

CATHOLIC AGITATOR



CHRISTMAS
APPEAL



THIS CHRISTMAS
WE ARE OVERWHELMED WITH
REFUGEES

A COMMON STRUGGLE BY WILL O'BRIEN P. 3



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CATHOLIC AGITATOR

DECEMBER 2005 VOL. 35/NO. 8

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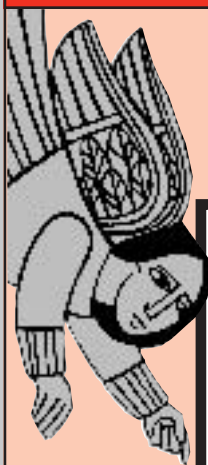
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YOUR CHRISTMAS DONATION IS



A LIFE LINE TO THE REFUGEES

CHRISTMAS
APPEAL



THIS CHRISTMAS
**WE ARE OVERWHELMED WITH
REFUGEES**

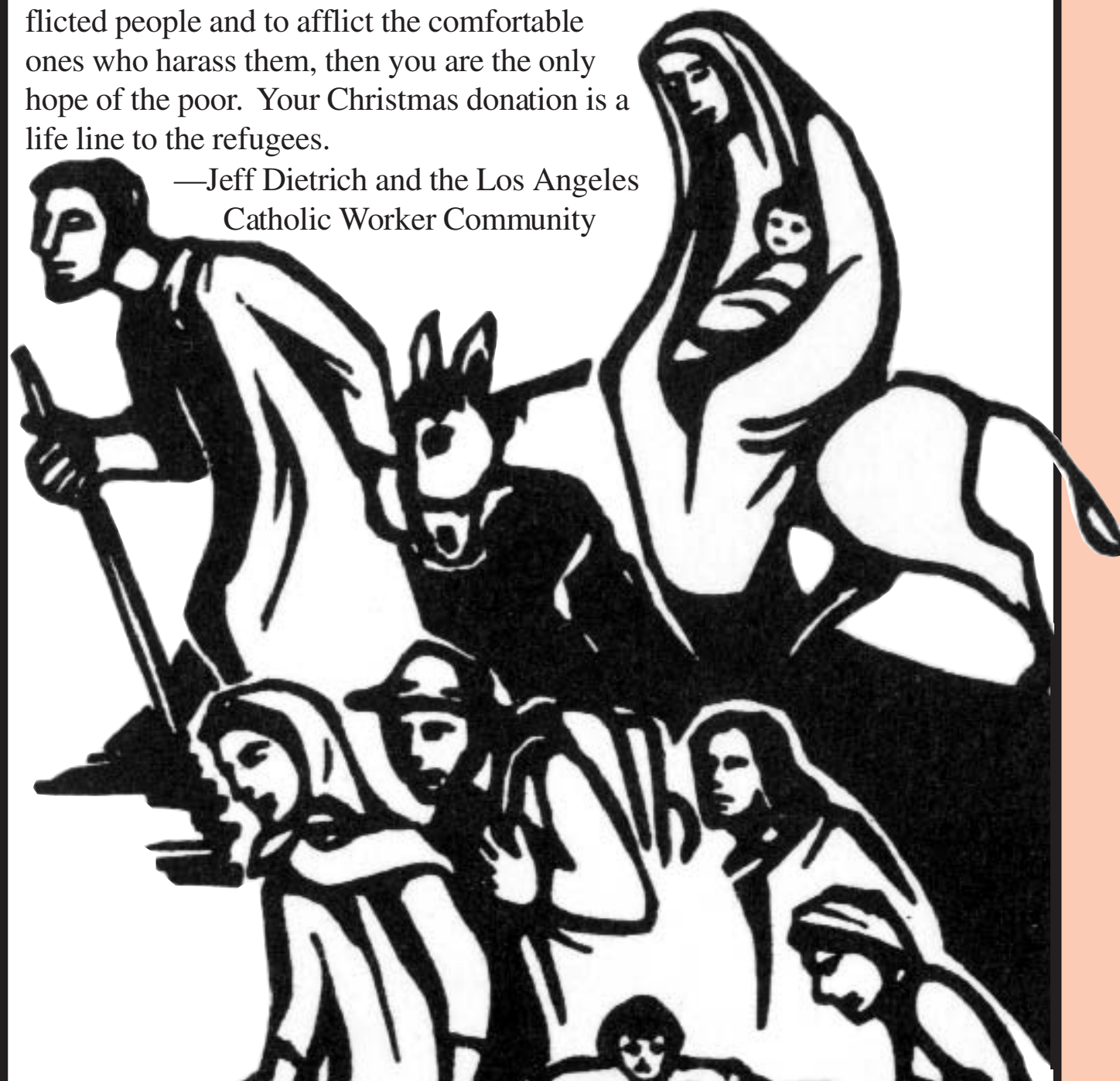
Dear Friends,

Christmas 2005

This Christmas we are overwhelmed with refugees. They pack into tents at the front door of our soup kitchen, they sleep on discarded cardboard, they press us for blankets, and they push their way through our soup line demanding priority. Our garden is filled with people on crutches and in wheelchairs.

No, they are not the victims of Katrina or the war in Iraq. But they are refugees—refugees of our government's "permanent disaster economy." They are harassed by the police, neglected by the nation, and despised by the business community. But if you believe, as we do, that Jesus came to comfort these afflicted people and to afflict the comfortable ones who harass them, then you are the only hope of the poor. Your Christmas donation is a life line to the refugees.

