

# MANNA *in the wilderness*

May 2007

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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## PERSONAL AND GLOBAL SORROW

by Julia Occhiogrosso

I have not been without worry for months now. I am preoccupied with thoughts that require much of my attention. My worrisome thoughts stay in me like a permanent internal fixture. I worry about my worrying, creating an obsessive drumming in my ears and in my heart. I worry mostly these days about the well-being of my children and the well being of the world. It is a tremendous challenge to reconcile personal suffering with global suffering. At once they are one and the same and at another they are completely distinct.

My son complains, "Why do you always connect one thing to another?" I reply, "because all life is interconnected," knowing full well that his thirteen-year-old mind would limit how well he could grasp my explanation.

It is four a.m. and I am driving to the Catholic Worker to prepare this morning's soup. As I navigate through the dark I meditate on images presented by the morning radio report. Car bombs in Baghdad. Civilian deaths. Genocide in Darfur and on and on. Even without the radio voice the images continue to filter through my heart's eye. All life is interconnected. An injury to one is an injury to all.

This global sorrow penetrates me like the painful journeys that arrive each morning for a bowl of soup. This global sorrow fills me and becomes a part of me like the deep wounds of my adopted children losing their birth mother at ages three and two. This global sorrow traces its steps backward in time to the spiral of violence and woundedness that proceeds and perpetuates new wounds, new suffering. The restless uncomforted sorrow that has not found the peace of tears, continues to live in us in search of relief.

Sufferings seems to take one or more lifetimes to heal.

Healing requires deliberate conscious action. It is slow, tedious and full of relapses. It seems at times to shrink in stature next to its rival force

of destruction and violence.

Like a seed that finds its way through the suffering thirst of the desert to become a Joshua tree, the healers in this world must gird themselves to experience and walk with the sorrow while never heeding to its cause. We must become the containers that can both hold and transform the sorrow into the healing force of compassion. The healers of this world must abide in the knowledge of the sacredness and infinite possibilities of the human spirit. They must be voices for what is true and good and constant, holding fast to integrity, honesty, tenderness and love.

I have learned not to fear the pain

that sorrow yields. I must be willing to let it in if I am going to have the chance to transform it. I must resist the temptation to protect myself from feeling the cost of human suffering; and finally to escape from under the burdens of worry and return to the joy of believing in the deepest promptings of the human inclinations to love and to care. When this sorrow moves through the human heart it emboldens us to act with courage and persistence for a healed world, a healed family, a healed relationship. If you are connected at all to life, the suffering will not pass you by. But if you are connected to love the suffering will not destroy you or keep you from moving forward.



Julia Occhiogrosso and Dan Berrigan, S.J. at the Pacific Life Community gathering at the Nevada Test Site on March 3, 2007. PHOTO BY MARIO INTINO

## New Hospitality House Open to Serve

by Gary Cavalier

We are pleased to write that our second Hospitality House is full of life with three men residing there.

Eddie tells us his room is "better than the Hilton!" We have known Eddie from the soupline for 20 years and it is a joy to see him with a home, taking care of the yard, learning to cook, and watching Spanish soap operas.

Tim enjoys volunteering at the soupline and patiently puts up with the loud Spanish soap operas.

Leigh is an organic farmer from Canada volunteering for four months, our yard and compost pile have benefitted from his arrival. We will miss him when he returns home May 17.

We took over the new building next door when Family Promise, a network of 18 faith communities housing homeless families, was evicted in November 2006 by the city. Fortunately, the City Council kept their promise to find Family Promise a new spot and  
(continued on back page)

# How I Came to Volunteer at the Catholic Worker

by Meredith Stewart

“So you’ve joined forces with the Catholics, eh?” a friend once said when I told her I had been volunteering at the Catholic Worker. Perhaps it is unlikely that a Protestant raised to believe that Catholics were somehow suspect would end up at a place called the Catholic Worker. But I was also taught to believe that “the least of these” were the most valued in the kingdom of heaven and that Jesus hung out with poor people, criminals, prostitutes, and other societal outcasts. None of the churches I was ever a part of really acted like they believed that. Then I read a book called *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* by Shane Claiborne. Here was a Christian who actually lived in the poorest neighborhood in Philadelphia, someone who was friends with homeless people and drug addicts, who reclaimed abandoned buildings and fed the hungry. As one of his primary influences he listed the Catholic Workers. It was the first time I had heard the name.

Eventually, I searched the web

and found that there was even a Catholic Worker in Las Vegas. I got on a bus that took me to an area of town I had never been to before. There were no strip malls or large parking lots, or eight lanes of traffic. It was strangely quiet. Many of the buildings were abandoned. One house was spray-painted with the warning: “No trespassing! Police take notice!” Behind chain-link fences dogs sat on dry grasses. Just about every third building was a church.

Soon, I found the right house. I recognized the little stone tower from

the picture on the website. I had never seen a house like it in Vegas before. I met Gary and he immediately set me to work peeling potatoes for the lunch that they shared with homeless friends.

Now I come to that same house every Wednesday. I have started a small writing workshop for people on the streets, something I could not have done without the support of everyone at the Catholic Worker. We write; we share our work and our thoughts. I feel I have come close to the kingdom of heaven.

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we attended the blessing of their beautiful new home on March 29.

We are using both homes each Wednesday when we hold our “Hospitality Day” and bring home around 20 men and women from our soup line and provide them the opportunity to wash clothes, take a shower, and finish off with a hearty homestyle lunch. With the addition of the new Hospitality House we have 3 restrooms with showers available as well as two washing machines and dryers.

## Empty Bowl Benefit Update

This year’s Empty Bowl Luncheon was the largest yet, raising almost \$22,000 for our morning breakfast soup line. We are thankful for the many volunteers who helped make the event so beautiful and such a success. We also thank the event sponsors: The Nevada Clay Guild, Green Valley High School, Aardvark Clay and the Fiber Guild.

### WEBSITES:

[www.lvcw.org](http://www.lvcw.org)  
[www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)

**PRAY FOR  
PEACE  
IN OUR  
WORLD!**

(FOR  
TAB)

*Thanks to all our  
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## Pope Benedict XVI on “Love of Enemies and Nonviolence”

Why does Jesus ask us to love our very enemies, that is, ask a love that exceeds human capacities? What is certain is that Christ’s proposal is realistic, because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and that this situation cannot be overcome without positing more love, more kindness. This “more” comes from God: It is his

mercy that has become flesh in Jesus and that alone can redress the balance of the world from evil to good, beginning from that small and decisive “world” which is man’s heart.

This page of the Gospel (the Beatitudes, Luke 6:27) is rightly considered the “magna carta” of Christian Nonviolence; it does not consist in surrendering to evil— as claims a false interpre-

tation of “turn the other cheek” —but in responding to evil with good, and thus breaking the chain of injustice. It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God’s love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone.

*Excerpt from address given Feb. 18, 2007 in St. Peter’s Square.*

### PLEASE JOIN US:

**Wed., Fri., Sat., 6:00 a.m.:**

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

**Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:**

Breakfast served at G & McWilliams street to the poor and homeless.

**Last Saturday of month; 8:30 a.m.:**

Deliver food to homes in need.

**Wednesday; 8 a.m. - noon:**

Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless men & women home for showers, to wash clothes, & lunch.

**Thursday; 8 a.m. - 9 a.m.:**

Vigil for Peace in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 S. Las Vegas Blvd.

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