Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat

Retreat Reflections
by Sister Ardeth Platte and Sister Carol Gilbert

Our response to the request by Frank Cordaro to do a presentation to the Midwest Catholic Worker Communities gathered for a faith and resistance retreat was a resounding yes! We had previously attended the Pacific Life Community and Atlantic Life Community meetings to share the hope-filled message of young people of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) who are dauntlessly, fearlessly, and courageously working for a nuclear-free world. We longed to do the same for the Midwest peacemakers with whom we had shared many years in the Michigan Life Community and Lakes and Prairies Life Community before moving to the East Coast in 1995. What blessings we encountered! The tours through the Philip Berrigan, Rachel Corrie, Chelsea Manning, and Dingman Houses, and meeting all of the amazing Catholic Worker servants of the homeless and resisters who witness at the Iowa National Guard Armed Drone Command Center (six miles from these houses) strengthened our conviction in the Philip Berrigan, Rachel Corrie, Chelsea Manning, and Dingman Houses, and meeting all of the amazing Catholic Worker servants of the homeless and resisters who witness at the Iowa National Guard Armed Drone Command Center (six miles from these houses) strengthened our conviction in the “Treaty to Abolish Nuclear Weapons” to the Drone Command Center’s military security at the gate. ICAN consists of 532 peace/justice groups in more than 103 nations. Their organizing effort began in 2007, leading to their active participation in the General Assembly. It is led by Elayne White-Gomez of Costa Rica and calls for the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, leading to their total elimination. We were privileged to attend all of ICAN’s work during March, June, and July, 2017 at the United Nations, all of their planning meetings, the celebrations of the Treaty’s passage vote, and the ICAN reception of the Nobel Peace Prize. The work continues for ratification like all the treaties before it.

We connect all the issues of these times to this abolition Treaty, including the enormous military industrial complex budget, economic disparity, corporate profits and wealth in the hands of one percent of the people, world-building to stop immigration and refugees, environmental devastation, extravagant military use of fossil fuel, disasters, pollution and contamination, poverty along with the lack of basic human needs in the United States and the rest of the world, limiting voting rights, blocking unionization, waging wars directly or selling nuclear and conventional weapon carriers and weapons for war-making, withdrawing from many environmental...
Editorial: A Note on Prison Abolition

by Jade Suganuma

An integral part of the Catholic Worker Movement is raising the voices of marginalized people. Whether they are the guests we serve at our houses of hospitality or international victims of colonization and American militarism, the people we strive to lift up are often targets of state violence, their stories and experiences ill-portrayed or completely ignored by mainstream media. Another group of marginalized people that is afflicted by state violence every second of every day is the over 2.2 million people incarcerated in the United States. Just as folks in the Catholic Worker movement advocate for individual victims of war alongside the bigger picture of ending the United States’ military empire, we should also be advocating for incarcerated people’s rights while keeping in mind the bigger picture of bringing about an end to this country’s current prison system.

The plight of incarcerated people is directly linked to state violence and oppression, both of which are common targets for Catholic Worker resistance actions. However, the issues of incarcerated people are often overlooked in other mainstream activist circles. One reason for this is the stigma around incarcerated people as “criminals” who have done something wrong, and are therefore deserving of some sort of punishment. However, a closer look into the incarcerated person’s situation will reveal that according to the most recent Bureau of Prisons statistics, 45.7 percent of people in prison were convicted of nonviolent drug-related crimes, while offenders committing violent acts such as murder, assault, or sex offenses make up only 13 percent of the entire prison population.

To first address those individuals who have committed abhorrent actions against others, it is necessary to understand that the current prison system fails to provide rehabilitation in any sense. On the contrary, being locked in a cage often makes people more aggressive and violent. Prisons do not provide resources to inmates as “criminals” who have done something wrong, and are therefore deserving of some sort of punishment. However, a closer look into the incarcerated person’s situation will reveal that according to the most recent Bureau of Prisons statistics, 45.7 percent of people in prison were convicted of nonviolent drug-related crimes, while offenders committing violent acts such as murder, assault, or sex offenses make up only 13 percent of the entire prison population.

The 13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment

Original spoken word piece by Travis John Wolfkill

Penned during a seven day lockdown at Iowa State Penitentiary:

Some say we’re created for slave reasons

Human beings designed to be subservient

This is proven in the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which report that 68 percent of prisoners who are released commit another crime within the next three years. This trend is also clearly evident at the Des Moines Catholic Worker, where we see many of our guests get run through the prison system time and time again for similar violations. Prison is not rehabilitation. It is a system that strips people of their human dignity by locking them in cages, cutting them off from social connections, and forcing them to work as slaves for the state or private corporations.

If the state truly cared about incarcerated people as humans, it would, at the very least, pay them a living wage so that they could start saving up money to start life anew and make good investments once they are released. Instead, prisons are the only place in the country where slavery is still legal, and once released, formerly incarcerated people are forced to check a box on employment applications that will lower their chances of being hired. The so-called justice system in this country is absolutely devoid of justice for any person that comes into contact with it.

To address the larger picture, the vast majority of incarcerated people have committed nonviolent crimes as a result of a lack of resources necessary for survival. Money is the key ingredient to surviving in a capitalist economy, but not everyone happens to be born into wealth or have access to opportunities to achieve wealth. In order to obtain money in such desperate situations, people are forced to turn to drug, weapon, and sex trades, alongside theft, migrating to a new country as soon as possible, and a myriad of other acts deemed “illegal” by the state, despite the fact that the capitalist state is at fault for failing to provide people with the necessary means to survive in the first place. Therefore, it is not the people who should be found guilty and sentenced to prison, but rather the capitalist state which should be found guilty on account of making it impossible for people not born into wealth to meet their basic needs.
A Culture of Violence: The Roots of the Migrant Caravan

by Richard Flamer

In 1990 I was in Guatemala taking pictures. I was invited to a site called Rio Negro by a forensic friend to take photos of a massacre of more than 700 women and children some years before.