—Jeff Dietrich and the Los Angeles
Catholic Worker Community



THEY'RE REFUGEES OF OUR GOVERNMENT'S "PERMANENT DISASTER ECONOMY"



DEATH PENALTY MORATORIUM

This is an unprecedented moment in the history of California's death penalty...a bill in the State Assembly calling for a moratorium, or "time-out," on executions.

by ERIC DEBODE

This is an unprecedented moment in the history of California's death penalty. There is not only a bill in the State Assembly calling for a moratorium, or "time-out," on executions, but the Senate has also begun a two-year study of wrongful convictions and the death penalty. This study is examining thousands of cases, much like Governor Ryan's Blue Ribbon Panel in Illinois. Nonetheless, California is planning on having one execution per month in December, January, and February. There will be more executions next year as the appellate process runs out for more and more of the 640 inmates on California's Death Row, which is the largest death row in the nation. Now is the time to speak out, protest, and write the Governor. We will never again have so much conflict around the death penalty. One of our resources as Catholics is the new United States Bishops' statement against the death penalty, which was released at the end of November. In it, the Bishops state, "Our nation should forego the use of the death penalty because:

- The sanction of death violates respect for human life and dignity.
- State-sanctioned killing in our

names diminishes all of us. Its application is deeply flawed and can be irreversibly wrong, is prone to errors, and is biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation, and where the crime was committed. We have other ways to punish criminals and protect society. The sanction of death when it is not necessary to protect society undermines respect for human life and dignity."

The following three men are scheduled to be executed in the next three months. While not trying to re-litigate their cases, it is important to point out that each man's case discloses the very flaws in the legal system that we hope a moratorium and study will bring to light.

Stanley "Tookie" Williams, co-founder of the Crips gang, is scheduled to be executed on December 13. Not only did the prosecutor move his trial from South L.A. to Torrance, where only 1% of the population is African-American, but the prosecutor also unconstitutionally removed all African-American jurors from the jury pool. The prosecutor's closing arguments used racially-charged references, referring to South L.A. as the "jungle" and a "zoo," and he likened Mr. Williams to a "caged tiger."

Clarence Ray Allen is a wheelchair-bound diabetic who will turn 76 on January 16, the day before he is scheduled to be executed. In his case, Allen's public defender did not prepare for the penalty phase of Allen's trial until after the guilt phase was over, leaving precious little time to provide a proper defense, ultimately amounting to inadequate representation. Also, accomplices, in the

ACTION STEPS:

1) For more information on all cases and upcoming events:
www.deathpenalty.org
For the U.S. Bishops' new statement against the death penalty:
www.ccedp.org

2) Please contact the Governor of California and urge him to grant clemency. Our message is this:

"California should not proceed with three executions while a Senate Commission is studying the issue and while legislation is pending in the State Assembly to initiate a moratorium. These three cases exemplify the very problems that are being studied. This is no time to carry out three executions against poor, inadequately-represented people of color, all of whom are charged with murdering white people."

Governor Schwarzenegger
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

crime Allen was charged with, testified against him in exchange for lesser sentences. Since then, the accomplices have stated that they lied on the stand.

Michael Morales is scheduled to be executed in February. In his case, a jailhouse informant testified that Morales confessed to him in jail. When confronted by the fact that the two never shared a cell, and when asked why no one else heard this confession, the informant stated that Morales spoke to him in Spanish. What the informant didn't know is that

Morales, a fifth-generation American, doesn't speak Spanish. Even worse, the prosecutor cut a deal with the informant to reduce his charges in exchange for his testimony against Morales *before the alleged confession even occurred!*

I believe killing requires lying. We always have to tell a falsehood that diminishes the inherent dignity of the human person in order to cause them harm. We know that the death penalty does not deter criminals, it doesn't heal anyone, it isn't cheaper than life in prison, and it doesn't make anyone safer. It's a flawed product that doesn't deliver on its promises, which are false promises. The whole project of executing people is built on lies, but we so easily fall into believing in it and hoping that violence can be redemptive.

We do well to remind ourselves that our God is compassionate and merciful and calls us not to make any more victims. Rather, we are to stand with all victims of violence, including violence committed by the state. And we are called to stop the violence!

I implore you to send a letter, make a call, sign a petition, and do everything you can to help raise awareness of the aforementioned executions and help to stop the death penalty. California is about to embark on a string of serial executions. If there ever was a moment when we could and should stand up and say "NO!" that moment is now. Ω

Eric DeBode is the coordinator of California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty.
www.californiapeopleoffaith.org

GROUND BY EMPIRE WE MUST BECOME GROUND

by MEGAN FINCHER

Very little grows on jagged / rock. Be ground. Be crumbled, so wildflowers will come up / where you are (Rumi, "A Necessary Autumn Inside Each").

After I heard George Bush declare war on Iraq, I went to my dorm's chapel, literally prostrated myself on the ground, and wept. I crumbled under the weight of my sorrow. But in that moment, imagining the terror that was to come, I realized that I had to surrender, I had to mourn, I had to feel betrayed. When Mary Magdalene mourned for the Lord, He appeared to her as a gardener. When we abandon ourselves, God can work over the soil of our souls. Only then, in this total abandonment to God's mercy, can the seeds of revolutionary action be planted.

Rumi writes in the poem "The Ground's Generosity:"
...the clearest sign of / grace is that from dung comes flowers, from the bulbous / sludge, buds and then

sweet / pears. The ground's generosity takes in our compost / and grows beauty! Try to / be more like the ground. Give back better, as a rough / clod returns an ear of / corn, a tassel, a barley awn, this sleek handful of oats.

When we allow ourselves to be stripped down, when we do not turn away, as the rich young man did in the Gospels, but joyfully, and empty-handed, give ourselves to grace, God can till our souls into rich earth. If we are brave enough to become dirt, the basic, but essential, component to life, we can then, and only then, give back.

