

MANNA *in the wilderness*

June 2022

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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Welcoming the Stranger

by Julia Occhiogrosso

“Don’t ever mistake kindness for weakness,” he counseled as I drove him to his job at a local dry cleaner. At seventy, he was the elder and I the youngster in need of tutelage. He appreciated having a place off the streets and found ways to express his gratitude. That morning he offered to take our oversized peace banner to work with him to apply his expertise as a dry cleaning presser.

Buddie was one of the first guests from the streets to live with us when the Las Vegas Catholic Worker opened its doors in 1986. He was with us for almost a year until he succumbed to his fight with pancreatic cancer. His Catholic Worker family held vigil at his bedside those last weeks. He shared his recollections of life on the road and playing in the USO with the great performers.

His sturdy confidence and humor distracted us from his declining body. Steadily, his words disappeared into shallow breaths until he lay in silence, surrounded by his new friends.

The early Christians believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent; that at any moment Christ could and would manifest in the guise of a stranger. It was a common practice for Christians to set aside a space in their home designated as the Christ room, for the stranger in need of shelter.

The Catholic Worker tradition of hospitality was inspired by this practice. Through the years hundreds of men, women and children have spent time as guests in our four houses of hospitality. A few, like Buddie, spent their last days with us. Others stayed for a time to regroup and stabilize. A relative few had difficulty abiding by our basic expectations of respect and reciprocity—they were either asked or chose to move on.

There have been challenging periods. We have learned how to be more discerning in accepting guests. We have had to reckon with our limitations and stumbling blocks.

Inviting someone in need of

shelter, whom you barely know, into your home, goes against conventional wisdom. We have apprehensions and wonder about the risks. How will this gesture of kindness impact my coveted comforts?

I was introduced to the practice of hospitality while living in



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community with the Los Angeles Catholic Worker in the 1980’s. In this context, I was fortunate to be mentored and learn from experienced Catholic Workers. In the context of community, risks are diminished and responsibilities are shared.

As with any practice, one develops and refines skills incrementally. I quickly realized that the gifts and graces one receives far outweighed the detriments and discomforts.

I have been stretched by being in relationship with people I might never have known. It expanded and



Herb

impacted the way I perceive the world. Learning someone’s story of hardship and struggle kindles the sparks of mercy and compassion within me. Witnessing how they navigate and traverse these hardships is humbling. Certainly, to have access to a way to personally alleviate the burden of even one person from the distress of being on the street gives me hope.

Ideally the spirit of hospitality overflows into all that we do. It is how we approach guests at our morning food line, our shower service, our food pantry. It is how we cultivate the Catholic Worker family of volunteers. Once we start engaging in hospitality, there’s this transformative experience, a reciprocal nature wherein by giving we also feel like we receive.

Presently the Las Vegas Catholic Worker provides long term hospitality or permanent housing for seven men who were formerly living on the streets. Each in their own way contribute to the life of our community. In addition to the two homes on Van Buren Ave., we also have two small apartment units that were gifted to us by the Franciscans Friars, who left Las Vegas in 2004.



Buddy

The daily life in a hospitality house takes negotiation and acceptance. It can be turbulent and messy. Yet I am convinced that when we can embrace a commitment to consistently return to the intention of finding the Christ, the sacred in each of us, then we are strengthened in our capacity to love each other and our world.



On May 9, Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG) held a Community Action on Affordable Housing at St. Anne’s Catholic Church. The Catholic Worker is a contributing member of NCG and Julia Occhiogrosso was chosen to ask questions of Clark County Commissioner Tick Segerblom and City Councilwoman Olivia Diaz along with Patricia Haddad of the Downtown Neighborhood Coalition. From left: City Councilwoman Olivia Diaz, County Commissioner Tick Segerblom, Julia Occhiogrosso and Patricia Haddad.

Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG) Delegate Assembly

Tuesday, June 28, 2022, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Holy Family Catholic Church

4490 S. Mountain Vista St., Las Vegas, Nevada

This is an important all members meeting to renew your institutional membership, pass the 2022-2023 NCG budget, establish issue teams, and ratify our work heading into the November election and the 2023 legislative session.

Contact Julia Occhiogrosso for questions or to RSVP at (702) 647-0728 or julia@lvcw.org



People pick out clothes in our backyard before taking a shower.

Clean the World Foundation Shower Trailer

We are excited about our new partnership with Clean the World Foundation. Every Friday, from 8 a.m. to noon, they park their mobile shower trailer in the empty lot behind our two homes. The trailer has four complete bathrooms, and they can do up to 40 showers.

We did not budget for clean clothes and socks and undergarments, but we consider it essential that people can put on clean clothes after a shower. We have been purchasing underwear and socks each week if they have not been donated to us.



We need underwear, socks and t-shirts for our Friday shower program, please contact Julia: julia@lvcw.org or (702) 647-0728

**We will be Closed
Aug. 4-13, 2022**

Donations:

Checks: Please make checks payable to “Las Vegas Catholic Worker” and send to:

Las Vegas Catholic Worker
500 W. Van Buren Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89106-3039

PayPal Giving Fund:
<http://lvcw.org/giving>

Credit Card Donations:
<http://lvcw.org/donate>

PLEASE JOIN US

Volunteer Scheduling:
(702) 647-0728
or mail@lvcw.org

Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker

Thurs.-Sat., 6:15 a.m.
Over 300 “To-go” Meals served to poor & homeless people (6:15 a.m.: meal assembly, 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.: distribution of the meals)

Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.:
50 lunches taken to the homeless

Friday, 8 a.m. - Noon:
Clean the World Foundation shower trailer in our empty lot., up to 40 showers given

Second Sat. of the month:
Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast (please call to volunteer)

Third Sat. of the month:
Deliver food boxes to homes in need

We are a Participating Member of: Nevadans for the Common Good

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