The men had been gathered some weeks before and marched to a nearby military base where they disappeared. That is, they were never seen or heard from again.

The teenage boys were warned by their mothers to stay out in the nearby jungle to avoid a similar fate.

A few weeks later, while the boys in the jungle watched, a civil patrol came to the village and started the massacre. After several hours of the rampant violence, the women were forced to dance and watch while the militia played music, drank, and kept killing.

Running low on ammunition, the soldiers started bashing in the heads of the children. That is, they grabbed them by their heels and swung them against the rocks.

An earlier investigation nearby had been finished some months earlier by the United Nations. The result of this earlier investigation was completed and then buried in the archives at the behest of the Roman church.

By the time of the Rio Negro investigation, the Catholic Church, through the offices of Archbishop Gerardi and Bishop Ricardo Flores, had four women on the staff to continue the work of the forensic team. The results of the Catholic Team were made public at its conclusion and later published as part of a larger four volume work called “Nunca Mas,” or “Never Again.”

The result was clear. A wealthy landowner, whose brother was a colonel in the army, wanted the land where the village was situated to add to his neighboring farm. The army colonel ordered the massacre to get the land for his brother.

The colonel, along with most of the upper ranks of the military in Guatemala, had been trained at the United States School of the Americas in Ft. Benning, Georgia.

In San Salvador, also during the 1990s at the University of Central America, four Jesuits had done much research on the killings and mass-murders of civilians in the civil war. Their work had been published internationally. Three of the four were killed along with their housekeeper and the daughter of the family.

A former officer of the army in Guatemala was accompanied by large scale fraud in not limited to only arms dealing. An entire paper plant was stolen as it came off of three transport planes and later was delivered to one of the Honduran generals who still runs the plant today.

The arms ended up flowing to El Salvador and Guatemala City. At one point, Guatemala City had over 40 warehouses filled with United States arms that had been delivered, purportedly for the use of the Honduran military.

As the war wound down, the United States started cracking down on domestic gang violence, specifically, the major Salvadoran gangs who had come up to the United States fleeing the violence in their own country. They were met with a different kind of violence when they encountered the “Crips” and the “Bloods.” The Salvadoran kids formed the Salva Maratruca and other gangs to combat the regional gangs of Southern California and Texas.

The United States started deporting the Salvadoran, Honduran, and Gangb branch a rung back to their countries of origin, where they continued their violence. Though not trained by the School of the Americas, they managed to get their training on American phys.

A few countries have managed to curtail the United States-fueled violence, but what of the thousands of land mines left behind in the Vietnamese landscape? The mines that even now, over 40 years after the war, continue to kill and maim children?

The drug cartels have been armed for years by United States’ companies, or they purchased their arms from the armies of the regions. Now, with a recent executive order signed by President Trump, there will be even more arms shipped to Central America. Specifically, Trump has negated that arms sales go through the state department which reviews Human Rights issues and transfers the sales to only the commerce department with no revision by Congress.

Is it any wonder that migrants are fleeing this culture of violence?

Second Annual Feast of the Holy Innocents Retreat and Witness

by Frank Cordaro

This year’s December retreat was special for me. We were led by Wes Howard-Brook, a scripture scholar and fellow Catholic Worker from Seattle. Wes wrote two books that rocked my Bible world, “Come Out My People! God’s Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond” and “Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced the Infants (Matt. 2:16) Today Des Moines Catholic Worker and Veterans.”

After hosting the retreat, the Des Moines Catholic Worker and Veterans for Peace sponsored a short witness and “line crossing” at the main entrance to the Catholic Church, through the offices of Archbishop Gerardi and Bishop Ricardo Flores, had four women on the staff to continue the work of the forensic team. The results of the Catholic Team were made public at its conclusion and later published as part of a larger four volume work called “Nunca Mas,” or “Never Again.”

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STRATCOM and Offutt AFB Witness Update

As we traveled to Omaha, Nebraska, there continued to be frequent news about the two separate deaths of Guatemalan children in United States custody at the Mexican border. These children got in the middle of a power struggle of fear where people can re-side. Three of us were traveling to Offutt Air Force Base outside of Omaha to remember the Biblical story of power and fear that ended in children’s deaths.

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December 28 marks the annual commemoration of King Herod’s order to kill the children of Bethlehem. Fr. Jim Murphy “crossed the line” and trespassed at Offutt last August 6 and received a “ban and bar” letter. He was released and intends to return to Offutt next August 6 to repeat his line crossing.

Contact Father Jim Murphy at <jim.murphy@americares.org>

St. Mary’s Parish, Portage, Wisconsin
Catholic Worker Farm Retreat: Catholic Worker Farms are Thriving

This year, we were fortunate to attend a Catholic Worker Farm Retreat at Anathoth Farm. Shay O’Toole and Mike Miles began the retreat by discussing current practices and projects of their farms. Retreat goers were also blessed with a presentation by the Four Necessity Valve Turners, a recent direct action to combat climate change complacency.

The retreat featured delicious food, including produce and meat from Catholic Worker Farms. Many roundtable discussions were held, including tips on Catholic Worker farm profitability, social media, song sharing, NATO war resistance, and raising children on Catholic Worker Farms. Laudate Si discussion, aging in the Catholic Worker, and a tour of Anathoth Farm.

