upkeep and cost. Karen House is a special place. Whoever takes on this place brings a warm and robust history with them. I hope they will make us proud.

And with love, admiration, and undying respect dear Karen House, I bid you adieu.

Ellen Buttitta



My Time at Karen House

by Mitch McGee

My time at Karen House was from April 1993 until September 1998. Since Jenny first invited me to write a reflection on that experience, the world has changed in ways that I would never been able to dream of with the outbreak of COVID 19. I think that will probably color my reflection to some degree, since it is THE event right now in our world.

When I first heard that Karen House was closing, I talked about it with a friend here, and her response to me was, "Is this your way of telling me you are moving back to St. Louis to try and save it?" I told her that I am old enough to know that I alone could never "save the house." I was grieving, picturing St. Louis and the world with no Karen House. It was always good to know that Karen House existed and all it meant to me and so many other people who had passed through those doors.

I learned SO much during my time there. Living at the "Worker" was something I had long wanted to do before I finally did it. I was hooked from the first time I entered Cass House doors to volunteer in about 1984. I avidly read books by and about Dorothy Day, and had such an admiration for people involved in the work, believed in personalism, and lived simply. It all resonated with me and I wanted to try to do it!

The incredible learning experience of living with people who were experiencing homelessness, mental illness, addiction - there is no way to put a price on the value it has given my life. Since I left Karen House, I have worked in the "social services" world and have tried to bring personalism along with me. Most jobs that have employed me to various degrees have served people experiencing homelessness. My present job, where I work with people who have HIV and have trouble stay-

ing in medical care, I love because it involves everything I have ever done in any job in my life, including my time at Karen House. At this stage of my life (almost 63), it is nice that I get to use all of my life experiences. I know my time at Karen House made me better at my work, and taught me so much, that I can't put into words what a difference it has made in my life.

Last week, I went to a book reading, by an author I admire, Melody Moezzi. While at the reading, she read the following lines from Rumi: "Welcome every guest, no matter how grotesque. Be as hospitable to calamity as to ecstasy, to anxiety as to tranquility. Today's misery sweeps your home clean, making way for tomorrow's felicity." When I heard those words, they made me think of Karen House. The many folks we welcomed, not all of them easy, but sometimes the ones who presented the most challenges taught me the most. I wish I could thank them all.

I also took away from my time at Karen House, the value of community. I was incredibly fortunate to have lived in community with truly terrific people, all of whom I admire. I had never experienced that level of community before, or since. I am always looking for community, and people to share life and work with. I think there is little doubt that the word, "Worker" had to be to be part of the movement, because **WORK** is what it is! But because of that work, I think people who share life and do work together – develop bonds that cannot be easily broken.

So, I guess in summary, I am forever grateful for my time at Karen House. I hope that how I live my life gives some tribute to that experience and to the vision of Dorothy Day.



Just Three Weeks in 1979

by Barb Prosser

I came to Karen House in 1979 for a January visit. I was a senior at the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota and as an interior design student soon to begin my senior internship with a design company, I had the month of January to explore studies in something unrelated to my field. While many were busy setting up studies in Jackson Hole, WY or Destin, Florida, I was intrigued by the experience of another student who had done a project with the New York Catholic Worker and Dorothy Day. I knew little about Dorothy and her Houses of Hospitality, but applied for one of two spots and was awarded one. When another student said she only wanted the New York experience, I offered my spot under the naïve assumption that there were other Worker Houses that would welcome a student for four weeks of volunteer labor.

So, I began sending letters of inquiry to Catholic Worker communities with such a request. Sue Lauritsen of Karen House Catholic Worker wrote back with a “yes.” I connected with a fellow St. John’s University student hoping to do the same and we coordinated the road trip to St. Louis. On a cold January evening, we arrived at Karen House and were met with a confused volunteer taking house who was unaware of our arrangements. We were travelling before cell phones, before GPS, and Steve Scott, my travelling companion, and I, 22 years old, were admittedly loose about details in communicating our arrival plans. Coupled with the Worker’s general casualness in communicating from one shift of volunteers to the next, it was a surprise start of the four weeks for all of us. But it led to a lifelong love affair with the Catholic Worker.

I threw myself into cleaning (my default button when not sure what to do next) and playing with the guests’ children. I handed out sandwiches at the back door. Together with Sue, I hauled a refrigerator up to a 2nd floor apartment for Helen and her boys. (In all honesty, Sue was probably the muscle in this effort.)