Rumi writes:
As a camel with a great Muhammad-soul on its back goes toward the thorn thicket / moaning, "Where is the rose garden?"

Where?!" while on its back / it has a bale of roses, perfume / from which could grow a thousand gardens. How long will we / keep searching for rose gardens? ("Extract the Thorn")

At the end of Song of Songs, God says, "O garden-dweller, my friends are listening for your voice, let me hear it!" (8:13). Lying on the marble floor in my dorm's chapel, I was moaning, "Where is the rose garden? Where?!" Reeling in grief over Empire, I let God hear my voice. I refused to accept this "filthy, rotten system," as Dorothy Day put it, and abandoned myself to God. Dwelling there, in the Lord's garden, God opened the seed of my soul. With God's grace, a shoot burst forth that was strong enough to start pushing through Empire.

Saint Therese, the Little Flower, writes:

"I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers . . . [Jesus] willed to create great souls comparable to lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at His feet."

As revolutionaries, we must rejoice to be little wildflowers! We may emerge bent and tangled, but we are blooming. We may be small in comparison to the roses, but we are able to hold our ground among the weeds.

Here, together, we can create a garden. Let us remember that the seed which falls on good soil bears fruit because of perseverance (Luke 8:15).

In the poem "Mary's Hiding" Rumi writes,

I want to be where / your bare foot walks, / because maybe before you step, / you'll look at the ground. / I want that blessing.

Let us pray that when we are feeling ground by Empire, we will become ground. Jesus teaches us: "Learn from the way the wildflowers grow" (Matthew 6:28). May beautiful flowers of revolution spring forth from each of us, and may we cultivate them, together, as gardeners of the soul. Ω

Megan Fincher is a member of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker.

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...Over time, I also learned to enter into community with the poor, and I discovered the common struggle we shared for healing and recovery. I am even tempted to say that their homelessness compels me precisely because of the emotional homelessness I often experienced.

A COMMON STRUGGLE

Will O'Brien and his wife, Dee Dee Risher, former editors of *The Other Side* magazine, were the presenters at our Sister House Retreat in the Fall of 2005. The following article grew out of Will's closing homily at that event.

by WILL O'BRIEN

Many years ago I was in the throes of a youthful and zealous phase of my faith journey, still fairly new to the path of radical discipleship. I recall one day when I was doing something that I did frequently in those heady days—I was reading the Sermon on the Mount.

Reading it, I was, as usual, deeply stirred by Jesus' radical vision, by this clarion call to the way of discipleship. Confronted with the challenges of turning the other cheek, loving enemies, blessing persecutors, taking no thought for what we eat or drink, I heard the echoes of St. Francis, of Dorothy Day, of Martin Luther King, Jr., of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, of Oscar Romero. Hearing the call to put my faith into action, I felt inspired and empowered on my own journey of discipleship. When I finished reading the sermon, I yearned to build my house on the solid rock of Jesus' teaching, safe from the buffetings of society's storms.

On this particular occasion of Bible reading, though, I did something a bit unusual. I continued reading on from the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew to the beginning of the eighth. Jesus, finishing the sermon, comes down from the mountain, where he is confronted by a leper in need of healing. It's a particularly moving account, marked by the leper's plaintive statement, "If you want to, you can heal me." This suggests that perhaps Rabbi Jesus might not want to heal him; perhaps Jesus, as a holy man, accepts Torah regulations that label this leper unclean and therefore socially segregated. But Jesus, of course, does want to heal—in fact, risking contagion, he touches the leper. He removes the leprosy, thereby freeing the man from the stigma and marginalization of the disease (Matt 8:1-4).

As I read this story, I sensed some odd things happening within myself. First of all, some curious questions came to me. I wondered: Did the leper hear the just-preached Sermon on the Mount? Was the leper called to the path of discipleship? Does Jesus expect the leper to heed his words, turn the other cheek, renounce possessions, to be light to the world? Or is the leper simply expected to be grateful, praising God for this miraculous deliverance from a horrid physical and emotional brokenness?

More unsettling, I found myself unexpectedly resonating with the leper. Something in the story touched a deep part of me, a part I barely acknowledged, but with which



discipleship. Many of us are wounded, often in ways we don't recognize. Sometimes our groping toward compassion and social healing are bound up with a deep and unexpressed internal need for compassion and healing of ourselves. Sometimes our peacemaking is marred by our unresolved anger and internal violence. Sometimes we are advocating for justice in the wide world while neglecting the need to advocate for our own wholeness.

Our instinct is to follow Jesus' advice of building a firm foundation. It makes sense: We want to put forth our gifts, our strengths, our assets as the key components of who we are. We build the foundation of our lives and our vocations on our intelligence, our sensitivity, our passion, our organizing skills, our relationship skills.

But I have come to believe that there is a subtle danger lurking behind the instinct. While there is nothing wrong with our gifts and assets, they are not the whole truth of who we are. We risk repressing critical parts of ourselves, living out a lie.

Matthew's placement of the story of Jesus' encounter with the leper has a profound and revealing irony to it. Right on the heels of a powerful call to discipleship is a reminder of how broken and needy we are. It's almost as if Matthew wants to remind us that part of the firm foundation for the house of discipleship consists precisely in acknowledging and acting on our need for grace and healing. It's as if Matthew knows—and wants us to know—that we are not ready to embark on the path of discipleship until we acknowledge the leper within us.

The impulse to follow Jesus is a holy and powerful one. But just as holy is the impulse to go before Jesus and boldly ask for healing. We need both.