Many farming communities attended the retreat. Those present were from St. Francis Farm (Lacoma, New York), Earth Abides Catholic Worker Farm (Sheep Ranch, California), Mustard Seed Farm (Ames, Iowa), Strangers & Guests Catholic Worker Community (Maloy, Iowa), Bitter Root Catholic Worker Farm (Stevensville, Montana), St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm (Cuba City, Wisconsin), and Lake City Catholic Worker Farm (Lake City, Minnesota). House of Hospitality Catholic Worker were also in attendance, many of which have community gardens.

We danced, we laughed, and we devoured delicious food!

Seven Women Walked into the Vatican: A Mission Walked Out

by Maria Bergh

The Catholic Worker Movement started during the Great Depression. From the Gospels arose a three-pronged approach to alleviating the ails of an increasingly technological, materialistic, consumeristic, and capitalistic society that often let the least of us fall through the cracks; houses of hospitality, farming communities, and resistance to all traits of empire.

Catholic Worker farms have a long history in the movement. Many of the initial farms were failures: living on a small action in love: hold a vigil (or a sign) with protestors were as shut out of the proceed-ings as we were. It was a witness full of valuable lessons about faith, religion, and impact. The lessons learned are as follows:

1. Survivors deserve support. We joined brave wit-nesses from #EndClergyAbuse who shared their stories of sexual abuse by clergy. There is no easy way to relive trauma. Please pray for all victims of sexual abuse and support ECA financially as you are able.

2. Support the churches in your diocese marked by divisions. The United Methodist Church was debating the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people, and the result was institutionalized division. Ecclesial divisions are biblical (faith or works?), but not the status quo. Division is created to build or maintain power for some within a group, especially the power of righteousness, the power of the pharisees, the power Jesus challenged. Let us name what divides us and reconcile that we light the whole world.

5. The church is the laity. We said this, the press asked about it, and finally, we heard it from Pope Francis and the bishops. We were the only lay people the press could identify for comment, which led them to question the importance of this issue. We all care deeply about clergy abuse, but we also feel disenfranchised. Priests and bishops can’t solve clergy abuse alone; the church’s problems are our problems.

6. Clericalism is a grave danger, and clerics can’t save us from it. At Mass we recognize the presence of God in the readings, the eucharist, the priest, and the laity. In each synod, summit, and council, these elements are relied upon for inspiration and discernment, with the notable exception of the laity. Mark Coleridge, the Archbishop of Brisbane, told us that Pope Francis is looking for a healthy decentralization built on new relationships between local churches and Rome. We are all needed to re-envision a healthy, accountable church.

7. Pray for unity, love, and devotion to healing, ask- ing for God’s blessing and help. May the spirit renew our hearts, our church, and our world.

Maria Bergh is a Midwest Catholic Worker, writer, spiritual director, and farmer. She also facilitates change and community building through www.westbuildagency and www.justdesign.coop

The Nuns, the Priests, and the Bombs

TIMELY NEW DOCUMENTARY

The Nuns, the Priests, and the Bombs* follows the federal cases against Plowshares who were imprisoned for undertaking protests at the Y-12 Na-tional Nuclear Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and at the U.S. Navy’s Trident nuclear submarine base near Seattle. The film also follows efforts at the United Nations to negotiate the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

“How can we be human and co-exist with weapons that have one purpose, one mission—the destruction of all humanity? The answer—through acts of nonviolent resistance and the creation of community—is crystal clear and klaon loud in Helen Young’s, “The Nuns, The Priests and The Bombs.”

Everyone mired in hopelessness and ensnared about the plight of the world (and isn’t that all of us at one point or another) needs to see this film and then— or build—a community that will lift them into action and connec-tion. Thank you to the filmmakers (and the activists who are the subject of the film) for reminding that we rediscover our own humanity by working to protect the human community!!”

Frida Berrigan, author “I Run In This Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing Into Rebellious Motherhood”

DVDs are available for public screenings or home use.

Please contact: Helen Young Productions, 245 W. 55th Street Room 403, New York, N.Y. 10019 ph 646-256-4228 hyoungroy@gmail.com.
I noticed a post on Facebook on February 17 remembering the anniversary of a United States-led one-day massacre in 1991 that killed over 1,000 disarmed retreating Iraqi soldiers. I shared the post with the following note:

"It was a war crime then, and it still is. However, we can’t keep up remembering this because so many other United States-led war crimes continue to happen on a daily basis. Just as some view mass gun killings in the United States, which seem to happen one after the other, such death and violence is now the new normal.”

We don’t really remember the war crimes committed by our country. The best we can do is list them.

This should be a problem for any Christian in the United States. The core of our faith in Jesus is based on our ability to remember Him; in the breaking of the bread, in the serving of the poor. Remembering Him in today’s America means being a peacemaker in a total war culture, living lives devoted to making things right for all who suffer unjustly, one person at a time. We Americans can’t follow Jesus and be pro-rich, pro-war and pro-U.S.A. at the same time. Los Angeles Catholic Worker, Jeff Detrick, wrote years ago that we baby boomers must commit class suicide if we are to follow Jesus.

What we are up against is the newest version of what St. Paul called the “powers and principalities.” Americanism is as measurable as racism, sexism, classism and all the other “isms” that plague the human race, only in Americanism, we are so extreme in our destructive behavior. It is a unique time in human history where our very existence as Americans is the problem.

In our post-World War II atomic bomb era, the human race and the life forces on the planet are at risk like never before. Not by God, not by nature, but by our own hands! This is a first in the human experience. Americanism exists because the United States has almost complete control and dominance over the systems of death by its overwhelming global military superiority and our continued dominance of the global financial systems.

