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408.297.8330

info@sjcw.org

318 N 6th St. San Jose CA 95112

www.sjcw.org

How can you help?

- **Financial donations:** Checks can be made to Casa de Clara Catholic Worker. Give online at www.sjcw.org
- **Cars and bikes** for guests. Cars must pass smog and function well.
- **Household & Shower supplies:** Toilet paper, deodorant, women's underwear, XL latex gloves

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August 2020

On Pilgrimage

by Chad Baron

About midway through my final year at college, I was thinking about the upcoming transition and what life after graduation should look like. In my reflection, I remembered that it had been a personal dream to volunteer for the year following graduation. The Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) and English Opens Doors were two programs that stuck out from my research. As I was filling out the application for English Opens Doors, however, I realized that the time of service would be only six months. A yearlong opportunity was a priority, so JVC became my primary focus. Irresponsible as this sounds, it was also the only opportunity I had pursued. I submitted my application, and I nervously awaited news from JVC. A week later, I learned that I had been accepted and placed at Cristo Rey High School here in San José. I could never have anticipated the extent to which that year as a volunteer would impact my future.

This year became an incredibly formative experience as it challenged me to look at the world from various new perspectives and to dedicate more time and energy to justice. There were many people and groups that I came to admire for their efforts in justice issues, and all became great influencers in my effort to personally live out a more thoughtful and intentional life that respected the communities around me and the environment. I don't remember how, or when, but some time during this year of service I began digging into the life of Dorothy Day. Her life and words really struck me. She had a raw experience with faith, and she constantly struggled with systems of oppression while fostering a more loving world. In my eyes, she lived a "radical" life grounded in the Gospels. My reflections on her extraordinarily simple Christian life naturally compelled me toward introspection. I asked myself how I'm living a radical life to promote a more just and sustainable existence.

Dorothy stayed with me the year following JVC as I moved to Virginia to work in higher education. Stumbling upon a bookshelf I noticed a biography about her and immediately retrieved it and began reading it. After a couple of days I closed the book, feeling reinvigorated and introspective once again. This time I asked myself if it would be possible to live with a Catholic Worker community, but I shook that idea from my mind quickly because, as a recent graduate, I found myself in quite a bit of student debt. I knew Catholic Workers didn't make much, if



Chad prepares sushi for a guest's birthday dinner

any, money. As I do when I feel drawn to something apparently unreasonable, I left the decision up to God. If this was something I should or needed to do, I trusted that it would happen.

My work in Virginia came to an end and I then moved back to California to work with the Cristo Rey Network in Southern California. A group of community members had come together in an effort to open a school in the Santa Ana/Anaheim area. The work was moving along quite well until mid-March when, appropriately, non-essential activities were put on pause. We thought it would be possible to adequately engage students, parents, and community members during a time of social distancing, but after a couple months it became clear that wasn't possible. The decision was made to postpone the effort for at least six months, and suddenly I found myself with quite a bit of time to do something different. I've never enjoyed sitting on the sidelines when things of import are happening around me, so I reached out to various groups continuing essential services. Soon after, I threw a bag of clothes in the car and headed once again for San José to join the Casa de Clara community.

My experience at the Catholic Worker thus far has been refreshing and challenging. Living in an intentional community that offers direct services and addresses larger systemic issues has reignited my desire to ask important questions and advocate for change. My capacity to love has expanded as well, despite my personal reservations. Dorothy Day and the charisma she promoted through the Catholic Worker movement has inspired me, like countless others. I am grateful to be here and learn more about the movement and the lives of those we encounter daily.



Left: Khalilah (L) and Calia (R) dance in front of City Hall to protest police brutality. Right: A Wednesday showers guests waves hello.

I Was Hungry and You Fed Me Flaming Hot Cheetos

by Artie Evans

I want to talk honestly about the food we serve to our low-income and unhoused friends. Before I begin, though, know that my critiques do not negate the enormous gratitude I feel for the donations and volunteers who keep Casa running.