I grew to know Sue Lauritsen, Luanne Schintzel, Virginia Druhe, and MaryAnn McGivern in those early weeks. I met Ann and Bolin Carter, friends of Dorothy Day and Catholic Workers from the early years. But it was the guests, Hazel, Trish, Edith, Judy, Karen, and Don who captured my heart. (Someday, ask me about my good intention to wash Don’s only wool suit in the washer. Ouch).

I returned to college for a semester and graduated. With a promised a design job later that fall in Lakeville, MN, I returned to Karen House for the summer to begin the beautiful experiment of getting a second house of hospitality ready to open in

St. Louis. This Minnesota girl had to adjust to the heat that still brings memories of shared sleeping dorms on the third floor! Living at Karen House and working on both projects consumed me during that summer and left my heart and head conflicted about the direction of my future. I honored my promise to return to my design job in September only to return to St. Louis and the Catholic Worker for good the following fall.

That trajectory ultimately affected every aspect of my life. It colored my relationships, my politics, my faith, my career choices, where I lived, how I lived, and whom I married. I suspect many other volunteer lives were transformed.

Dorothy Day was once quoted saying “We cannot build up the idea of the apostolate of the laity without the foundation of the liturgy.” Admittedly, most of us who formed community came from a Catholic background. And we had a basic knowledge and respect for Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. But many of us struggled with the Church and our vision for how to live the Gospels. Liturgies were important to us, and between Karen and Cass Houses, we were able to feed this need. The sacred space of chapel and the ways we could celebrate liturgies with inclusion, along with the intermittent morning and evensong, made it possible.

I met several women religious as I joined in the work. In the end, the experiences and lessons from Karen and Cass House kept me in the Church, even now. It is a reminder that our church is bigger than the Vatican. Our guests reminded us daily of the Eucharist in the breaking of the bread. One of the verses I love is the one where Jesus is preparing to leave the disciples and says, “I no longer call you servants...Instead I call you friends” (John 15:15).

I continue to enjoy many rich friendships with Catholic Worker community members and guests all these years later. I enjoyed a 40-year career serving older adults through my Catholic Worker connection. My life with the Catholic Worker was mostly lived out physically at Cass House. But I came alive as part of the Karen House Community that birthed Cass House into being so that we might continue the broader works of our Catholic Worker community. It is what I refer to as “The Beautiful Experiment,” just as Karen House was those 43 years ago.

“The Holy Spirit loves to do its thing, its fire and water, where the need is the greatest.” Who knew I would be the greatest one in need?



A Love Letter to Karen House

by David Buer, OFM

My first connection to the Catholic Worker occurred while on my first ever retreat at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky where I discovered *The Catholic Worker*, the newspaper of the New York community. It was 1977. I was attracted to the newspaper, both its articles and artwork. In November 1978, I moved into the Franciscan Gospel Brothers community in Uptown, Chicago. That community was made up of two friars and three of us lay men who were interested in Franciscan life. We were in an extended community with other friars, sisters, and lay folks inspired by St. Francis of Assisi. One day, in the mail came a copy of *The Catholic Worker*, and I remember saying to myself, "Oh there is that newspaper again." I've been a regular reader ever since.

One friar I met in 1977, at a vocation weekend retreat in Oak Brook, IL, was going to medical school at St. Louis University and had met Ann Manganaro, SL. He introduced me to the Karen House community in, I think, 1978. My first visit to a Catholic Worker house was in the spring/summer of 1978. A Franciscan sister invited me to visit the St. Francis Catholic Worker house in Uptown, Chicago and I became a member of the extended community for the next 15 years. Eventually, I helped at the soup kitchen, organized Round Table Discussions, and wrote for their newsletter, At The Door. While living in Chicago from 1977 to 1989, I'd regularly take the Greyhound Bus from Chicago to St. Louis and back, to visit with my parents two or three times a year. My routine would be to come into the Greyhound station in downtown St. Louis arriving early in the morning, walk to Karen House, have breakfast there and talk with Teka and the community; then my parents would pick me up and take me home to West St. Louis County. During my stay, I'd make it a point to return to Karen House for the Tuesday night mass, and occasionally, I'd stay overnight to help with a painting or cleanup project around Karen House.