Much of my life was lived in the tension between radical Sermon-on-the-Mount style discipleship and the cry of the leper. I often felt stuck between an instinct to pour myself out for the poor and a need to attend to my own poverty of spirit.

In some respects, I have been especially like the leper—uncertain that the Lord truly wants to heal me, and therefore, all the more driven to a discipleship of perfectionism to earn divine favor. And because my discipleship is inevitably imperfect, because I fall short of the Sermon on the Mount, I long to hear Jesus say, simply and affectionately, "Of course I want to heal you!"

Over the years, as I increasingly took the time to attend to the pain in my family history and in my own psyche, I found that it was not a divergence from the path of discipleship; it was a strengthening of that path. In fact, my relationships with and advocacy on behalf of homeless and mentally ill persons was deeply enriched when I acknowledged the alcoholism that had ravaged my family. As a disciple of Jesus, I felt called to serve my homeless brothers and sisters, bind their wounds, meet their needs. But over time, I also learned to enter into community with

continued on p.6



Will O'Brien leads the Sister House Retreat.



Will O'Brien with his wife, Dee Dee Risher



Catholic Worker Sister House Retreat Sept. 2005; from left to right: Steve Bremser; Faustino Cruz, David Gardner, Martha Lewis, Jeff Dietrich, Kathryn Clifton, John McAndrew, and Will O'Brien.

I needed to grapple.

At the time, I thought I was following the script of radical discipleship flawlessly. I was part of an intentional Christian community living in a poor neighborhood. I was living in voluntary poverty, in solidarity with the marginalized. I was nonviolently resisting militarism and economic exploitation.

I was also an emotional wreck.

I was beginning to recognize, though only faintly, that there was a deep psychological dissonance in my vocation. Coming from an alcoholic family, there were severely wounded parts of myself that needed healing, but I was operating on an assumption that paying attention to my own pain was bourgeois, selfish. What I hadn't yet come to realize was that my radi-

cal discipleship was partly motivated by two profoundly unhealthy instincts: one, a lashing back in anger at my father and his upper-middle class world for the ways that he and that world had scarred me; and two, a reckless perfectionism that needed to go to unhealthy extremes to please God, a father figure, and earn divine love.

Reading the story of the leper on the heels of the Sermon on the Mount would become critical in my growth toward spiritual health and wholeness. It opened up in me a deeper awareness that part of me simply needed to be healed.

Over the years, I have come to suspect that my personal story is not all that unique in the circles of folks committed to serious biblical dis-



CATHOLIC WORKER VOLUNTEERS ARE:

LIFE LINE TO THE REFUGEES

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR SOUP KITCHEN VOLUNTEERS



BEN SULLIVAN

I don't categorize myself as Catholic or Episcopalian or Jewish, but I do have a feeling that we are all supposed to be treating each other decently; and you don't see that every day in Los Angeles, or any other place for that matter. Coming to the kitchen is one of the few places where I get to witness that—I see volunteers and community members treating their fellow Angelenos like human beings. In the hustle and bustle of traffic and work and daily life, that is not something that's easy to find.

I first came to the kitchen in 1984, I think. I was a student at Loyola High School at the time, and one of the things the Jesuits required was a certain amount of community service. A friend of mine, Kenny Gould, and I spotted the Catholic Worker off a list of potential service spots. My dad had some connection to the Worker, very tangential, I think, and always said it was a group we should explore one day. Kenny and I were lucky to make the right choice and come to the kitchen.

I was thrilled with the experience, but after high school, I went away to college, and I didn't really come back to Los Angeles for about 12 or 13 years. But this year, volunteering at the kitchen felt like something I needed to do for myself. So, I've been coming here as regularly as I can on Saturdays.



days.

I lived in Prague for about five years and in Hungary for a year. One of the big things that happened when I was away was the Los Angeles riots. I was with some other Americans, sitting in a cafe where they had a television set turned on, watching these riots in real time. And it was really shocking watching people beat up each other, watching police beating up people, this whole breakdown...It left me scratching my head, wondering what had become of Los Angeles.

There are certainly poor people in Eastern Europe, but there are a lot more working poor, and, to be honest, a lot more middle class people. That is ironic, considering how America prides itself on its middle class. There are fewer really destitute individuals who have nothing but the contents of their shopping cart. There are more people with very low-wage jobs, who still earn enough to keep a roof over their head, to keep them clothed and fed.

Also, a lot of the countries in Europe come out of a more social tradition, not Socialist necessarily, but a more community-supporting-community tradition. And while they aren't as sophisticated, in terms of non-profits or non-governmental organizations as we are here, that speaks well for their society, because they don't need such sophistication—the society itself works a little bit more in caring for their poor.

I enjoy the other volunteers at the kitchen. I love the diversity of people at the chopping block, which is one of my favorite places. The guy standing behind me designs engines for the space shuttle; there's an intelligence analyst for the LAPD on my left; a person who is part of the Jesuit youth group or doing an internship with the Catholic Worker is across from me; along with a teacher doing volunteer work on the weekend. You get a real cross-section of America—a real diversity of people from different walks of life and backgrounds. Yet we've all found our way to the kitchen.

I'd like to interact a little bit more with the guests. I've always enjoyed serving main dish on the line and hope to do that more.

It all starts with the full-time community members—the Jeff Dietrichs and the Catherine's. You guys set this example, which is, as far as I can tell, even more important than the actual food that is served: showing people how to be human. That is great. Ω



SOPHIE GOLDSTEIN

I had wanted to volunteer at the kitchen for some time. When I was around ten, I asked my mom for the first time, but she thought I was too young, so she said to wait, that she'd take me down when I was older. So, over the years, I would keep asking.