A nearby supermarket donates a large portion of the food we distribute on Wednesdays. It is clear to me that much of this produce is long past its prime. I find myself spending 15 minutes every week sifting through boxes

An Encounter with Christ

By Calia Kammer

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. -Mark 2:3-4

While waiting for their turn at “Showers to the People!”, guests share food and inside jokes, and swap skills and stories. Some weeks, though, the camaraderie blossoms in surprising and heart-wrenching ways.

For the past couple years, we have come to know Ernie, a man who has lived in his car in the parking lot where we host Sunday showers. Physical disabilities and old age leave Ernie reliant on family and friends to care for his basic needs. Despite Ernie's proximity to us, I had never seen him agree to shower. One Sunday this May, though, a trio of shower guests convinced Ernie that collaborating to make sure he showered was well worth the effort. I'm reminded of the men in Mark's Gospel, so intent on bringing their friend to Jesus' healing that they carve a hole in a roof: someone pushes Ernie as he slumps into his walker, others lay towels on the ground so he can lie on the pavement while waiting his turn. The newly-formed team moves metal stairs aside and places a chair in the shower stall; each grips one of Ernie's limbs to carefully hoist him into the shower trailer, and a longtime friend steps into the trailer to wash away the months -maybe years- of accumulated dirt, waste and stress from his frail body.

After showering, Ernie's daze holds a new brilliance. The friends again gather to lift the sickly man's frame from the trailer back into his walker. High fives and heartfelt thanks round out the celebration for such a basic form of care. Like the men who lower their friend into Jesus' healing presence, we get to take turns carrying each other to healing and restoration.

One day later, a shower guest who had helped the previous day informs us that Ernie has passed away. The abruptness of the news lays a heavier weight on Sunday's experience. In hindsight, Ernie's shower seems more like a baptism or last rites, having shown him the dignity and communal assurance to let go. When we choose to serve and give generously of ourselves, as the shower guests did to support Ernie, we get to take part in beautifully intimate moments. **Encountering the divine happens as we carry and serve one another, especially those most oppressed.**

Some of us serve “on-the-ground” and get to witness the generosity and gratitude in scenes like Ernie's shower; others are on the back-end: sewing masks, packaging meals, donating funds, writing letters. Each part of the holy collaboration is necessary. Not all have the privilege of witnessing the tender interactions at showers, food distribution, or Casa de Clara; we hope to convey that for as much oppression as the poor suffer, there are many moments of beauty like Ernie's last day. Wherever you are, thank you for being part of the ministry.

Dispatch from the Garden

By Peggy Coleman

For the past 6 months, I have been working with Calia in the garden, attempting to bring some beauty, fresh vegetables, and flowers to our dinner table. Hopefully, we can provide better nutrition and something for the soul to lift the spirits of the homeless and those who have been uprooted from their homeland.

Every Tuesday morning from 9 to noon, I look forward to pruning the flowers, gathering vegetables, planting seedlings, and watering the apple and peach trees. This list of chores has recently expanded to include adding fresh hay to the chickens' coop.

I meet with Calia to determine how to transform the backyard into a more suitable place for the girls living here. A free spirit and room to safely play are essential for a child's development.

Our dogs, Coco, Chagall, and Nala, take advantage of the large backyard to run and chase each other. It would most likely please Dorothy to see how, on a small scale, our Catholic Worker house can seamlessly blend downtown living, hospitality, vegetable farming, and animal husbandry.

Lee, who sleeps on the sidewalk in front of the house, regularly lends a hand as well. He pulls weeds and has created a rock garden in the strip of dirt along the street.

We are a thriving community of Catholic Workers at Casa de Clara. We know it takes a village to bring new life to 6th St. We can use your help to create: a small sandbox for the girls to play in; a compost pile; a more efficient watering system with new hoses; and an herb garden. If you are interested in volunteering, come on Tuesday mornings, or text Peggy at 408 221 3424.