My post novitiate year was in Guatemala. Six of us newly professed friars went down there for 9 months with two friar mentors. At the end of our nine months, we had

a chance to visit El Salvador for several days in June of 1993. One day, I sat down to read the San Salvador newspaper and noticed the obituary for Ann Manganaro. The obituary said Ann had died back in St. Louis, but that night, there would be a memorial service at the Jesuit university chapel. I quickly hopped on a city bus and got there just as the service was ending. I met some of Ann's friends and when they learned that I knew Ann from St. Louis, they said I had to come to the outdoor memorial mass for her the next day, in Chalatenango, where she had worked and founded a clinic. The outdoor memorial mass was beautiful with many testimonies to Ann's goodness and witness for peace and healing, in the midst of a war. After I spoke a few words, in the best Spanish I could muster, a couple groups of indigenous women came up to me with some things for me to take back to St. Louis. The first gift was a large homemade card for Ann's mom, signed by many dozens of the folks from that area, thanking Ann and her family for her presence there over those last several years. Another group of women came with some ears of corn from the garden they had planted for Ann, but that she was unable to use since she had returned to St. Louis. I was successful in smuggling the ears of corn and able to present the card and corn to the Karen House community on my next St. Louis visit, during the Tuesday night mass.

I was also a fan of John Kavanaugh, SJ. Based on my life in Franciscan communities, his book, "Following Christ in a Consumer Society," made a lot of sense. I also enjoyed the book of photographs for which he and Mev Puleo had collaborated. I was at John's last Christmas midnight mass at Karen House, 11 months before he died in 2012.

My dad died in the summer of 2018, and I was able to be with him his last three and a half weeks. This last issue of *The Round Table* seems to me like a death. But we who attempt to serve Christ, nourished by the Church, believe in Resurrection; and so we trust that in death, much new life can come. May it be so for Karen House, especially in this mysterious time of pandemic.



Dear Karen House,

by Angie Potter

Thank you for welcoming me into your world. I came to you eight years ago from Immacolata Catholic Church, along with Kim Gaskell, my quiet and never-ending supporter, looking for a place to bring West County kids, grades 6-8, to give them an opportunity "to see the face of God in others." This was the motto our mini St. Vincent de Paul group was striving to put into action. Many other organizations didn't want school age children; they had rules, regulations, age restrictions, etc., but you welcomed us with open arms.

We planned and prepared a meal once a month in our school cafeteria, then we got into the car and began our discussions about Karen House: What is a Catholic Worker? Who do they represent? Who is Dorothy Day? Who is Peter Maurin? Who runs Karen House? Why are we going here? That was my favorite question and even if no one asked it, I was always sure to give them that simple answer – just to play with the kids. That's it. Let's just go play with some kids that might want to play with us. We can bring some fun activities, games, crafts, or whatever we think might be fun, and let's just hang out with them. (Thank you, Shelia, for always playing with us!)

That is what we did! Then came the discussion on the way home: How was it? Were you nervous? Was it fun? What was the best part? And then the questions: Why do they have cell phones? Are they all poor? We had good discussions and learned about people with different backgrounds and experiences. My message was always clear – please do not judge them. It is not our job to pass any kind of judgment. Just respect them, appreciate them, and be with them. That's it. Thank you for the opportunity to have those kids ask those questions and hear those answers.

What a gift you gave all of our kids that walked through those doors. It would be impossible to know what kind of impact that experience had on each child, but I believe it was a gift that will have lasting impres-

sions. Thank you.

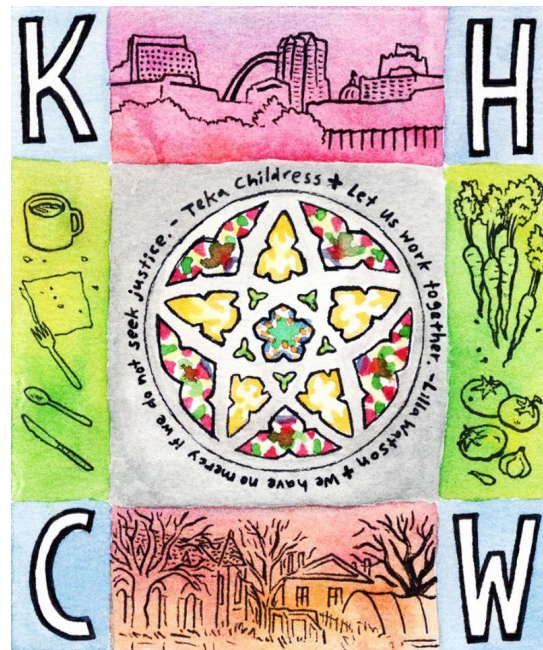
Everyone who has been there for the last several years (I'm not exactly sure when I started the tradition) might know my favorite part. Christmas...for the 3rd floor. I don't remember exactly when it dawned on me, but it truly was an aha-moment, when I realized the most incredible people in the building, those who lived and congregated on the 3rd floor, deserved something a little special. Why shouldn't they be part of the fun too? And so it began, my favorite day of the year, shopping (locally), baking (homemade cookies and caramel candies) and buying spirits (one year, Growlers from Ferguson) for the folks on the 3rd floor! Thank you for allowing me to experience a joy so deep and powerful that the clerks at Trader Joes always wanted to know why I was so happy. A way to express my deepest gratitude to those who were giving and doing so much more than I would ever be capable of. Thank you.

