

THE Round Table

Spring
2000

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

Experiments in Community Living... Old and New



Why This Issue?

Why this issue? The topic of Community is one we have featured in former issues. We are usually grateful to better understand the dynamics of community, and so we greet each "community" issue with curiosity and enthusiasm.

In the 1993 summer issue of *The Round Table*, Bill Miller wrote of how notable and different it is to live in community in a society that values individualism almost to the extreme. Couple this observation with an increasing desire for persons to find ways to support and sustain blending life-style with ministry and one has something to talk about. It is in this spirit that we invited seven people representing six different communities to share with us.

Catherine Nolan offers her wisdom with a seasoned look at the Kopavi Community, an intentional community living in the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood for over 26 years. To many of us, this was an inspiring model in our early years. Teka Childress writes of the fluid nature of the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community, while pointing out that hers is a rich life of enjoying long-term relationships with guests and community members. Experiencing a more traditional form of community is Terri Bednarz, a Sister of Mercy. Ironically, the act of a young woman entering a religious community could be viewed as a revolutionary act in today's world. In CoLibri's Kitchen, Mira Tanna speaks of the very real experiences of preparing food and enjoying meals together as a symbol of how essential and basic community living can be. Mira points out how the CoLibri Urban Housing Collective did some of its best planning over potlucks as early as 1996. We hear from Julie Jakimczyk and Lynn Fingerhut as they offer reflections on their desire for community and how they satisfy this desire. Located in close proximity to Kopavi members and to many members of the broader Catholic Worker community, Sophia House was born three years ago with Julie and Lynn coming on board in its second year. Knowing this house well (I am neighbor and landlord together with my husband, Phil), I am struck by the sign of hope these young people are to our neighborhood and to the many folks who pass through their door. New on the scene is Claver House, located on the northside in the Ville neighborhood. Erin Nealon writes of how dramatic and yet comfortable this young community's presence feels to her. Sitting in the shadows of the closed Homer G. Philips Hospital and of the vibrant St. Matthew Parish, Claver House joins with others in witnessing to its northside neighborhood. All of these reflections promise hope and new life to us, while the community members speak about the energy and strength they receive from one another to continue the work to which they feel called.

In *From Abroad*, Bill Engel sends us word from a wintertime visit in Outer Mongolia with the Missionaries of Charity. Mary Ann McGivern shares a poignant poem capturing her life work, the dream of Boeing-McDonnell Douglas beating swords into plowshares. In the *Karen House* article, Courtney Barrett shares why she came to Karen House, or perhaps more accurately, how she could not resist Karen House. Mark Chmiel rounds out the issue with his reflection of a recent visit with Brazilian theologian, Ivone Gebara. We also include a striking poem from a recent visitor to Karen House, Kate Sopko.

My hope, dear reader, is that you savor these rich reflections and capture some of the energy and excitement they offer. I am reminded of two lines from Ann Manganero's response at the liturgy of her final vows in 1976: "... I am choosing to share fully in the life of this community in all its richness, with all its great gifts and with all its human frailties. I take on the responsibility of working out my destiny with you." Enjoy! +

--Barbara Prosser

Front cover by Fritz Eichenberg

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

Karen House
1840 Hogan
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-4052



Ella Dixon House
1540 N. 17th St.
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-231-2039

Kopavi Community: "More Than a Glimpse"

by Catherine Nolan

In an old neighborhood of brick duplexes on the near south side of St. Louis, there is a small group of 40- and 50-somethings who have been calling themselves "community" for more than 26 years. Add to these folks their assorted offspring, now in their teens and 20's, and you have a snapshot of Kopavi community in the year 2000. I am a member of this group and, at the request of *The Round Table*, I'm reflecting on my experience of community. It's overwhelming and humbling to even consider representing "the community" to others, and I don't claim to be able to do that. I will, however, tell a bit of my own story and why I'm still here after 26 years.

Communal living has been the subject of curiosity, speculation and skepticism for many people over the years. In the 1960's, when most of us first articulated our values and made our first choices about work, relationship and faith, the term "commune," often preceded by "hippie," had both high-minded and vaguely risqué connotations. In fact, these features—appealing both to my idealism and my rebelliousness—are probably what first caught my interest. The choice to come to Saint Louis University, however, may have played the most important role in leading me to community.

Although the daughter of a Jesuit-educated parent and the niece of a Jesuit, I chose to attend Saint Louis University (SLU) knowing very little about this tradition except that it was a part of Catholicism. I arrived in 1969, ready for an opportunity to take my life in a direction I couldn't yet really imagine. At the time, in spite of the inspiration of Vatican II and high school prayer groups and retreats, faith and community did not seem as important as political activism and defining myself as different from my parents and my middle-class upbringing. I was fortunate to meet friends at SLU who

seemed to share my outlook and mentors who even encouraged it.

Nevertheless, for years in college I paid little attention to most manifestations of community—family, neighborhood, city, nation. While enjoying the intellectual stimulation of the university and the newfound freedom of making my own decisions, I still struggled to understand the relevance of faith and commitment to my life. It was (still is) so seductive to focus only on myself, my circle of friends and our immediate concerns. These years were a time of exploration with little



risk, and I'm forever grateful to my parents for making it possible, for trusting me more than I realized at the time.

Luckily, at SLU I formed connections with individuals who had ideas that made real sense to me. They helped me to look again at the words of scripture and at the lives of people of faith and hope. I found that there was another option after graduation, that part of my work could be building community with others under the same roof, as well as with people in a neighborhood or a city.

Catherine Nolan coordinates Master's Program internships in the School of Public Health at St. Louis University.

Surprisingly, I discovered that community was not incidental to my Jesuit education, but very much informed and enlivened by it. All of us were educated by Jesuits and have been challenged through the years to use our minds for critical reflection and our lives for service.