The Neoliberal Pandemic in Canada

By Paul Salvatori

During my quarantine, I came across an interview on YouTube with Dorothy Day. In it she explains the mission of *The Catholic Worker*: "If your [sibling] is hungry you feed [them]. You don't meet [them] at the door and say 'go be thou filled' or 'wait a few weeks and you'll get a welfare check.' You sit [them] down and feed [them]."

I've been thinking a lot about Day's powerful words, especially with respect to how Canada has been responding to the plight and needs of its most vulnerable. Often thought of as a "nice" or "humanitarian" country, Canada has sadly revealed itself to not be much different from its neoliberal counterparts throughout the world.

In Toronto, people continue to be unhoused in vast numbers, failed by the city's shelter system that is at capacity. They are forced to set up encampments throughout much of the downtown. The elderly, as revealed by a deeply troubling military report on the conditions of Canadian long-term care residences during the pandemic, are subject to abuse by staff. At the same time, they are at the highest risk of dying from the virus itself. Finally, gun violence in Toronto is higher than it was during this time last year; not even the threat of COVID-19 can keep marginalized youth inside and away from the deadly activities they're pressured into by poverty and neglect.

This is all tragic. And unnecessary.

“People continue to be unhoused in vast numbers, failed by the city’s shelter system that is at capacity. They are forced to set up encampments throughout much of downtown.”



Whether it is the homeless, elderly or marginalized youth, Canada continues to fail in providing for the vulnerable in ways that it can and—as a matter of moral obligation (which Day understood so well)—*must*. When swaths of people are unhoused, you house them. When the elderly are at the receiving end of cruelty, you stop it. When youth, woefully too young for a funeral, are endangered by gun violence, you offer them love, community and mentorship—regardless of how much “tax money” that costs—so they can pursue safe and meaningful lives.

The responsibilities lie in large part with governments. But as our countries become increasingly neoliberal, they offload such responsibility onto the private and non-profit sectors, in the mostly-untested belief that they will do a better and more “efficient” job in tending to the vulnerable than the state ever can. “We will provide you some help and funding,” so the neoliberal attitude goes, “but don’t expect us to pick up the slack for you. We’ll be out of the picture and you’ll be on your own.”

This works all-too-well for neoliberal governments. When the vulnerable suffer, it’s not the government who is blamed. Neoliberal governments are too proud to admit negligence, as they continually turn away from the hungry and occupy themselves with “expanding markets”—endlessly pursuing the bottom line to sustain their greed.

Still, we must hold neoliberal political leaders accountable. Behind their callous social indifference and irresponsibility, they, like us, are human beings. Ugly as is neoliberalism, its students retain a beautiful humanity. Through protest, demonstration—however we contest power—we must awaken that sacred part of them so they too can see the vulnerable who, recalling Day, need to be tended to *now*. Governments, while wholly respecting privacy, must ensure that all populations are cared for and protected.

Neoliberal governments don’t recognize that this is an absolute priority. The economy, markets, and money are secondary to human life itself. Be we residents of Canada or the U.S., emerging from the pandemic is not a mere

matter of life and death. It is a moral mission, calling on all to imagine and recreate a compassionate, just and loving society where no one—under any circumstances—is left to fend for themselves or at the mercy of impersonal forces that determine who lives, who dies.

So long as we recognize what is best in us, namely the heart which extends beyond self-interest, that society is indeed possible. It is *not* utopia. It is a society that grows from the simple question: what does everyone need to be well, and how do we make sure they receive it? It is also a society long overdue, since the suffering of the vulnerable did not start with the pandemic. That suffering has only been compounded and made more visible. Our sibling has been waiting at the door too long.

House Updates

We are grateful to continue with our regular ministries of weekly food distribution, three *Showers to the People* locations, and monthly rental assistance even through the virus. Additionally, we recently have enjoyed the following activities: Three of Casa de Clara's guests and Catholic Worker Artie celebrated their birthdays here. For two of the guests, this was their first time having birthday parties for themselves.