We went to the Catholic Worker House when I was 11 or 12, and that's when we first got the *Agitator*. I would read it, and I would really want to come down to the kitchen, and my mom would say, "Just wait until you're older." So finally, this

They are refugees of our government's "permanent disaster economy." They are harassed by the police, neglected by the nation.



just crazy homeless that you hear about all the time, or that my friends talk about, or the flippant remarks that people make about the homeless. You realize that there's a lot more to it than just making easy comments about it; there's a lot more behind it.

I have this idea that later on this might be something I really want to continue for the rest of my life, so I applied for the summer internship program. I want to get an idea of what really living the life is all about, all the hard work that I know I'm going to have to do. I want to really get a sense of, an idea of, how it all works. So far, I haven't come across anything that I find difficult or challenging. I think once I stay here long enough, I'll find something.

What I like best about the kitchen are the community members. We all work together; there's not one job here that I've done by myself, we're all doing it together, and it's really nice to collaborate on something we all feel very passionate about. I really like the sense of community. Ω



JAN HONORÉ

I think we should be Sermon on the Mount people. The Sermon on the Mount expressly tells us that we've got to be in community with the poor. There is no group I know of that lives that out like the Catholic Worker—serving the poor, caring for the poor, and living with the poor, as well.

It is a delight to work at the kitchen. I really believe that

God's hand brought us there. A teacher at the school where I used to work introduced my husband and me to the West Side Food Bank. He would bring bread to our public elementary school and leave it there to be given away to staff members, and also to poor immigrant families. But there was an awful lot of bread, and so I told Tom, my husband, that this bread should go to the most needy, and that's how we got connected with the Worker. Tom knew about the Worker, but when he started bringing bread to the kitchen, we began to volunteer. Now, we look back on that and realize that was God's hand gently pushing us where he wanted us to be. From the beginning, it just felt as if we were meant to be there.

I love the way we make a real effort to bring beauty to the people who eat at the kitchen, with the lush garden and the fountains...These dear people whose lives are so difficult...bringing smiles, serving them, giving a little bit of comfort, and especially giving dignity. To treat people with dignity...My guess is that folks just don't get much dignity on the streets, and perhaps not in their relationships either. The kitchen is a place where people are treated with respect and where we can really touch the people who are most in need.

The hardest thing about working at the kitchen is knowing that this kind of poverty is completely unnecessary. I would like my taxes to go to facilities and services that would give these dear human beings dignified and comfortable lives, instead of building up the military-industrial complex. I would like to be able to say where my hard-earned tax money should go. We don't care for the most needy of our society. People don't seem to understand that when we take care of the most needy, we are taking care of ourselves. They are our brothers and sisters. That is the hardest thing.

I'm just getting to the point where I'm able to come to the kitchen regularly, and just beginning to recognize the faces that are there every week and they are beginning to recognize me. It was a real learning experience for me to be able to wipe the tables outside and to hear, and be impressed with, the conversations our guests have. Ω

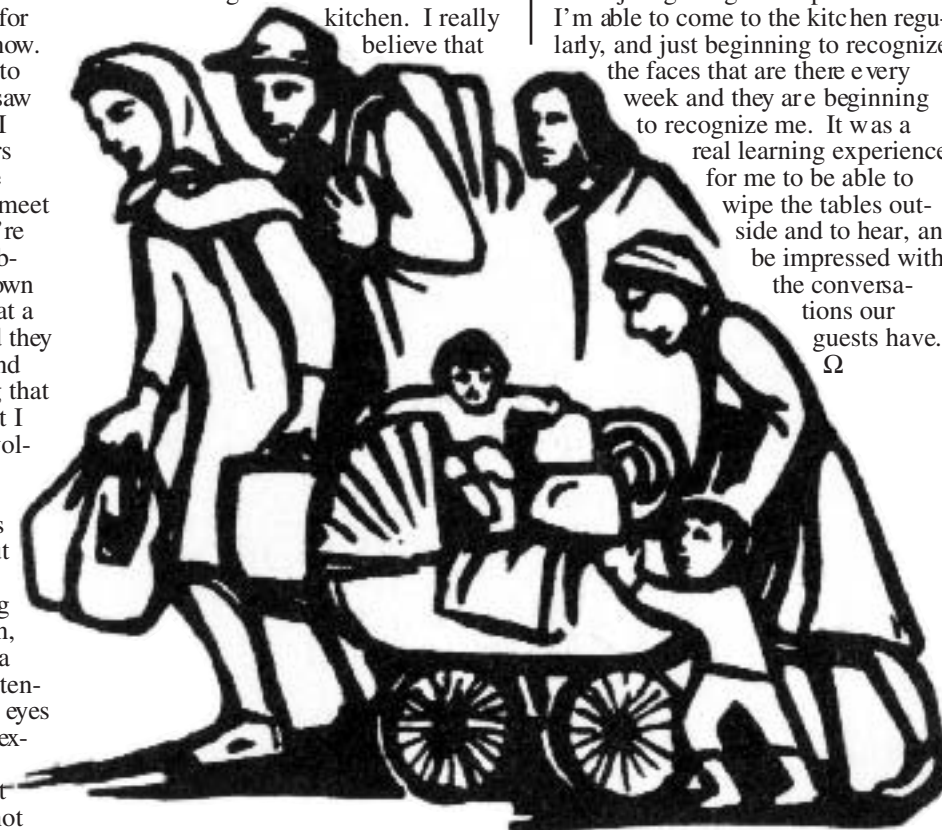




Photo by David Gardner

TED VON DER AHE JR.

I've known you guys for a long time. I wanted to go where folks who help poor folks are, and you have always been a beacon. I, like everybody else, have these intellectual gyrations about the church, about theology, about what ought to be done. But, when it comes right down to it, we are called to feed the poor—and that is what you do.