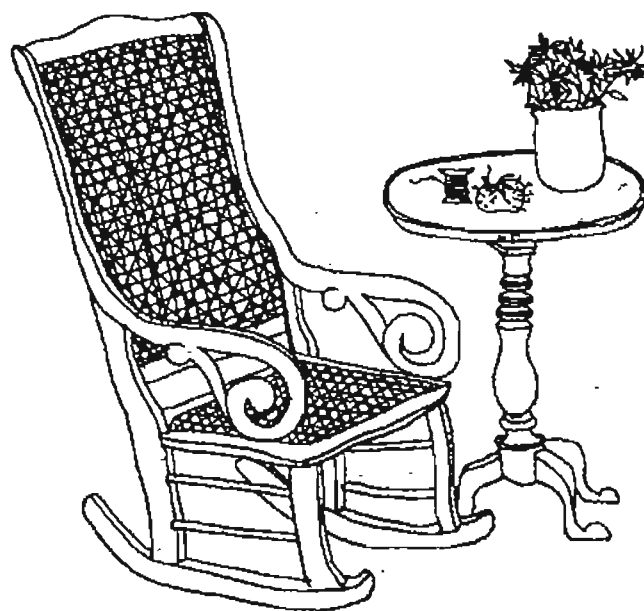
So, how did I come to see community as the right, even necessary, response to questions posed by my upbringing, my education and the society for which I was trying to prepare? That's simple; I didn't. It just seemed easy. When we formed our current community, in 1973, we were a group of mostly single, well-educated men and women with similar interests and backgrounds. We were going to live together in two houses near each other in a working class, racially and economically integrated neighborhood. As part of the decision-making process about who would live in which house, we each put a shoe into a pile and randomly drew them out to make two groups. It was an exciting time, filled with idealism, new friendships and the possibility of being part of enormous changes. We brought to each other our varied influences--war and draft resistance, civil rights, Vatican II, Catholic Worker, Jesuit formation, women's rights, music, art and literature. We had liturgies in our homes, cooked and ate meals together, had weekly meetings and shared work and automobiles. In time, we also became discouraged by dealing with old, neglected houses and indifferent landlords, by a Church that seemed intent on marginalizing our beliefs, by painful interpersonal conflicts and by feelings of not being heard or understood by others.

Some folks chose to leave the community after the first year or two. Others were interested in joining, and some did from time to time. We formed relationships with other, similar communities and organized potlucks and basketball games. Lots of people wanted to know more about our life together—how did it work, why did we stick with it, were we a religious group or what? I can remember being asked to give talks and workshops on community in the early years. It's a little embarrassing to remember that I did give those talks, as if I really could teach others about community.

When six of us, shortly after moving into one of the two houses, decided to begin sharing all of our money and household goods, we crossed over into an unknown. In retrospect, it may have been the best, possibly only, time in our collective lives for such a step. We had relatively few possessions, modest incomes, few financial obligations, good health, good minds and good intentions. Although I smile now at the seriousness with which we took up such matters as brand name or plain label, new books vs. new clothes and (this was a big issue one year) how much food to have at Thanksgiving dinner, I can't imagine how I could have formed my ideals of generosity and stewardship, of simplicity and hospitality, and of simply getting along, without these discussions:

Choosing financial interdependence meant we wanted to try living community in the sense of the early

Christians—simply and with less need of the security of possessions and position. I loved the kind of security we did have, though. Among many benefits, we gave each other the gift of financial support when going to school or working at a low-paying job meant that one or another would contribute less income. For me, the loss of personal control of my money was more than offset by the sense of common purpose this move



Barbara Fine

brought. I was no longer struggling alone with my questions about how to be a good person and make right choices; I had company and counsel.

Even as more people joined in the financial sharing, however, we didn't want to formalize our relationship in legal, or even written, terms. There was an implicit understanding that each time we came together we affirmed our choice in that moment, without really knowing how future choices would be made. Years later, as we came to own more property, and as other models of community became popular, people would find it amazing that we would say that we owned property in common without the documents that defined such an arrangement. It may not always have made the most sense, and I know that the ambiguity has caused difficulties. Every year, though, I see better the wisdom of our early decision to keep the bond implicit. It meant that we were required to search our own hearts and God's hope for us each time we were faced with a decision. While we have celebrated weddings and anniversaries, births, birthdays and graduations, there has never been a day in time that is "the beginning" of the community. The boundaries that enclose us are invisible and elastic.

Inevitably, time has brought many changes to this community. We no longer live in just one or two households, but separately in families or singly. Some community members have moved far away, but remain

close friends. Some community members chose to leave and put distance between themselves and the community. Marriages and children have shaped and altered our daily lives, conversations at dinner and decisions about money, work, time and relationships. As our lives became more complex, we chose not to continue the financial sharing; and crucial decisions, while still willingly discussed and prayed over at community meetings, now have less to do with the whole community than with individuals and families. Nevertheless, the friendships shared by the members of this community have endured and deepened. We have seen each other through success and loss, through illness and healing, and we have learned more about ourselves by seeing each other in the children God has brought into our community.

What hasn't changed, for me, at least, is the immediacy of my understanding of community and the vulnerability that implies. There are still no guarantees that things won't be different tomorrow. Even though we no longer share money, I have invested my emotional riches in this group, and there is always risk of loss. This used to give me fits, and I resented it that the married couples had committed to each other while I, a single person,

had no such security. I worry less about this now, though, realizing, as we all grow older, that lives are fragile, but spirits are sturdy. What's amazing is that it took me so long to see that the security, the trust and the friendship that community is for me is empty of purpose or meaning if it has not brought me closer to a loving Creator and to seeing God more clearly in myself and other people.

Looking back over years of community meetings and discussions—some dreaded, some cherished as much as any moments of my life—I am still awed by the trust I have had in these people and that they, too, have trusted me with their needs and hopes and desires. I'm humbled to realize how little I have understood what was sometimes being asked of me, and how stingy I have been in giving my own strength and support when it was so much needed. But I also remember that we have taught each other about acceptance of our failures, that we have learned together how to forgive, that we have encouraged each other to have integrity in our work and our relationships, and that living together has given us more than a glimpse of the lovely place our world can be.



Sisters of Mercy:

"Supported, Encouraged, and Challenged"

by Terri Bednarz, RSM

Some time ago, and still now and again, I find myself questioning whether I am living out the deepest desires of my heart. Sometimes the doubts rise out of a desire to be in a committed relationship with one person, where I am deeply known and loved and in which I can love and know deeply the significant other of my life. Sometimes the doubts rise out of a desire to be rid of all the struggles of rubbing elbows that comes with community living. And sometimes, I am not plagued by doubts at all, but by a need to do my own thing and be my own person in a completely independent way. So with my old friend, Doubt, nudging at me, why do I choose to be a member of a religious community? Are my heart's desires being nourished in my life-style

choice? What are the struggles and blessings of living such a life?

When I entered the Sisters of Mercy, I was drawn by three heartfelt desires: to deepen my relationship with God and my spirituality, to live in a healthy, loving community, and to be of service to those who needed a listening ear and a compassionate heart. I believed that through community I would be inspired, loved, challenged and renewed by others, who like myself, had similar desires.

Are my heart's desires being nourished in community? I would say yes, but not always in the ways I expected. When I reflect back on my initial desire to live in a healthy, loving community, I realize that through

Terri Bednarz, RSM is currently studying at The Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.



experience in community living, I have had to redefine my expectations of community. I discovered that "healthy" community is more a process than a product. We are always working on communication and "speaking the truth in love."

Living in a religious community has had its struggles and its blessings. Besides bouts with loneliness, (which I believe accompanies all of us at some points in our lives, no matter the life-style), there is the current reality of diminishing numbers of youthful sisters and the energy and idealism they bring. There are the dysfunctional dynamics that confront healthy community life, and there are the ordinary rubbings in daily living. But I have found that often-unexpected blessings come from community dynamics. I venture to guess that we all have had experiences with persons in our family or community with whom we REALLY rub elbows. It has been true for me living in religious community. What I have learned is that no matter how different we may be, we are committed to care for and to love each other. Learning to love someone for who they are, and not for who I would like them to be, has been a great gift to me. It is freeing to live in community and know that in spite of our shortcomings, we will be there for each other even when the rowing gets rough.