Finally, thank you for the many ways you have made me a better person. These are only a few. I have learned to love unconditionally, to never judge a book by its cover, to be really frustrated and still respect the differences, to recognize dedication in ways that I have never seen, to meet people where they are, to appreciate so many things, to be able

to have a discussion about Michael Brown and actually know first hand what his life might look like, to be "an example of what a volunteer should be" (Colleen once graciously complimented me with that title and I will never forget it), and an opportunity to truly have an impact on the lives of others (asa former guest dictated so eloquently many years ago, the most beautiful voice-mail on my phone thanking me for what I do--a message I will never delete).

"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." Thank you for being my revolution!

Graphic by Gregory Fister



From City Hope St. Louis

by Michael Robinson

During the winter vortex of 2017, Michael Robinson and dEstiny Family Church partnered with Bridge of Hope Ministries to address the void that the City of St. Louis was experiencing due to the closing of New Life Evangelistic Center. That winter they housed 60-75 people nightly. The following year dEstiny operated a pop-up shelter in south St. Louis City. Nearly 60 individuals were housed nightly. During this time Michael & Ms. Jennifer Turner began discussing plans for the future of shelter work.

After seeing an immediate need for more available bed space and quality services for the unhoused, City Hope St. Louis was founded by Bishop Dr. Michael Robinson and Jennifer Turner in September 2019. City Hope St. Louis provides immediate shelter and resources for individuals in the Saint Louis Metropolitan Region experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. "Our mission is to cure homelessness while loving people and impacting the world."

City Hope operates several winter warming centers across the St. Louis area during the months of November through March each year. In addition, City Hope St. Louis has developed transitional housing and workforce development programs which have successfully assisted several in finding sustainable employment and permanent housing. "We believe that the development of true relationships with the individuals we serve and a deep-rooted desire to address all aspects of their immediate and long-term needs with love & dignity are the keys to our success."

We have the privilege of having some amazing team members onboard at City Hope. We have intentionally staffed persons of various backgrounds. A large portion of our staff are those that are present residents within our shelter. This has provided us with the ability to serve with a balanced approach. Our unhoused staff members have proven to be loyal and very dependable. We also have team members that are extremely passionate about the work that they get to do with our unhoused community members. We are committed to building a team of "Make It Happen" individuals that recognize the value of hospitality.

We have developed a strong sense of family at City Hope St. Louis. We are the only family that some whom we serve have. Our mantra is, "Homelessness is not a crime." As a result, we ensure that we work to provide our guests a comfortable, peaceful environment, great meals, and fun activities. Most importantly, City Hope staff treats

everyone with respect and provides exceptional service. We have often heard, "This is the friendliest shelter I've ever been to!"

The future of City Hope St. Louis is exciting! With the gifting of Karen House, we are able to expand our scope of service. Our team can now provide longer term housing, develop additional programs, and invest more time per person while assisting each of our guests through their journey to independence. We are currently in the process of developing a comprehensive plan that would include the housing of families on both short- and long-term cycles. Our goal is to continue the amazing work that Karen House has offered the community since 1977.

One of our first undertakings will be to organize multiple groups that will come and serve alongside of us as we make some repairs and updates to the facility. We want to ensure that the building can endure another 50 years of successful service to our community. We will be looking for those that will partner with us to do some awesome projects on the campus.

Our organization depends heavily on donations from individuals, organizations, and corporations in the form of cash contributions, food and/or prepared meals, clothing, blankets, goods, services, and volunteers. We could not do what we have done over the last three years if it were not for the generosity of fellow community members that understand the challenging dynamics of operating shelters. City Hope St. Louis has also contracted with the City of St. Louis to provide shelter care during the winter season. This collaboration has helped to ensure that we save lives during the winter season.

We look forward to meeting some of the long-standing supporters of Karen House. Our plan is to host several dinner meetings at the building so that we can introduce our team to you. We certainly hope that you will consider remaining a part of the great work that we plan to continue. During this transitional period, we know that we are going to need the help of many.

City Hope STL is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization.

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The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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STAY INVOLVED & CONNECTED!

If you'd like to continue supporting the hospitality that's happening in the Karen House building, please consider getting involved with City Hope STL! www.cityhopestl.org



Art by Sarah Fuller