Our newest member of the Catholic Worker family is Chad. We're thankful he moved here in June and is a kind and hardworking member of the house.



We also welcomed Nala, a black lab puppy given to us recently. Even with her many house accidents, we're so glad she's here!

In July, we enjoyed a house trip to Santa Cruz. We loved watching the young kids' joy as they played in the ocean for the first time. Another house trip to Vasona County park marked the kids' first time visiting a lake.



We began demolition and reconstruction on our downstairs bathroom in July, after discovering old leaks and rot. Thanks to a local plumber's direction, we're learning how to do much of the work ourselves.

Catholic Worker Betty is elated to announce that she is a grandmother to a beautiful baby boy. One of our regular volunteers and close friends, Brenna, welcomed her baby girl to the world in July as well.

of rotting bananas, oranges covered in white fuzz, and black bundles of lettuce that disintegrate when I pick them up, hoping to salvage something appetizing.

I have noticed a similar problem when it comes to the prepared food people bring us. It's often soggy, tasteless, and lacking in nutrition. To be frank, I would not want to eat some of the food that we pass along to our showers guests. For instance, we'll receive plates of canned chicken, tuna, green beans, and overcooked pasta. When I hand that meal to someone, I feel cheap. If I wouldn't eat this, then why should someone else?

We receive SO MUCH junk food, like pastries, cakes, cookies, muffins, and other sweets. Excessive consumption of these foods can cause obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure (in the case of salt-laden, pre-packaged snacks), and fatigue. Our unhoused siblings already lack access to adequate medical care, which heightens the need for them to have healthy food, lest they develop or exacerbate one of the aforementioned conditions.

Betty spent several years living in her car and various shelters, so I asked her for some input on the food situation. She characterized the food available at shelters as, "high carbs. A lot of pastries, and rolls and bread, stuff like that. Not a lot of fruits and vegetables that were appetizing." She went on to explain, "When I was completely homeless [not in a shelter], I would get lunch quite often at the Salvation Army, and they had some decent meals, but they also had extras that we could take--the breads and the starches and the sweet rolls."

I hope we would all agree that the impoverished deserve delicious and healthy food as much as anyone else, but I don't see that desire reflected in our reality. Instead, every week at showers, I see the table half-full of pies, cupcakes, and cookies. I watch as a well-intentioned man hands out liter-sized soda bottles.

If you're really hungry, you want to grab something that's quick and easy - like a granola bar or a doughnut. Furthermore, a bag of potato chips keeps far longer than an unrefrigerated cup of yogurt. You've likely learned that sugar is comparable to cocaine in terms of its tendency to create addiction¹. As we've established, sugar- and salt-laden food is most-readily accessible to the unhoused and food-insecure, so people can quickly develop a dependence on junk food. Betty noticed this pattern herself. "Most people don't use their food stamps for nutritious food...A lot of homeless people crave sweets and other stuff. I don't know why, but they really do. They want soda and candy. They end up [spending their EBT] on stuff like that."

We are grateful for the continued support of our community, especially when it comes to food donations, and as we encounter unhoused friends with health issues resulting from poor diets, we hope to encourage more conscientious donations. If you donate prepared food, please make sure it is freshly-made and looks appetizing to you. Instead of pastries, donate things like apple sauce, low-sugar granola and protein bars, nuts, string cheese, pretzels, dried fruit, and jerky. In other words, bring us things you'd want to feed to your own kids. I also encourage you to check out the following articles that further explore the issues I raised above:

"This food bank doesn't want your junk food. Good." By Julia Belluz for *Vox*

"A focus on healthier food for the homeless." By Julie Siple for *MRPNNews*

1. Ahmed, Serge and Karen Guillem and Youna Vandaele. "Sugar addiction: pushing the drug-sugar analogy to the limit" *Clinical Nutrition and Metabolic Care*. 16 Jul 2013

Clockwise from top left: James Drumlin, Brenna and Xiomara, and Nala the pup