Living in community includes the oft times long drawn out processes of making choices that further witness to our life-style. We dialogue, reflect, discuss and many times struggle with how to live and to witness to our values. We set goals in which we encourage each other to live simply, to live in right relationship with

each other and the earth, and so forth, which require stretching and sacrifice. Community calls me to move outside of myself and respond in some personal way to the needs of the global community.

What I have also discovered over time is that religious community is like any other life-style, in that I have to make choices for what gives me life and nourishes me. I also have to struggle to balance my needs with that of my community. Sometimes I have to set my personal wishes aside to support the wishes of the community. The blessing is that I am continually called to place myself in light of the common good. Community helps me to grow not only as a person, but as a person committed to the vision and mission of Jesus.

When I reflect on my experience of living in religious community, underneath it all I know that my heart's desires are being met and deepened. In community I am supported, encouraged and challenged in my relationship with God and with others. I have found and continue to find life and love both within my Mercy community and within the community I share with my friends and family. And in spite of my old friend, Doubt, I continue to find myself at peace and happy being a Sister of Mercy.



Community calls me to move outside of myself and respond in some personal way to the needs of the global community.

Karen House: "Our Commitment"

by Teka Childress

As I write this article, the uppermost thought in my mind with regard to community at Karen House, is its impermanence, just how much it changes. Two members of our community are in the process of leaving. As I bemoan this fact, I think, "For heaven's sake, Teka, what do you expect living in a Catholic Worker house?" Mary Ann McGivern recently gave me a list of the people who had at one time been part of this community and it reminded me that I have indeed, lived in hundreds of different communities here, because each different combination of individuals really makes for a unique community. If I add on all our guests, including the children who have lived here, the change and variety is incredible. Yet, for all the change, there is a sense of stability in our life at Karen House. First, there are all the long-term relationships with supporters, former community members and former guests. Our extended family seems to grow ever larger, but a very familiar friend is never far away, both former community members and guests come back to visit and to stay. There is a sense of sameness due to living in this familiar old convent year after year. And, ironically enough, a sense of stability can even be found in the familiarity of the chaos.

I imagine it's my age, but I have recently pondered a great deal about what one can hold onto in this world. I have appreciated Peter's desire in the story of the Transfiguration when he says, "Let us build a tent." I have understood more fully why most people get married and make a home. These desires to treasure the sacred and make space for them, to try and hold on to



them for dear life, makes so much sense. The commitments that people make to love one another, no matter what, in sickness and in health, are an embodiment of God's unconditional love for us. So how do I make sense of living in a spot where so little seems capable of being held onto? I think it is by realizing what is at the

Teka Childress is concerned that the plan for a golf course in the Karen House neighborhood has been resurrected.

Karen House Catholic Worker www.KarenHouseCW.org 314.621.4052 1840 Hogan St. Louis Missouri 63106

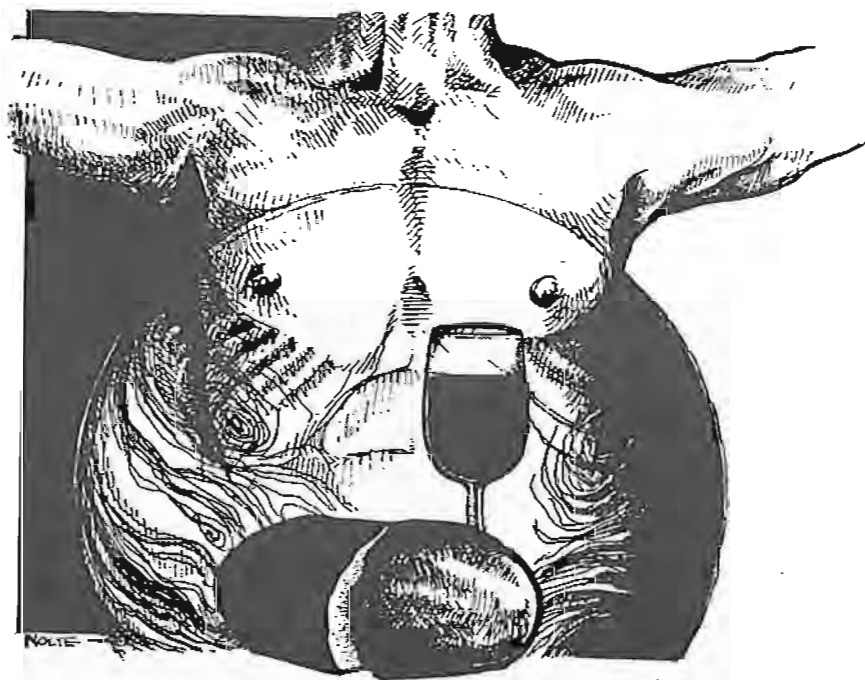
heart of the Catholic Worker, the one thing that really can be grasped and held and counted on no matter what else changes. And that thing is what Dorothy Day saw so clearly, that God is present and always with us in each person in the house, in each person who walks in the door. Our commitment here, then, is to try and believe this reality and to then offer the unconditional love and mercy that each of us so desperately needs and that such a reality inspires. In this endeavor, we are able to continue because of the hundreds who share it with us, who support us in it, who take part in it, and who help us recapture the vision when we lose it. This vision binds our communities together and makes this rather motley crew of characters united. Even if we do not always cherish each other, we want to. Even when we are momentarily blinded and see as the world sees and forget to notice the perfection of God embodied in all these varied persons, we are sorry, we regret it, we wish to be called back to this vision. What a lucky thing to live with people who want to see the world this way.

I have been blessed to have many long-term relationships with guests and community. We have seen great friendships develop. I have been most recently touched noticing the great support different of the women have been for each other, both here and after leaving. Some of them have moved out in close proximity to each other. All of this and a reflection upon our life here brings to mind Peter Maurin's invitation or exhortation to "build a new society within the shell of the old." I look at our life at Karen House and am grateful for the ways we are able to do this, trying in our own broken ways to build the things that last. But I wonder sometimes if the Karen House community could not do more. A sadness about the transitory nature of Karen House is not just the loss as friends move on, but that

often our guests head on to situations that are difficult and much more a part of the broken world in which we live, than of any creation of a new society envisioned by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. Three times we have watched beloved children from our house killed as they've lived in violent households and neighborhoods. We have watched several other children turn to selling drugs and we've watched several end up in prison. We've seen so many of the women go back to using drugs after being in recovery; and, beyond counting, we've seen women continue to struggle financially, just trying to get their basic bills paid. Although we continue to be a place to which people can return, and although we continue to offer our support to our many friends after they've moved on, I've wondered if we should not have longer-term options for community living for some of our guests to whom this might appeal. After a retreat about a year and a half ago, I began to wonder about the possibility of establishing some housing near the house where our former guests and others could live together in community and perhaps support and take part in the work of Karen House, among other ventures. I have many questions and doubts about such an undertaking, but rather than wonder about it forever, I'd like to invite others to join our community in a roundtable discussion about it. Please come meet with us on Sunday evening, April 30th at 6:30 at Karen House.