What does God want of me? Who am I? Where does all this lead? I think basically, what Jesus says is just to go and do it—feed my sheep and follow me.

It makes me think of this little anecdote about Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama. They got together one day, and they talked and exchanged ideas and were getting closer and closer to understanding one another, but Merton was preoccupied with the fact that he had to go through this Tea Ceremony. He had boned up on the way to do it correctly, when and how to lift up your cup, and so forth. He thought he had it right, but then he got kind of stuck, and so the Dalai Lama looked at him and said, "Drink tea. Just drink tea." That's the way I feel. You go through all these gyrations because you think you're supposed to, and all of a sudden it is simple—feed the hungry. For me that distills the Gospels.

We have a little Bible study group that Ched Myers started, and we had a great reflection today on this gospel reading for Advent that says, "Be alert! Be alert! Be alert!" We have to stay awake. You try to be awake in the moment and be present there, and then you take time apart to reflect on it and be more awake to what is going on. You continue with the inner work and the outer work...the inner work and the outer work...and you keep going back and forth.

When you reach a certain age you know you've heard the command and you've put yourself in different situations. Now I just try to find out where God is the closest. It feels right to be at the kitchen, and the folks there at the kitchen are the right folks to be with. It is a great community and I love it. I love the give-and-take and the bantering. We focus on what we do, and yet we don't go around thinking we're all high and mighty or that we've got all the answers. We just help out because we think that is what God wants us to do, and we feel good doing it.

I love to do food flow, a job where I feel like a linebacker or a coach. I'm in the background, making sure that everybody can do their job. I make sure the servers have bread and salad and sporks. I stir the pots and clean the counter. Jeff and Catherine know the structure, yet there is great leeway to be creative on the job. Ω

BOOK REVIEW NORTH OF THE FUTURE

The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich, by David Cayley (Toronto: Anansi, 2005).

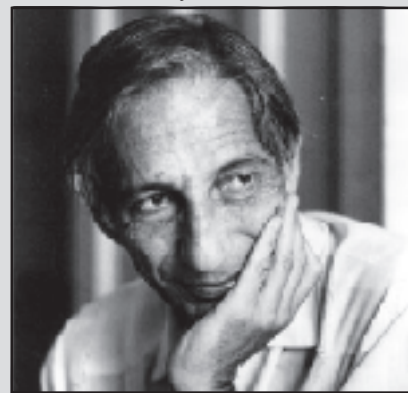
by LEE HOINACKI

Before he died on December 2, 2002, Ivan Illich wanted to make a statement: He wished to say what lay deepest in his heart, to let all people know exactly where he stood. Cayley's book wonderfully fulfills Illich's requirements.

According to Illich, the world, in the way John uses the term in his Gospel, is radically out of joint. Further, the Church, too, is profoundly out of joint.

In this book, Illich details how the principal structures of our time came from Christian attempts to make certain that grace be effective. He believes that all of us live in the modern world, which is, in its origin, the Western European world. Explaining his position, he says:

"The more I try to examine the



present as a historical entity, the more it seems confusing, unbelievable, and incomprehensible. It forces me to accept a set of axioms for which I find no parallels in past societies and displays a puzzling kind of horror, cruelty, and degradation with no precedent in other historical epochs (p.60)."

Speaking of modernity, Illich says, "Whenever I look for the roots of modernity, I find them in the attempts of the churches to institutionalize, legitimize and manage Christian vocation" (p.48).

Illich further explains, "I live in the *kairos* in which the mystical body of Christ, through its own fault, is constantly being crucified...I am therefore expecting the resurrection of the Church from the humiliation, for which the Church itself must be blamed, of

having gestated and brought forth the world of modernity" (p.175).

Reading this book, believers and non-believers, too, see that the triumph of *homo economicus* and other so-called facts like globalization or the establishment of empire are really only epiphenomena. A much more important reality lies beneath them.

Illich strikes through the various manifestations of evil, although important in themselves, to get at something infinitely greater, namely sin, the specificity of evil after the Incarnation. For him, sin has a distinctly *personal* character. Through his interpretation of the parables of the New Testament, Illich gives an unusual exegesis of the Good Samaritan story, dramatically detailing his idea of the *optimum* (God's grace seen and grasped in the Incarnation) and of *pessimism* (what people have often done with God's gift). Cayley summarizes the theme of his interviews by the phrase *corruptio optimi quae est pessima* (the corruption of the best is the worst).

Illich believes that historically-documented events show how sin was criminalized by churchmen. Sin became not an offense against God for which one must express true contrition, but a legal fault for which one can be temporally punished.

In accord with such modern writers as Simone Weil, and basing himself on a tradition found most clearly and consistently in the Orthodox churches, Illich concludes that the truth of the Cross is folly, best seen in the figure of the fool. If one were to speak of Christianity as a reality to be understood, this image expresses the essence of belief.

According to Charles Taylor, author of the book's forward, Illich changes the terms of the debate about Christianity and modernity. Illich states that modernity is neither the fulfillment nor the antithesis of Christianity, but its *perversion*.

Illich's discussion of ethos and ethnos, virtue and Kantian-derived ethics, the importance of surprise and the centrality of friendship will be welcomed by all those concerned about the ravages of modernity.

Lee Hoinacki was a close friend of Ivan Illich and is also a friend of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker.

O'Brien, continued from p.3

them, and I discovered the common struggle we shared for healing and recovery. Quite literally, there are times when they serve me. I am even tempted to say that their homelessness compels me precisely because of the emotional homelessness I often experienced.