70 years into this new and perilous human predicament, we’ve morphed beyond the military and financial systems. Now we have organized our human systems needed to meet our most basic human needs like food, water, health, and education to be based on the same lies and systems that are killing the planet. It’s a nightmare reality, of “Book of Revelations” proportions, a global pyramid scheme as old as Pharaoh’s Empire, as murderous as the Romans in Jesus’ time. Only now, it’s total, it’s global, it’s immediate. There is no more identifiable group of human beings more responsible for the destruction of the planet than we American baby boomers.

The human race is killing the planet. Every fourth grader knows this. Further, we Americans are the most responsible for this reality, yet we are the least able to see this truth about ourselves. Of all the “isms” we suffer in this culture of extremes, Americanism is the most dangerous because it is the most denied! Any work we Americans try to do to address racism, sexism, classism and all the other “isms” is bound to be too little too late, too short sighted for what really needs to be done.

This is why the witness and message from my old friend, long-time Catholic Worker, and deportee, Ciaron O’Reilly, is so important! Ciaron’s been a Catholic Worker for over 40 years. Born in Australia with Irish citizenship, Ciaron helped start a Catholic Worker in Australia in the 1970s. He came to the United States for a few years, checking out the folks at Jonah House and visiting other Catholic Workers. He participated in his first Plowshares action in 1991 during the Gulf War. Ciaron was a member of the “ANZUS Plowshares” group which attacked a B-52 bomber heading to the Middle East at Griffiss AFB near Utica, New York. He ended up doing 13 months of jail time before being deported from the United States forever! Ciaron went on to do two more plowshares in 1997 and 1998.

The Faraday Cage

This issue of the Via Pacis features the first in a series of cartoons depicting the aims and means of the Catholic Worker movement. Each cartoon will be ripe with snark and real heavy on the sass. I hope you enjoy them!

- Charlie Faraday

The first aim of the Catholic Worker movement is to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ. When we examine our capitalist society’s prevailing concern for acquisition and material interests and emphasis on respectability and mediocrity, we find it far from God’s justice.

In economics, private and state capitalism bring about an unjust distribution of wealth, for the profit motive guides decisions. Those in power live off the sweat of others’ brows, while those without power are robbed of a just return for their work. Usury (the charging of interest above administrative costs) is a major contributor to the wrongdoing intrinsic to this system. We note, especially, how the world debt crisis leads poor countries into greater deprivation and a dependency from which there is no foreseeable escape. Here at home, the number of hungry and homeless and unemployed people rises in the midst of increasing influence.
Visions of What Is To Come in Venezuela

by Patrick Stall

The United States has been attempting to overthrow the democratically elected Bolivarian government of Venezuela since 2002, when it sponsored a failed coup attempt. Since then, the American policy towards Venezuela has vacillated between economic and political attacks at destabilization and a grudging acceptance of the Bolivian government's legitimacy. With a crop of right-wing regimes taking power in Venezuela's neighboring countries, and an increasingly reactionary American defense secretary in place, the United States has added open attempts to overthrow the Venezuelan government, crippling economic sanctions already in place. While Juan Guaido's American-backed attempt to claim power has failed for now, it seems that the direction of the United States policy towards the country is increasingly interventionist in the near term. It is impossible to predict exactly how deep and violent that intervention will be.

The United States history allows us to predict with some clarity what the articulation of that intervention will look like. US military intervention can take any form and escalate or deescalate, but in general, the scope of that intervention falls into three categories:


Under Obama, the United States generally turned away from using traditional invasion and occupation as a method of regime change. While Trump has largely followed this policy thus far, a large-scale war may be an attractive option if he finds himself in serious political jeopardy at home, or if his poll numbers are wanting in the 2020 election. The United States could use any small pretext: Venezuela’s acceptance of military aid from Russia, the killing of some protestors, or any incident that vaguely signifies escalation against the United States could be used as a pretext, and, with cooperation from Columbia and Brazil, Trump could decide to invade Venezuela directly.

Venezuela’s military, while no match for the United States and its South American allies in a conventional war, is a large, professional force that is fiercely loyal to the government. The United States might be able to claim military victory after a few weeks, but the Venezuelan military and paramilitary collectives will likely mount a guerilla war from the mountains and rainforests that cover Venezuela. This war could last decades. A direct military intervention is the most bloody and destructive, it is probably the least likely to take place. The Trump administration has shown little desire to initiate conventional ground wars, much less wars of occupation. The Venezuela military is overwhelmingly behind Maduro, and will doubtlessly inflict unacceptable casualties on an American invasion force. Perhaps most critically, America’s allies in the Organization of American States (OAS), including Colombia and Brazil, have indicated that they do not want a United States invasion of this sort. While Trump may surprise us yet again with his absurd changes in foreign policy, this scenario—barring unexpected changes in the situation in the United States and South America—is not in the cards.


The United States government has a long and sordid history of training, arming, and equipping right-wing dissidents to wage guerilla wars against non-United States-aligned regimes, especially in Latin America. While the government has largely pulled back from this policy in Latin America since the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan years, the Obama administration armed and equipped Salafi jihadist fighters in the Syrian Civil War from 2012 to at least 2015. This method of intervention has the advantage of leaving the direct dirty work of war to other actors, and is less likely to bring about public backlash in the United States.

The United States government is currently shipping arms to hard-right dissidents in Venezuela hidden in containers purportedly containing “humanitarian aid.” While investigative media outlets have yet to find evidence that Venezuelan dissidents are being trained by the United States, this broad category of intervention is absolutely happening in the country, at least as recently as March. What remains to be seen is how far this policy escalates. Should Colombia and Brazil allow right-wing guerillas to pass through their borders with Venezuela, we may see the beginning of a small-scale civil war there yet. Trump’s selection of Elliot Abrams as special envoy to Venezuela, looms ominously over the country, as Abrams is a relic of the Reagan administration who helped oversee right-wing death squads in El Salvador in the 1980s. United States-backed, right-wing guerillas have committed crimes against humanity in almost every situation they were employed. They were responsible for child rape and genocide in El Salvador, massacres in Nicaragua, mass political executions in Chile, and the enslavement of women and children in Syria. Here can be no doubt that any United States attempt to increase arms shipments or training to right-wing forces in Venezuela will mean the murder of some segment of the population there.