As I sit here pondering these things, I really have no idea where God will lead our community. I've been continually amazed how every time I'm sure we cannot go on, God has provided what we need. I hope and believe that if we seek God in everything and everyone and hold fast to this vision, God will bless our efforts and do wonderful things, even though we are so human and even though we don't know the road ahead.

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Sophia House: "Ever-present Gifts"

by Julie Jakimczyk



As I sit in Sophia House trying to analyze what draws me to living in an intentional community, I realize how strong an impediment community living has been to my writing this article. Just as I jot down a few ideas, Amy comes home with tales of a successful Catholic Schools Week and her newest infatuation. She and I chat and giggle for a while before I settle back down to continue. My brainstorming resumes until Lynn appears, exasperated by the incessant calls on her pager from a client recently readmitted to the hospital. She and I commiserate about the frustrations of our workdays until my resolve returns to focus on the article. Again, I introspect for only a short time before Darren knocks with a great article he'd clipped about a book I'm currently reading. All right, now I've got to focus. It's been a couple of hours, and I stare only at a list of disconnected though heartfelt words and phrases. This is taking me a lot longer than I would like.

Of course, my complaints are even less than halfhearted. In reality, these distractions exemplify one of the many aspects that draw me to and keep me in community life. Community living is constant. It can't be turned on and off for convenience, nor can it be neatly scheduled into an otherwise tight agenda. It's unpredictable, and often some of its most crucial moments occur at quite inopportune times. However, this impromptu occurrence is not only worth the minor inconvenience, it epitomizes the constant, yet unexpected nature of living in community. Each of the interruptions I described above, though ordinary and perhaps mundane, was life-

giving. From listening and laughing with Amy, venting and empathizing with Lynn, to thankfully receiving Darren's thoughtfulness--those brief instances illustrate well some of the small and ever-present gifts of community.

I've lived in Sophia House for one and a half years now. Each of us can confidently state our mission as a faith-based, intentional community actively striving for peace and social justice, but we struggle every day to figure out the specifics of trying to live up to such a broad and ambitious goal. It's quite humbling. However, the glory of living in community is facing these daunting struggles not alone, but together, amidst the support, inspiration, challenge, and commitment of companions in community.

When I leave work on a given day, weary from the trials of patience that are routine in my day of teaching preschool, walk home as both a witness to and victim of the violence and crime that plague our neighborhood, and sit down to plow through the reports of poverty, greed, and violence that saturate the *Post-Dispatch*, it can be difficult to stave off disenchantment. Soon, though, Amy returns from her second grade classroom, clutching to her chest construction paper riddled with hearts, photos, and plenty of "I love you's." She sinks into a chair and sighs, "Oh, Thu Le made this for me. Isn't it just wonderful?!" Amy's enthusiasm for life is truly infectious and her love for her students inspiring. She works tirelessly at all hours to prepare both first and second-grade material to catch her students up to

Julie Jakimczyk enjoys ballroom dancing and teaches in her neighborhood at City Garden Montessori School.

grade level. It's impossible to become disillusioned by the prevalence of evil when I live with such inspiring examples of faith-filled goodness. Each of us has our ups and downs, but we keep each other energized. Our individual passions for faith, justice, and peace, when combined, are much intensified and unquestionably inextinguishable.

Moreover, we keep each other challenged. Along with living in community comes a never-ending series of questions ranging from dauntingly profound to annoyingly mundane. For example: What exactly is community? And how do we continue to build it? What can we expect from each other? From ourselves? How can we grow in faith and become closer to God? What can we do to bring about peace in our world? And justice? And, by the way, whose dishes are those in the sink? And whose turn is it to take out the recycling? Community is constantly teaching us. Its lessons range from the simple daily tests of patience, acceptance, flexibility, and communication inherent in living with others, to deep stretches in spiritual and social growth. Of course, challenges can be quite trying, but they push us to learn and to grow. It may not always be easy to listen, to be present, to be understanding, but as we reach beyond our comfort zones, and try to give wholeheartedly, we become more caring, more kind, and more blessed.

Thus, even the seemingly small, banal challenges of community push us in our growth toward becoming more peaceful, more just, and more spiritual people.

So far, I've spoken only of the gifts exchanged among the four of us currently living in Sophia House, but all of these gifts are greatly increased by the amazing extended community that surrounds us. We are blessed with many incredible neighbors, friends, co-workers, and parishioners, who struggle along with us and support us in our mission. As we try to extend hospitality through celebrating masses, hosting speakers, potlucks, and parties, we are graced with the company of many extraordinary people who also inspire, support, and challenge us all.

Thus, I thank God every day for the many blessings I receive in community. My quest for spirituality, peace, and justice is more successful because I am accompanied by my friends in community. We continuously learn from each other by example. We grow together through shared prayer, community reflections, conversations at the dinner table, extending hospitality, and just spending time together. We challenge and support, inspire and encourage. We share laughter, tears, frustrations, celebrations, revelations. We sustain each other—constantly. Accompanied by my community, I feel stronger and more hopeful as I strive to heed God's call.



Sophia House:

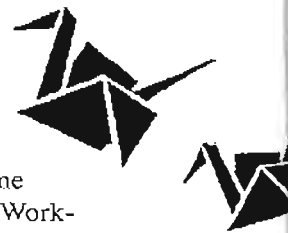
"Justice-and-Faith-Based Lives"

by Lynn Fingerhut

I always describe Sophia House as an "intentional community." When asked more about my home, I explain that many of my friends participated in the acquisition and rehab of a large house in the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood, and that since that time, four people have lived in the house. I explain that we live together, hold weekly meetings and weekly prayer sessions, as well as hosting speakers, prayer groups, Catholic masses, and even social activities. We share our resources, from grocery money to furniture. We are focused on doing social justice work together and supporting each other's efforts to live justice- and faith-based lives. I also explain that the name "Sophia" was chosen as the

representation of the female image of God.

This seems an adequate description, and those who ask probably come away with a vague idea of what our house is. Aside from some people in religious orders, Catholic Workers, and former Jesuit Volunteers, the idea of living in community just isn't familiar to most people. "That's great," some will say, "it must be cheaper and more fun to have a lot of roommates!" Well, that's not the idea exactly, but my amusement at their attempts to understand community living is ironic, as I have diffi-



Lynn Fingerhut is a case manager at Council for Extended Care and a graduate student at SLU.

culty defining it myself. I know why I moved into Sophia House eighteen months ago. I know why I stayed there through last year and I know why I live there right now, but each of these reasons is different and my community experience changes almost constantly.