And I begin to understand: This, after all, is compassion—the suffering with, the breaking down of distinctions between servant and served. This, after all, is biblical justice—not simply political advocacy by the privileged on behalf of the oppressed, but the building of that community of *shalom*, the common assent to the mystery of God's reign wherein we recognize our oneness and right our relationships.

Which brings us back to the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: the Beatitudes and their paradoxical proclamation of blessedness found in human brokenness. In fact, when I think of the leper in Matthew 8, I wonder if he isn't enacting a kind of *midrash* on the Beatitudes:

Blessed are those who know they are in need of mercy—they shall show mercy.

Maybe in the end it's not so bad to have the leper as a kind of role model. After all, while he comes forth in a state of need, he also has shown tremendous courage. He has risked serious approbation by breaking the social codes that demand he stay segregated. He has defied the religious rules of the day because he sensed a radical stirring of God's power. He is moved to bold action, to civil disobedience, in fact, because he has heard the good news of the reign of God. Jesus often affirms the faith of those who boldly come forward to seek Gospel healing—as if the real transformative power is theirs as much as it is Jesus'.

Maybe in the end the leper is already a disciple. Maybe he is an ironic prophet of the truest meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. May we learn from him—and thereby be strengthened in following the radical and healing ways of Jesus. Ω



Photo by David Gardner

JOHN OWEN

I came to volunteer here for a short time in the early 80's. I think we met again in 2001. My local Fellowship of Reconciliation group was vigiling on the front side of the federal building, and the Worker was vigiling close to the jail on the back side of the building. I started going to your vigil, and Paul Benson said, "Come down to the kitchen!"

I was at the vigil probably about six months before I came down to the kitchen. You had me do the water flow. You explained to me how important water was to the customers, that it would be there for them, and be cool and pleasant, and I just completely loved doing it.

There are four water filling stations: two in the garden, one on the sidewalk, and another water bucket for people that are standing in line waiting to get their meal. The water comes out of the tap at about 75 degrees, so it's warm and it doesn't taste good. What you do is fill up the big bucket with a whole bunch of ice in it to cool the water down. So there's cold water served to the people in line, and there's cold water available in the water stations, and a whole freezer full of ice to keep the water cool.

During the summer, you use the whole freezer full of ice in a day. I think on a really hot day you can serve about a ton and a half of water. I think about 2000 servings, about two little cups per person, is what it averages out to.

This is a water planet: It is about 80% water and our bodies are 80% water. You can go for a long time without food, but you won't live very long without water. Particularly on Skid Row, water is one of the hardest things to find. To give icy cold water in unlimited quantities is just a tremendous gift that I really enjoy providing. And they love it, the customers love it, and they walk around and say, "Hey, water man!" to me.

There is something about doing the water job that just feeds my heart and reminds me of Jesus. What I have found in my life is that giving people what they need and what they want, and giving from your heart, is the best thing to do. I think that's the Christ spirit within me, that is within all of us. If we exercise that spirit, we have to actually go out and do something, or it tends to shrivel and die. So, this is a huge joy for me to do.

I am constantly amazed, and, again, have my spirit restored, by the quality of the volunteers and Catholic Workers. This place, perhaps, is the best place that I've ever worked. It's really good to be around other people who care, and who remind me that I'm not really alone in the world, and I'm not completely crazy to feel the way I do. Ω

ON THE LINE

RECRUITMENT PROTEST

Catholic Workers and other activists from Duluth, MN, were arrested on November 9 for blockading the doorway to a local Army recruiting office. The activists stated that the recruiters misrepresent the realities of military life to possible recruits.

VANDEMBERG WITNESS

MacGregor Eddy, retired nurse and mother of four grown children, was arrested on October 8 for trespassing onto Vandenberg Air Force Base property. She was arrested during the annual protest at the base during Keep Space for Peace Week.

—newspress.com

EVERYONE'S A TERRORIST

The U.S. Government has detained more than 80,000 people in numerous locations from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay since the attacks on the World Trade Center four years ago. Currently, at least 14,500 people are in U.S. custody and are being held without formal charges.

—guardian.co.uk

SOA/WHINSEC UPDATE

On November 20, a record 19,000 people gathered at Fort Benning, GA, for the 15th annual protest against the School of the Americas. Forty people were arrested for trespassing; adjudicated defendants range in age from 19 to 81. Two defendants pled guilty at the arraignment and immediately began serving their three and six-month sentences. Franciscan priests Jerry Zawada and Louie Vitale declined to post bond and will remain in Muskegee County Jail until their trial on January 30.

—soaw.org

IRAQ OIL LOSSES

Insurgent attacks on Iraq's oil pipelines and wells are costing Iraq nearly 500,000 barrels of oil each day, nearly one-third of its daily oil output. At the current oil prices, this amounts to a loss of \$28 million in export earnings every day. Since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Iraqi oil production has failed to match the pre-war level of 2.5 million barrels per day.

—realcityest.com

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

After adamantly denying its use, the U.S. Government now admits that the U.S. military used white phosphorous in Iraq. The military used white phosphorous as an incendiary weapon during the assault on Fallujah last November. After igniting phosphorous above a targeted area, clouds of chemical dust leave clothing intact while painfully burning flesh to the bone. Chemical weapons experts say such attacks are in violation of international law.

—democracynow.org

CLIMATE SHIFT

According to the World Health Organization, the earth's warming climate is estimated to contribute to more than 150,000 deaths and five million illnesses each year. Global warming is driving up rates of malaria, malnutrition, and diarrhea throughout the world. According to one climatologist, "Wealth is the number one factor in determining vulnerability or adaptability of a country [to global warming]."