Continued on page 11
Scenes from an adventure to Chiapas, Mexico (see p. 8)

We love our volunteers!

We will not miss digging out the van in the snow and ice!

A visit to Wallyhouse in Honolulu, Hawaii with Barbara and David.

Faith and Resistance Retreat and Witness group photo; it was a success!
From Des Moines to Chiapas, Mexico and Back

Ryna-Ria Ignacio and Jakob Whiston share reflections about their journey overland to Chiapas, Mexico as they accompanied Richard Flamer of Casa de Camillo Torres Catholic Worker Community in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico with the purpose of delivering carpentry tools to several shops Richard has helped form.

A Shower of Rusty Metal

by Jakob Whiston

I put the van in park in front of Phil Ber- rigan House. It was 2 a.m., but the street lights made it feel like daytime. I stepped out of the van while simultaneously thanking God for our safe arrival back in Des Moines. The trip was long; time seemed to drag on in the unforgettable maroon upholstery ship, and I was happy to say my last goodbye. A new name would soon be in its title.

The trip started with little fanfare and not that much planning, on our part at least. Richard arrived in Des Moines after a grueling three days of van repair in Omaha. A 2005 Chevrolet cargo van would be our home for the next couple days, or so we thought.

Southern Iowa received a late November snow storm, but the roads were cleared. Kansas City was conquered by rush hour traffic. Southern Oklahome hills tested the engine's strength, and the bright casinos displayed the van's rear wheel quarter panel rust. Ryna-Ria took comfortable naps in the blacked out cargo space.

In our next stop, Jim, a retired profes- sor, welcomed us in San Antonio. San Antonio Ethiopian food filled our bellies, and a comfortable bed prepared us for the next leg of the journey. Texas is the biggest state in the United States, and my bones felt it. A glimpse of the Houston Catholic Worker broadened our awareness of the Catholic Worker spectrum. Palm trees grew right up in Brownsville, Texas, where an suprise four-day pit stop awaited us.

Because it weighed too much and lacked back windows, border patrol rejected our van. We felt the failure. Richard was our guide. Then Ryna-Ria spotted a 1980s GMC conversion van in the parking lot of a big box store. A day and a half later, we were in Mexico, happy enough. The cores of old volcanoes dotted the dusty scenery. What an adventure!

At this point, pothole after pothole caused a shower of rusty metal to fall from the van's interior upon my bare feet. Orange groves filled my lungs with their pungent fragrance. The port city of Tam- pico displayed a different side of Mexico, dry, dusty, grimy, and malodorous. I was sure an oasis existed, there are always oases.

Vera Cruz, and then an eight hour traffic jam, put a damper on our day, but before a flat tire could seal it, Tuxila Guiterrez is a 70 degree difference from Iowa. San Cristobal de Las Casas welcomed us with mild weather, oak and pine trees in every direction.

Casa de Camillo Torres preserved its beauty as it aged. Avocados, limes, vegetables, and dogs greeted us at the gate. There was a fire burning inside, and a freshly cooked meal awaited us. Araceli is a wonderful chef, and much more. Three days passed, and the road called us back.

A bribe was paid and a beach was walked on the journey home.

Feeling of Gratitude

By Ryna-Ria Ignacio

The morning of the 28th of November, we were sitting in anticipation near the front door of the Berrigan house in Des Moines, slurping on our warm butternut squash soup, waiting for Richard Flamer to return with the van so that we could finally begin this journey down to Mexico. This was my first time traveling to another country; how exciting!

As we were eating, I was trying to let go of any kind of expectations or predictions that were arising. In this moment, and throughout the entirety of our journey, I reminded myself, "I have to be open and grateful. I have to surrender all sense of control. Whatever God would like for us to experience on this trip will be a chance for inspiration and growth."

Richard finally arrived in the red cargo van. I opened the door to the back seat and found a dark, windowless cave with a booth surrounded by shades of tools and things I could not identify at the moment. Full of excitement, I hopped in and created a comfy nest, preparing for the long road ahead of us.

Without windows in the back, it was difficult to hear the roaring of the engine (I spent a lot of time sitting at the edge of my seat trying to listen to the many stories being shared), and having mistakenly taken a drink of "Sleep Aid" syrup instead of cold medicine, I found myself falling in and out of sleep often, and I lost track of where we were over time. However, one thing that I was definitely conscious for was when we got pulled over because a cop was bored!

We made our way San Antonio, Texas to meet a couple of Richard's good friends, Jim and Patty. They shared with us their beautiful home and garden of many bird feeders, wind chimes, flowers, fruit trees, veggies, and chickens. We spent most of our day enjoying the nice weather and listening to Jim's experience of raising goats and making cheese. Their home was a good place to rest.

We arose before the sun the next day and made our way to the Houston Catholic Worker. We opened the door to see Louise and another community member fly around us trying to meet many guest's needs. Richard and I were at a loss as to what to do next. We decided to set up the kitchen after the guests. We passed through a dining room and was given a tour by two women and a child that were living there. I grabbed a few books and newsletters and left to continue our journey.

We spent four nights in Brownsville, Texas, going through so many obstacles to get past the border. We needed to switch to a passenger van, so we spent another night in Motel 6 to start looking for a new vehicle the next day.