I moved to Sophia House after completing a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in the Bronx, NY. I was familiar with the four women who had lived in Sophia; and I really felt that the house, the neighborhood, and the idea of living with others in a social justice-based environment would be the best situation for me as I moved into my first real full-time job. When I told friends from JVC, (the Jesuit Volunteer Corps), about the house I was moving into, a few were skeptical of the idea of choosing community living after a year of it, as a required part of the JVC program. More friends, however, expressed envy for the existence of an independent community that focused on the values of JVC including spirituality and social justice. In fact, when it became apparent that one person was still needed in Sophia House after I had made my decision to join Christy and Amy in living there, my community member from the Bronx, Julie, expressed interest in living in community again and after some research and soul-searching, moved to St. Louis (sight unseen) and became a member of our community.

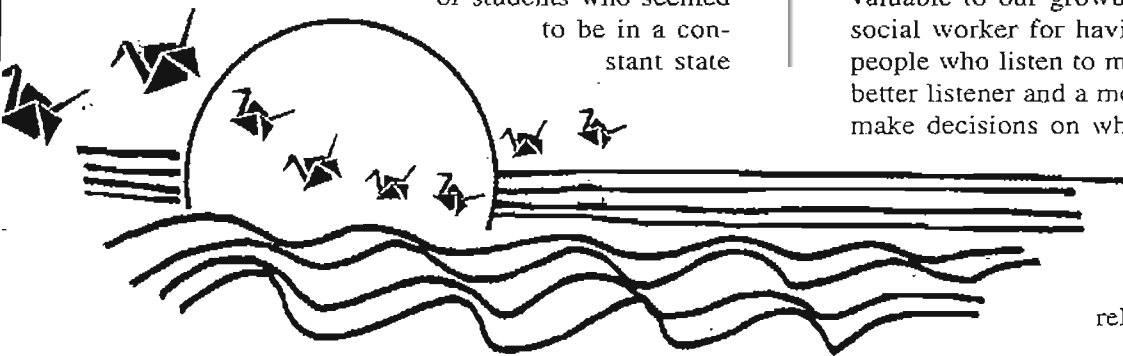
The four of us spent our first year together sorting through the emotions and trials of our respective first years in post-college jobs. Two of us were teachers, one a teacher and graduate student, and I am still the lone social worker. Each of us learned more about our own strengths and our desires to make positive differences in the lives of those in marginalized populations. We shared our work with each other. It was inspiring to hear about the gains we made, from Christy's high school students reflecting with her after a powerful urban plunge experience, to the joy expressed by several of Julie's preschoolers when they spied their beloved teacher at church on Sundays at St. Cronan's, and Amy's diligent and excited planning, preparing her second graders for their first communion. We also shared our frustrations. In experiencing the emotional, spiritual, and financial poverty of some of the people with whom we worked, each of us dealt frequently with our perceived inadequacies in our respective jobs or the aggravation of some coworkers, clients, or students who seemed to be in a constant state

of crisis. Our home was a forum to express these disappointments freely, and often we finished long tales of our job woes with a laugh at another's humorous story, with an impromptu dance party in the kitchen, or just with a sigh of relief at hearing that our frustrations are heard and understood.

Sophia House members grew together, without the synchronicity that we had hoped, but with the understanding that with patience and flexibility, we could learn much about and from each other. I missed living with the energy and companionship of my roommates when I spent some time alone in the house last summer when my teacher roommates took advantage of their summer vacations (an unknown luxury to a social worker!) by traveling abroad or spending time at the homes of their families. I found not only a community within Sophia House, but also outside of it. When we gathered for prayer and community meetings, inevitably we would express gratitude and joy for our neighbors, many of whom had chosen our neighborhood for their own community living experiences years before we did. My usually frustrating stories from a long day of work often concluded with a laugh when I recalled our three-year-old neighbor Gabe hounding me with questions about the whereabouts of Julie (his teacher) or a conversation with our neighbor Phil about the prospects for a winning Billikens basketball season. The "unintentional" part of our community—our neighbors and our parish, the activists, teachers, writers, and parents who surround Sophia House—continue to inspire me and to inspire the vision we have as a small group for our house and our lives.

Sophia House continues to strive in its goal for living justly and with faith. My definition of community today would be shaped by the people living there—again Julie, Amy, and I, and this year, Darren—by our neighbors, our friends, and the experiences we have had since we began living together in August. This year has been a wonderful example of how the individual contributions of commitment and personality have given us not only a close community bond, but has also led us to initiating activities such as speakers and social activities. These regular events give us an opportunity to gain knowledge of injustices, and to learn how to work to change them, and perhaps most importantly, it brings people into our lives and our community that are invaluable to our growth and knowledge. I am a better social worker for having lived in Sophia House with people who listen to me and challenge me. I am also a better listener and a more patient person. I continue to make decisions on where I will live and work in the

future, but my experiences at Sophia House—both the "intentional" and the "unintentional"—will remain an influence on my goals, beliefs, and my relationships.



Kopavi



"We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."
--Dorothy Day

Karen House Community

Sophia House





CoLibri Urban Housing Collective



Claver House

Sisters of Mercy



CoLibri:

"A More Socially Responsible Life-style"

by Mira Tanna

On a typical evening, I come home from a long day of work to find two or three people gathered in the kitchen. Someone has cooked extra, and there's enough food for me. I grab a plate and take a seat. A couple of others straggle in, and we crowd around a kitchen table never meant for more than three, discussing our day. Somehow, community at CoLibri seems to center around food.

Our peculiarities seem to come out most in the kitchen: Stacy has a penchant for labeling which has become contagious. Tom would rather wash every dish in the neighborhood than cook. Mara's metabolic rate is faster than a hummingbird's. LeAnne is the resident herbalist and astrologer. Cathy spent weeks marveling over the eggplant-colored cupboards in our newly rehabbed kitchen. And Mark occasionally will surprise us by unearthing a stash of chocolate chip cookies. Flyers about upcoming protests and speakers compete for space on the refrigerator.

CoLibri Urban Housing Collective started brewing as an idea over four years ago. In January 1996 we began meeting in my apartment in the Loop, sharing potlucks while coming up with bylaws, a development plan, a name (*colibri* means hummingbird in Spanish), and a sense of community. Our first arguments were even over food: whether or not to be a vegetarian household. In the end we decided that, in order to fulfill our mission of fostering an ecologically and socially responsible life-style, meat would have to be smuggled in if it was to enter our house (and it has been). For the hard-

core, there is a vegan option at every communal meal.

We bought our first house in April 1998, a brick-four family in the Fox Park Neighborhood on St. Louis's south side, having decided that we were committed to living in and helping revitalize an urban neighborhood. At first, it was just three of us. We were soon joined by a stray dog, and eventually by four other humans. In those first few months I was confronted with my fear of cooking for others. A few times a week, I would banish everyone from the kitchen while I frantically whipped up dinner. After enough positive feedback, I became confident enough to put others to work chopping peppers or peeling potatoes.