—washingtonpost.com

POLICE HARASSMENT

Relief activists in New Orleans say that they have become a target of constant police harassment. A volunteer relief worker from Ohio was documenting police misconduct when he, too, was arrested without charges. According to the volunteer, his arms were twisted and his face was slammed into the police cruiser's plexiglass barrier when he attempted to use his cell phone after being placed in the car.

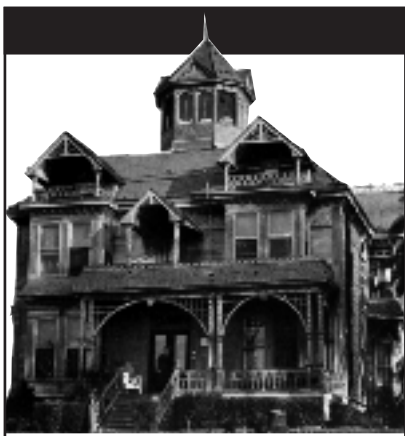
—alternet.org

SHRINKING AMAZON

Brazil's Amazon rainforest is disappearing twice as fast as scientists previously estimated. The shrinking forest increases vulnerability to local wildfires and undermines its biological productivity. Also, illegal logging in the rainforest releases nearly 100 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year, rapidly advancing global warming.

—news.yahoo.com

On The Line is compiled and edited by Mike Wisniewski.



THE HOUSE JOURNAL

November 2 was another solemn, yet joyful, remembrance of All Soul's Day. As the occasion fell on a Wednesday, we celebrated our regular evening liturgy around the beautiful Day of the Dead altar that Gustavo Monzon and others had so lovingly assembled. While looking at the dozens of photos of loved ones, community members, and guests, all illuminated by the flickering candlelight, we mourned our beloved dead.

Christian Belt arrived at our home via the Santa Ana Catholic Worker. He will be staying with us for two months. Originally from the beautiful city of Osnabruck, Germany, he joins us under the auspices of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. In lieu of military service, Christian chose to do social service in a German kindergarten. He is highly energetic and quick to lend a helping hand.

We were truly thankful to have Father Greg Boyle preside over our Thanksgiving Mass. His moving stories of former gang members finding strength and hope in family and



Photo by David Gardner

Brian Terrell (center) from the Malloy Iowa CW with Eduard The Agitator Loring (left), and Murphy Davis (right) of the Open Door Community at Annual SOA Protest.



David Gardner and Elizabeth Henricks (2005 Summer Intern) at SOA.

friends inspired all of us. We pray that many more homeboys will be delivered from the voracious prisons and deadly street violence that are symptomatic of a nation long dedicated to a foreign and domestic policy of death.

Thanksgiving Day, always a festive and busy day, was made all the more special by the presence of over fifty guests, including family, kitchen volunteers, and our friends from the street. On that mild fall day, the ringing laughter of the children in the garden, the spirited conversation of friends, and the hustle and bustle of food preparation culminated in a fantastic feast.

The weekend before Thanksgiving,

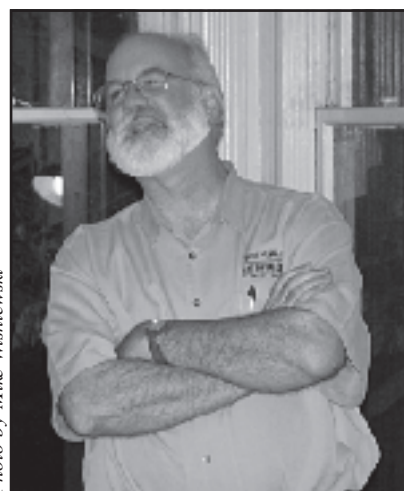


Photo by Mike Wisniewski

Fr. Greg Boyle celebrating mass at LACW.

we sent David Gardner to the School of the Americas protest. According to David, the protest at the SOA was a peaceful and sobering experience. There he bumped into a number of friends and affiliates, including former LACW community member Sheila McCarthy; LACW volunteers Bob and Teri Koenig, Tom and Jan Honoré, and Bill Davis; Voices for Creative Nonviolence founder, Kathy Kelly; Catholic Workers Brain Terrell

and Jim Haber; former JVC Sara Suman; and former LACW summer interns Chris Knestrick and Elizabeth Henricks.

On his trip, David stayed with the Open Door Community in Atlanta, our Protestant Sister House. David reported that he observed all six of the Works of Mercy at the Open Door. Particularly poignant was his description of how the Open Door has organized local churches to provide transportation to families wanting to visit imprisoned loved ones, an effort that has continued monthly for the past 20 years. David was also able to protest with the Open Door against the opening of Atlanta's new \$280 million aquarium. The Open Door believes that Atlanta should house people before their house fish.

Kathleen and David Bellefeuille-Rice visited their daughter, Clare, and the community, over the Thanksgiving holiday. We were amused and enlightened by their wonderful stories about their days as Catholic Workers in Alderson, Virginia and in New York. David repaired the community bikes, Kathleen offered excellent garden advice, and both added soaring voices to our Thanksgiving Mass.

Blessed and joyous birthday wishes to Jim and Joyce Parkhurst, Ann Boden, and Amal Kennedy. The community took the occasion of Arnal's birthday to launch Arnal Appreciation Week, during which we lauded and pampered Arnal, our steadfast kitchen dishwasher for over three years. What would we do without this faithful and gentle soul?

Kitchen volunteer Lana Chwe graced us with her presence at a recent culture critique. She provided an overview of the fascinating writings of resistance theologian William Stringfellow.

As we begin the Advent Season, it is our fervent prayer that our nation, a modern-day Babylon, will repent and share its abundance.

House Journal was written by Faustino Cruz.