We began the day by going to mass for the first day of Advent. We ate napoles and potato tacos at Brownsville Cafe and drove around to look for passenger vans. Then we took a break from our busy day and walked in a Chicano park.

The next day, we were able to drive a new van. I was excited about the windows, but not so excited about the squeaking door, which sang the whole way there and back.

On the fifth of December, we finally made it past the border and through Matamoros, Mexico. We drove past many fields, vibrantly colored homes, shacks, and restaurants.

We then made our way through a city named Tampico, where I began to more healthy, luscious green life, including trees that carried spanish moss. We drove through Naranjos, and saw many rows of orange trees.

Richard told us about the bees that travel through here and how their honey has a hint of an orange flavor from collecting the nectar from orange blossoms. We stopped by a booth to buy some of this honey and some sweet va- nilla to bring home to our friends and family.

Not too long afterwards, we realized we were in traffic on the highway for about eight hours because of road construction. The sickening smell of long lines of semi-trucks filled the air around us, and people began to get out of their cars to talk and walk around to see what was going on. Some families from nearby took this as an opportunity to sell some food and drinks.

Once we finally were free from the traffic, we found rest and shelter at "Hotel Angeles," where the hallways were decorated with plants and offered the coldest of showers.

Continuing on the next day, we passed many Oxxo convenience stores and Petro gas sta- tions. We continued on with other obstacles, including losing the tread on a tire, but luckily, it was noticed by two men in a service truck, and they helped us replace it. This was not the last tire issue we were to experience on the trip, and although these were not the enjoyable parts of our journey, it brought us to pause and fully absorb the moment and the beautiful environment that surrounded us.

It took a several days to finally arrive in Chiapas, but we made through with great joy. We enjoyed fresh fruits and delicious home cooked meals. We shared a lot of conversations through interpretations, how to translate them guided by translations by Jakob, and spent some time late one evening laying out by their (in- progress) retreat center, enjoying the clear, starry night. Araceli shared some of her homemade soaps with us, which we sold through our own organic co- op. We spent a lot of our days exploring the streets and markets of San Cristobal de las Casas.

Our journey back home was just as eventful as the journey there. Rough, bumpy roads caused the struts to blow out, rust to fly down from the ceiling, and the center console to occasionally fall off, spilling Jakob's coffee and my hot tea all over the floor. Added to this were cops soliciting us for a bribe of 4,000 pesos, then a flat tire, then a cold rain in the back, and a road stop in the desert. Luckily waking up early one day to walk along the Coast of Esmerelda. A lot of time was spent learning and re-learning things about one another, jamming out to Bob Marley, Sanskrit mantras, and Latin vibes to keep each other awake and present.

We made our way to visit Jakob's hometown, Pratt, Kansas and reunited with his family. We found sweet shelter and comfort there and made our way back to Des Moines the next day.
I feel a need to get rid of all the extra real retirement (whatever that means), on in me and how I see myself as a Des

The move marks a change going and new spirits, which is very exciting for community members who both bring unique Whitson and Ryna-Ria Ignacio, new com

Dingman House. I've moved seven times all a part of my most recent move back to Worker retreat with our moms. up at the Midwest Sugar Creek Catholic

In December, Ruby Montoya and I took a long road trip to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Marquette University for a historical archive material dump at the National Catholic Worker movement’s official archives, hosted in the Marquette University library. I’ve been sending ma

In the first World War my mother served in the British Navy shoveling coal into the buckets by the ton. Then in World War II, my mother’s brother served in the British army, I guess. Mother served as a nurse.

A Canadian named Norman that flew a Canadian bomber to England, but he flew a British bomber to bomb the Germans. Someone, Mum, Mum I don’t know where it came from, his mom was on the base. Both were on the same train. Mum got off first, and Dad, handed and talked to the base.

I don’t know where in New York Dad’s family lived and died. Mother recalled that Dad recalled his mother, Margaretta. You see, Dad’s father came home from the trenches of the first World War with influenza. It affected and killed a lot of others since Dad was a young lad. He was put in an office as he is no longer responsible for years of archives. There are audio recordings of 90 percent of my weekly homilies as a priest

The last of my stuff at Berrick House was the archive files I’d been collecting since 1986! Years ago, I had already sent our archival materials from our early years, 1976-1986. With this trip to Marquette, a big load is off of my plate, as I am no longer responsible for years of archival stuff I’ve been saving. I’ve been calling it a “hystoric” dump, archivally speaking, because the people and materials are part of the freedom I’m getting by living in one room with all my staff, at Dingman House.

With this addition of archive materials, the running joke among Catholic Workers is that Frank and the Des Moines Catholic Worker will have more “stuff” weight-wise than anyone else in the national collection, including Dorothy Day! Among all this stuff lies some hidden gems, including the hidden early years of the Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement’s papers. I was the sole staff person in Des Moines for CCI during those years. My headquarters were in Waterloo, and Joe Fagan was still a priest! Years of audio and videos of speaking gigs and actions were also included in the archives. This is a truly amazing 30 percent of my weekly homilies as a priest for 19 years! There are files of organizing notes and news coverage of hundreds of actions over the years, plus files for all the projects, community concerns, and all other issues that come with being a Catholic Worker for over 40 years! Then add all the funny relics I’ve sent to Phil over the years, most of them yet to be discovered! Truly, our community has a rich history, and evidence of that history was found in droves in this archive transfer.

I'm proud to know of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, and John Lennon. I thank you for being around and starting something nice. I love and miss you, mother (died at 92), Rose M. Searah. Dad died before Mom, Andrew J. Searah.