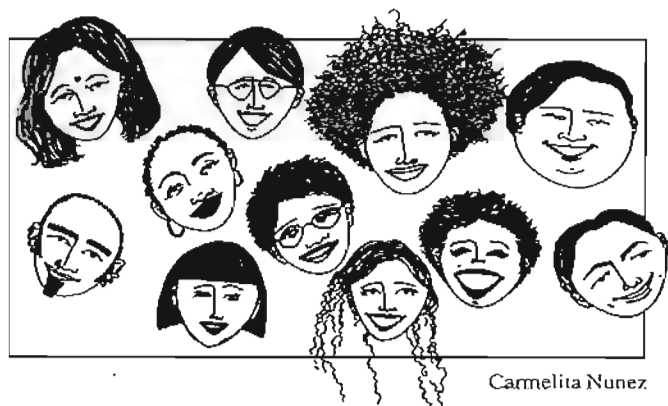
Our next property investment was the adjacent vacant lot. On it, we now have a fertile vegetable garden, adorned with a hand-painted sign which reads "CoLibri Community Garden." Homegrown kale, broccoli, tomatoes, herbs, carrots, and potatoes have graced our dining table this past year. The neighborhood kids have helped water the garden, and we're plotting a little bed just for them this next spring. It's rare to grow up in the city and be able to harvest your own dinner.

Food that we can't grow ourselves is ordered from a buying club at wholesale prices. Buying in bulk is one of the joys of living with a group of people. I always wanted to be able to buy jugs of shampoo, or 20 lb. sacks of rice. When possible, we order organic produce; we had a subscription from a local organic farmer one season, part of the CSA (community supported agriculture) model. We also live off the kindness of Black

Mira Tanna works with the America Friends Service Committee on international peace and justice efforts.

Bear Bakery, a cooperatively owned bakery nearby where several of our members work. Food procurement isn't just a matter of preference, it's an issue of principle. We try to purchase food which has been harvested in a sustainable manner, both for the workers and the environment, and to support independent and cooperative businesses rather than multinationals.

Our community has now expanded to eleven



resident members (not including dog, cats, iguana, and a few Madagascar hissing cockroaches.) We have a lease-purchase on the house next to the garden, where four people live. We have a waiting list of people interested in moving in to CoLibri as space becomes available or as we purchase other property. And we have a group of associate nonresident members, who come share meals with us, help us in our sluggish rehab efforts, or work in the garden.

Every Sunday evening we gather around the dinner table and meet as a community. Though our meetings occasionally drag on, it amazes me how well we all get along, how much support we provide each other to live a healthier and more socially responsible lifestyle, how many talents and interests and skills we all have to contribute, how passionate about issues we can often be—and how forgiving the community is when I don't do my chores. And then it's time to take out the recycling, do the dishes, and put away the leftovers. And at CoLibri, it's true that the early bird gets the worm. By the time I wake up, all of the leftovers are in my housemates' lunch boxes.



Claver House: "We Aim to be Just and Good Neighbors"

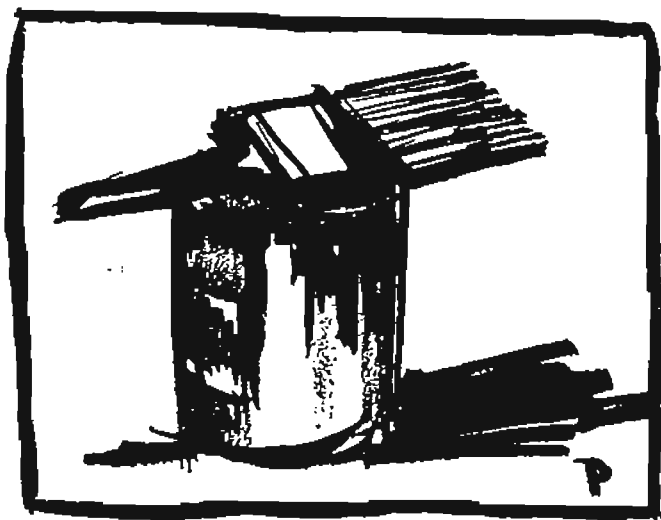
by Erin Nealon

Claver House: "We are an intentional faith community of nine young adults at various stages of education and profession in North St. Louis, situated in the heart of St. Matthew the Apostle's parish." This is the easy, automatic script I give to those inquiring where I live and with whom. Yet many cannot relate to words such as "intentional," or "faith," they are merely words to glaze over. This response does not do justice to what builds my home in north city. I have learned that words do not do justice to the larger community, to my beliefs, nor do words do justice to those who are seemingly satisfied with such easy descriptions. At these moments, when I am called to explain my community, I find that there is much more to it than the rehab projects of the



Erin Nealon is currently studying at St. Louis University in pre-med and is about to take her M-CAT.

physical structure—knocking down walls, putting walls back up, painting, putting up doors, waiting for the plumbers, electrician etc.—that are so easy to identify with. Often, there is more than what others bargain for in a passing conversation. It is at such times that my ministry begins through witnessing, and I am reminded to be more mindful of others' life experiences with an open heart. I must go further and deeper into the meaning of community and into the spirituality, justice, and intentionality that creates it. My responsibility to my community and extended community begins with this



ministry of educating and being educated by others' questions, perceptions, and assumptions. For instance, when others ask why we chose this neighborhood, I can speak of my commitment to change the oppression with revitalization; when people ask if we are under the supervision of the parish, I can clarify the delicate balance of being encouraged by a partnership while being autonomous in our initiative. When people ask, I have the responsibility to offer them more than a script. Rather, I am blessed with the opportunity to share my life, my faith, or our mission, which I take as a personal responsibility to encourage a deeper understanding of the world in myself and within others.

In these beginning months I have felt the hardships of miscommunications and assumptions from many sides, whether they be within the community at large or the neighborhood itself. For instance, when local city officials question our motives and reasons for living in "shits-Ville USA", and let us know this is no place for a bunch of "kids," and ask, "Why did the parish make you come here?" When such misunderstandings about mission and presence fester, there are implications of complex agendas and youthful naiveté as to why we were "placed" in The Ville neighborhood. There is no complex agenda that forces us to be trapped in our neighborhood as a group of young white adults in a largely homogenous yet revitalizing black neighborhood. With simplicity and hospitality as a way of life,

we aim to be just and good neighbors, committed to investing ourselves in the formation of loving friendships with each other and within the larger community. I find I feel most at home and more roots growing when I can see and be seen in the streets of The Ville: when I take the bus with my neighbors, when I walk the dog, when I eat great chicken and ribs or Friday night fish fries at Fatt Matt's restaurant, when I go to various committee meetings, working in the community garden weeding and planting with neighborhood and county high school children, at the sign of peace, or when I sit on the porch just watching, listening, feeling what is around me. We aim to be active and share a youthful energy within our parish and on the streets. We are intentional in that we chose freely to make North city our home. For me, to be intentional is to be conscious of my actions, choices and their effects; and my own will has placed me in a neighborhood where many may not have many options or choices. My intention with Claver House is to become educated, not fearful, to identify the needs of my neighbors as my own needs and to be committed to a place that is often overlooked. Lots of people do live here who raise families, have jobs, hang out, and who struggle. So this neighborhood is not dead. For me, the true challenge of living beyond the secure walls we construct, is to find life where others may not, and to contribute to the growth of this living place.

Integral to our community is spirituality, that which empowers my community and me to take leaps outside what is comfortable. With my faith I have found that I am able to take risks, yet feel sure of the ground and supported by a presence of grace far greater than myself and my agendas in the streets of The Ville. This risk is required for me to trust the unfamiliar and for challenging the apathy and insecurity of the society around me, which dictates that the dangers are more than I know and that The Ville is no place for a white, educated female--or male, for that matter. Sharing faith with others in my community and being an active parishioner have provided me with the courage to be committed to a vision of solidarity of which I may never see the fruit. I have the courage through faith to invest my present and future plans in making my home in north city so that I may know and understand rather than ignore and avoid. I have the courage to look into burnt-out buildings, to look past the layers of abandonment, to look toward the potential for growth that lies within. This faith, that is shared and lived out each day in my community, has proved that hope springs eternal and that there is potential in everyone and everything that may be perceived as negative. Our strength that stems from faith enables us then to continue to bear witness to, and be a part of, the life that exists in our neighborhood. This witness takes many forms, from bringing people to north city with hospitality, to bringing north city to people through our words in conjunction with our works. So much of Claver House transcends the physical rehab project (that never seems to end) into

the grander scheme of building and rebuilding connections to those outside our immediate walls. This openness is an invitation to people of all levels of society to take root and build a home within our hearts, minds and souls in a reciprocal exchange. Living at Claver House has challenged me to be much more vocal with my faith as I describe to others where I live. Witnessing my own faith, which has been a more personal friendship with God in the past, is instrumental in developing my beliefs and being more consistent in what I have known prayer to be, that is, action. So as I invite others into our home, I feel as though I am inviting them into much more of my soul, my life, and my faith, as well as into that of eight other community members.

Another integral part of our vision at Claver House is working on many different levels for justice. This is how we take action through our spirituality, intentionality, and witnessing. My understanding of working for justice requires living for justice, which I am empowered to do with Claver House. This eternal mission of justice is the culmination of what we bring to this neighborhood in order to be in communion with each other and extended communities. Justice is then a responsibility that comes to us by merely being alive,

living where we do, being who we are, with the education that we have. This responsibility is ours because we have eyes to see the realities of injustice around us, consciousness to feel its effects, and the intentionality to do what we can about it. We are active parishioners, joining the efforts of revitalizing The Ville neighborhood by attending housing committee meetings, block unit meetings and by being a stable house for years to come, by meeting our neighbors like Purnell, Vince, the Blackshear's, Ms. Harris, and Erna and spending time learning about their lives and history, by hosting masses at our house and extending our walls. by participating in social actions, by educating ourselves and constantly increasing our awareness and understanding. These are all about living justly, which must be coupled with whom or what we live justly for: the Kingdom of God, where justice reigns, for our brothers and sisters and for ourselves because we are instruments of something much larger than ourselves. With this expanded scope, our brokenness becomes apparent but not paralyzing. For me, it is in this realization that I invest, in being an active participant in life through faith, justice and community. Please call, come visit and break bread with us and celebrate living life!

+



Stephen Rutney

From Abroad

by Bill Engels



Sain baino (hello!) from Outer Mongolia. I stayed home during the Christmas and New Years holiday. I wanted to be in Ulaanbaatar for the grand occasion of this epochal new year, and my plans to visit Moscow during the first two weeks of January were thwarted by a computer shutdown in Russia. On the afternoon of New Year's eve, a helicopter swinging a lettered banner pendant with a weight at one end, and scattering confetti, suddenly appeared within view of the south window of my fourth-floor apartment. I celebrated at my parish church, Sts. Peter and Paul, where the youth group hosted a prayer vigil and telephone linkup with the Vatican during the Papal commemoration of the beginning of the Jubilee Year. It was a great moment for the young people of our fledgling, mission parish, as three of them read in turn a stanza from a famous modern Mongolian poem, "My Homeland," and the entire group was greeted by a delegation of youth in Rome and sang the "Our Father" in Mongolian. We watched the twenty-minute fireworks display from where we sat in the third-floor chapel after the vigil while waiting for the conference call. The display was launched from Children's Park, which was also the site of many ice sculptures (dragons, the Eiffel Tower, etc.) and an ice pond where men dressed as Genghis Khan's warriors rode horseback.

On December 26th I visited the sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, who operate a school and a soup kitchen at their home in a poor outlying district. After a year or two in an apartment in the city, they purchased two adjacent dwellings, joined them with a corridor, and dug a well. The clean and tiny dining room, where I sat and conversed with them over tea and homemade cake, adjoining hallway, and chapel had been newly painted. Over the chapel door hung a framed photograph of Mother Theresa with the caption in large, handwritten letters, "Love one another as I have loved you." Sisters Salvia and Sudhir are from India, Sister Rosemita from Bangladesh, and Sister Francois from Poland. After tea, I toured the two or three small rooms with crepe paper

hung from the ceiling by the children and a fold-out construction-paper manger scene made by the mother of one of the children, the quaint kitchen with its wood or coal stove and huge basins, and boiler room with its coal pile.

Invited to assist with their Christmas party, I made the long, frigid bus trip (heating systems aren't yet fashionable on Ulaanbatar buses) to the mission again two days later, scratching a patch in the frosted window pane so that I could see the Tuul River and begin counting down the stops. When I arrived at the school, Sr. Francois was talking with animation to the guests, chiefly adult men and women from the neighborhood, who were packed into the largest of the small classrooms, while children in a classroom-turned-dressing room down the hall made last-minute adjustments to their costumes. More guests kept arriving, piling up in the hallway; there would be about 160 in all, many more than expected. During the Christmas drama, the attentive audience laughed when the two boys, dressed as shepherds and brandishing splinters of wood, herded in the sheep—three or four boys crawling on all fours with lint pasted to their shirt backs and with construction-paper masks. The crowd also seemed to especially like the three wise men with their tall, tinsel paper hats.