Other people in my family that I remember are me, Norman S., David S. and his wife, Susan, brother Lindsay S., husband Dana S. and wife Pamela, husband Mark S. and wife Kathleen, husband Howard S. and wife Susan, wife Constance S. and husband Michael, sister Bernadette S., wife Deborah S. and husband John S., sister Frances S., sister Andria (the deceased), wife Gale S. and husband Mark. There were a lot of grandchildren too.

for all the bad winter weather snow, cold weather, floods, tornades, ice on roads, on riv

The place where he was when he was a child when his parents died was run by nuns in New York state.

I’m into Native American Indians. I had a friend in Massachusetts named Tuna, but I never knew what tribe he and his father were from. When he died when he was young, and his father went back to his tribe. He was a Lakota Sioux.

I also had a good friend here in Des Moines, Iowa, who had a family on the Rosebud Reserva.

He was a Lakota Sioux. He was a Crow Eagle, and he came up to the Catholic Worker a couple times to work in Des Moines caring for young and old people, to help them eat and get shelter.

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Mike Smith, Des Moines Catholic Worker, 1976-1978, Rest In Peace

By Ann Smith

Mike Smith was one of the earliest members of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community. After a visit to Des Moines in 2017, we published an article by Mike from the April 1977 issue of the Via Pacis. Mike died last year. Below you will find a piece by his wife, Ann Smith, and a note from Des Moines Catholic Worker Cofounder, Joe DaVia.

Mike Smith passed away on December 28, 2018 after an eight-year journey with Parkinson’s disease. A couple of years ago, after being admitted to hospice at home, Mike planned his Celebration of Life service and designated the Des Moines Catholic Worker and our local Catholic Worker house as recipients of donations. I’m happy that you will benefit from his respect for the work you continue to do.

Mike's connection to the Catholic Worker Movement began back in 1976. After he became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous in June of 1975, he was in need of purpose. His uncle, a really cool priest, suggested he help out at the Catholic Worker house in Milwaukee. Not long after that, Mike moved to the Des Moines Catholic Worker. He remembered Eddie Polich picking him up at the bus station. He and Eddie have remained dear friends to this day.

Mike moved into a downstairs room of our first house, the now Phil Berrigan House at 713 Indiana Ave. I joined him a few months later. Frank Cordaro, Joe DaVia, Jacqueline Dickey, Eddie Polich, and I lived in the premises in those days. We served women and children.

After a year or so there, we moved to the Kansas City Catholic Worker where we helped Beth Seberger run a soup kitchen.

Dale began his life in the Des Moines Catholic Worker, where he made his lifelong friends, more brothers and sisters than friends, Omar, Landon, Fernando, Julius, Josh, Jordan, Kary, Jann, Rhashida, Janelle and Shawn. Dale grew up in our own children, his fond memories of that time became apparent in September of last year, a few months before he died.

He was writing a little autobiography for his high school graduation’s 50th reunion. He couldn’t speak and had to spell each word letter by letter on his alphabet board. He also needed the help of his hospice volunteer to write it down because he couldn’t write. It took the two of them a few hours to write four paragraphs. It’s significant that Mike devoted two of his four paragraphs to his years as a Catholic Worker.

He wrote, “Another date of importance is March of ’76 when I joined the Catholic Workers, which is the far left of organized or unorganized Christianity. I was basically a self-deprecating individual with hopes of being an intellectual who wanted to do some good in the world. I still maintain the ideals from those days: Dorothy Day’s critique of mainstream Christian values, the need for revolution, and the feeling of helplessness.”

After his years as a Catholic Worker, Mike and I moved back to Bloomington, Indiana, where we had met, and we raised five daughters. Mike found meaning in his family, his playwriting, and then as a self-styled “shaman.” AA continued to be his main source of deep spiritual support, and he influenced a couple of generations of men in that program.

Mike’s commitment to AA was amazing. He wrote, “Another date of importance is March of ’76 when I joined the Catholic Workers, which is the far left of organized or unorganized Christianity. I was basically a self-deprecating individual with hopes of being an intellectual who wanted to do some good in the world. I still maintain the ideals from those days: Dorothy Day’s critique of mainstream Christian values, the need for revolution, and the feeling of helplessness.”

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Dale began his life in the early fall, October 25, 1951, and he left his body on January 4, 2019. Dale was not only a regular visitor at the Des Moines Catholic Worker, he was also the father of Anna and Jeff Wheeler. Dale often came in to assure the community we were cooking good food, a taste tester of sorts. He could definitely tell the difference between good, excellent, and bad food. Several of the Catholic Workers hit the mark, but often we did not, and he let us know when we didn’t.

I have a many fond memories of Dale, but one sticks out in my mind. In the middle of the summer last year, I was sitting outside of Dingman House on a particularly muggy and hot day.

Mike’s commitment to AA was amazing.

Dale Tarr, Beloved Friend, Father, and Grandfather, Rest In Peace

by Jakob Whitson

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It was very early in the morning, around three in the morning, if I were to guess. I could not sleep because of the heat and a small case of insomnia. I thought I would be alone for my evening stroll around the outside of the house, but I was not for long. Dale came strolling up the brick path, and he obviously couldn’t sleep that night either. We had a heart to heart conversation; it was one about the afterlife, pain, and purpose of life. We also spoke about his foot problems and the eeriness of the hour.

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Contact: Wendy Vasquez
wendyvasquez1227@gmail.com
Community Life Is Hard: Mistakes Made, Lessons Learned

A bad thing happened in our community this past summer. A core community member violated our sexual relationship policy with an intern. The intern was visiting the community on the very weekend that the community participated in the two-day federal nuclear weapons protest. We did not act immediately, and today we think more deeply about how we have failed. We present this difficult, personal story in the hope that our experience can be used to strengthen our policies and our community. This week, we therefore present a policy on sexual relationships and relationships among community members. We are grateful for the support of our friends and allies, and the mistakes and challenges we have faced have given us many lessons.

In the weeks and months that followed the affair, snowballing consequences were suffered by everyone involved. The expulsion of our community member from the community was a communal inability to mend inter-relationships multiplied the consequences. It also left unchallenged false and ugly claims about our community, as individuals and as a whole. This resulted in negative consequences at both the regional and national Catholic Worker level.

Six months ago, we chose to seek help from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, and we’ve been making progress. We have some communal regrets. We regret that we did not act more forcefully and proactively giving our offending community member an opportunity to face an accounting for their violation within the communal circle. We denied ourselves the opportunity to tell them about the hurt and pain that their actions set off for everyone in the community.

As a community, after a lot of work and prayer, we’ve determined to learn from our mistakes, make amendments where we can, and recommit our- selves to the integrity of our communal circle and to our sexual radical love policy.

Our community circle and the community formation that takes place within it is the heartbeat and soul of our community’s hospitality. We understand the circle to be the gathering of people and the loving process by which we govern our community. All of our work, messaging, purpose, and needs, both personal and communal, are worked out within this community circle. Everything and anything about our personal and communal lives, including money, alcohol, and sex, is open for discussion and censure if it affects the Des Moines Catholic Worker.

As a community, we recommit ourselves to the below sexual relationship policy:

1. “Love is the Measure,” and in our community radical love is demanded. Radical love is love that’s committed to gospel discipleship and is accountable to the community and the mission and work of the circle.

2. The sexual relationship policies and practices of Catholic Worker communities falls in a continuum, from a strict adherence to the Bishops and official Catholic teachings to communities where the boundaries of sexual behavior are not limited to procreation and where sexual behavior is based on freedom and responsibility. On this side of the Catholic continuum, the core issue is not “who love, but “how you love that matters.”

The prison system will not be abolished until the current economic system that forces people into desperate survival scenarios is dismantled. However, discussing how to do anything to help incarcerated people now. Legally advocating for prison reform is good, but we also need to leave the prison as quickly as possible. It is important that the faith and resistance testimonies were encouraging, and I cannot wait to get to know those of you who will participate in this movement. I am grateful for our community for giving their time and gifts, as we could not have done it without each other. I am looking forward to many more retreats and community building opportunities. It was an amazing weekend, and we would like to thank everyone who was involved for lending their time, gifts, and talents.

All eight were taken to Polk County jail. Al Burney was bailed out. The other seven stayed in jail overnight, and as such to allow the community members to leave the protest.

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The Voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community

VOLUNTEERS:
Individuals and work crews for hospitality (serving food, cleanup), cleaning and general inside and outside maintenance... without them, we burn out.

FOOD:
Fruit, Vegetables, Meat and Fish, Milk, Cheese, Salted Butter, Olive Oil, Sugar, Coffee, Creamer, Juice (sugar free), Salt, Black Pepper, Fresh Garlic, Salad dressing, Soups and Stews (both canned and fresh). Leftovers from weddings, funerals and other social gatherings...

MEAL PROVIDERS:
Provide a meal for 50-70 people once a month!
Call or email for current openings. 515-214-1030, dm-catholicworker@gmail.com

HEALTH AND HYGIENE:
Feminine Hygiene Items, Diapers, Baby Formula, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Multivitamins, Antibiotic Ointment, Band-Aids, Lip balm.

TOILETRIES:
Disposable Razors, Shaving Cream, Shampoo, Conditioner, Lotion, Deodorant, Soap, Toothpaste. (Small sizes preferred for handout...) Toothbrushes and Toilet Paper.

CLOTHING:

HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES:
Bleach, Laundry Detergent, Environmentally-Friendly Dish Soap, Murphy's Oil Soap, Pinesol, Trash Bags, Brooms, Rugs, Candles, Energy-Efficient Light Bulbs, Aluminum Foil, Plastic Wrap, Sandwich and Freezer Bags, Bath Towels, Playing Cards, Candles, Phone Chargers.

HOUSE REPAIRS:
With four old houses, there are plenty of projects large and small. We invite do-it-yourselfers — individuals or groups — with skills in carpentry, plumbing, painting, electrical, etc. to come in, look over our housing needs, and choose a project. Bring your own tools if possible.

LIBRARY:
Peace and Justice books for the Berrigan House Library.

$CASH MONEY$:
Cash donations are essential to pay our property taxes, utilities, repair and maintenance of property, upkeep and gas for two vans, purchase of needed supplies, our community gardening and for the continued publication and mailing of the via pacis, a good 20% of our annual expenses.

DMCW WEBSITE
For up to date news & info on the community, the Rachel Corrie Project, Berrigan House and Occupy the World Food Prize visit the DMCW webpage: www.dmcatholicworker.org/.

HOW YOU CAN HELP
Des Moines Catholic Worker
via pacis
PO Box 4551
Des Moines, IA 50305
Change Service Requested

Third Annual Armed Forces Day Rally and Direct Action
May 18

A Culture of Violence: The Roots of the Migrant Caravan
by Richard Flamer

Seven Women Walked into Rome: A Mission Walked Out
by Maria Bergh

Americanism: the Single Most Threatening "Ism" on the Planet
by Frank Cordaro

From Des Moines to Chiapas, Mexico and Back
by Jakob Whitson and Ryna-Ria Ignacii

Norman’s Whereabouts

Obituaries: Mike Smith, Luke Swann, and Dale Tarr

Charley Mertes holds a replica of a military drone that he made for protests at the Drone Command Center in Des Moines.

Third Annual Armed Forces Day Rally and Direct Action May 18
more info on pg 9

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Des Moines Catholic Worker

The Voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community