After the play, we began handing out the plastic or glazed earthenware bowls containing doughnut holes cooked in oil and five pieces of candy to those seated in the classroom. The children had been cooking all week to prepare the pastry, milk tea, and mutton-dumpling soup that we served the guests, each course in the same bowl. During the hectic serving, there was much reaching out of empty bowls, some scuffling, and, at one point, an imminent riot. When most of the seated guests had dined, I posted myself at the door of the room and began handing out one plastic bag containing small gift items to each departing man, then woman (as the culture dictates), exchanging the farewell word, "Buyartay." "Praise Jesus!" Sister Francois had led them in a prayer,

Bill Engels is teaching English at the International College in Ulaanbaatar in Outer Mongolia.

after briefly explaining the significance of the holiday, before the food was served. This general procedure was followed in serving the second wave of guests, who also filled the classroom. Like the widow's jar, which Dorothy Day alludes to recounting one of her own experiences as hostess to the poor, the soup pot (augmented by an eleventh hour concoction of left-over ingredients and milk tea) kept giving out until everyone had eaten. Throughout the party and during the clean-up afterwards, several of the older children eagerly pitched in, making it difficult at times for me to get into the act.

The temperature was even colder on January 3rd, when I assisted them in their Christmas call at the prison hospital. The temperatures in parts of Mongolia that week were 40-46 below zero (Celsius). The first inmates we visited were a group of tuberculosis patients, shrunken, emaciated men who squatted in hospital pajamas of various colors and cuts in a row on either side

of the hallway after a doctor or uniformed guard called them out of their rooms. In our troop, two boys dressed as Jesus and Mary performed a brief Christ-child-in-the-manger skit; a Mongolian woman led them in reading from a prayer card they were given; all of us sang "Silent Night" in Mongolian; and, dressed as a thin, beardless Santa Claus, I handed each man a plastic bag containing several small gifts, saying "*Sain baino*, Merry Christmas!" Then the men were invited to sing a few songs of their choice. Singing is an integral part of social occasions in Mongolia.

Sister Salvia told me that some one hundred patients in this ward had died last year, apparently due to a lack of medicine at the facility and late detection of the illness. The director of our mission parish, Father Wenceslaus, recently procured additional medicine for the patients, as well as urgently needed bed linen for the youths' prison. When I entered one or two rooms to distribute gifts to patients confined to their beds, I was struck by the squalor and poor sanitation. I don't re-

"...his suffering was a source of healing for the world. He seemed receptive to this idea. Would I have been if I were in his place?"

call seeing, on this or any of the other wards we visited, a single pillow on the beds. These mattresses were laid on wire mesh. The country's economic hardship was visible here, too.

After visiting the patients who were well enough to work, who had been brought from the kitchen, grounds, and other parts of the facility by their overseer and stood in two orderly rows in a basement hallway, we went to the unit for patients being treated for stomach and intestinal ailments. A guard unlocked and opened the metal door of one room, and two women emerged to join the men squatting in the hallway. I have since been told that a parliament member would have been among those whom I greeted and handed a Christmas stocked bag to on this unit. As we were passing back through this hallway after visiting the psych ward, a few of the patients tried to con us into a second gift bag. "You have to watch them," one of these street-wise sisters said to me. Our last call was to the patients recovering from bone fractures. Sister Francois introduced me to a man, probably in his thirties, who lay on his bed and who frequently grimaced with pain as he spoke. He had been in the hospital for three months after fracturing his pelvis in a fall sustained while cutting a tree. He had served ten of his eleven or twelve-year sentence for killing a man while in a drunken rage. He was unable to sleep at night on account of the pain. He faced possible lifelong paralysis. He told us that, if his condition proved incurable, he would kill himself. I told Sister, who acted as a translator, to say to him, if she thought it appropriate, that his suffering was a source of healing for the world. He seemed receptive to this idea. Would I have been if I were in his place?

The first day of classes at the International College is now a week away. Soon I will be back in the routine of class preparation, lecturing, and grading. If I don't have memories of Mayakovsky Square or the Bolshoi Theatre to refresh me in my labors, I do have them of a quiet upstairs chapel two hours before the august ringing in of the millennium, of a miniature dining room with a circle of bright faces and table-spread of tea and cake, and of rows of impassive men who, the moment I approached them, unfailingly smiled and returned my greeting, "*Sain baino*!"



From Karen House



by Courtney Barrett

Brokenness. . . Even as I type the word in my computer, it is underlined by that annoying little red squiggly line that I know so well. (I am not the greatest speller.) Only recently has that word fully become a part of my lexicon. I have never experienced a truer feeling of brokenness than at Karen House. From our temperamental coffee maker, to our faulty wiring, to the stories of what brought each of us to the house, all are (partly, in part, somewhat, at least a little bit) broken.

An even more recent concept in my life is the Enneagram (which, by the way, also elicits the squiggly line on the computer). Very briefly, for those of you who have yet to tap into the wonderful world of exploring each others' personalities, there are nine types. Each number defines certain characteristics that could make up one's personality. It also gives possible reasons for possessing each number, as well as healthy and unhealthy ways to express your number with other numbers. (These numbers are other people, we must not forget.) I am an "8." This means I am a strong unshakable leader, almost always "tell it like it is," and could try to manipulate others into my way of thinking, all because I am afraid of being perceived as weak, vulnerable. . . or possibly broken. What an interesting quandary.

This very thing I flee in my life is what surrounds me each day. I would have it no other way. I will never forget the instant I decided to move into Karen House. I had just returned from a week-long trip to Philadelphia with friends, where we visited the Catholic Workers there. Some of us planned to start a community later in the year; others were moving on to endeavors in other places; and others were thinking of moving into Karen House. I was undecided. The trip was obviously life-altering (or I would not be writing this article). We shared meals, discussion, work, and friendship. The last night of our trip, I found myself in a discussion with Mary Beth, one of the CWs who works at their free clinic for the homeless. I was telling her about our ideas of starting a clinic and living in community in St. Louis. She replied, "Of course you are going to live at the Worker." Tell it like it is (or should be)—a very effective means of suggestion to an "8." For most of the twenty hour trip home, I thought and talked about mov-

ing in. It had never occurred to me before. I had volunteered on and off for four years, attended mass, subjected the house to my hapless cooking skills, and hung out with the guests. I loved Karen House. Could I live there? I feared in my own brokenness, I could be of no help to the guests and community, I had my own issues to deal with first. After I was better, healthier, stronger, and less broken, I could move in. I spoke with the community and they were wonderfully welcoming, supportive, and excited. I still wasn't sure. I would have to give up so much. . . my space, my independence, my freedom, my control. . . my selfishness. Could I be vulnerable? Was it possible for me (the "8") to let go of that control and power and share in my brokenness with others? I can't be cared for, I am a fixer, a strong leader. I am an "8"!

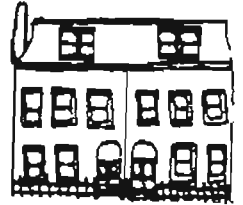
The following Monday, I was taking a house shift with Jenny at night when I met Anthony and his family. Anthony, his mother, and four siblings had moved in several days before. He was full of chatter about his day at school and equally bursting with questions about my life. We talked for a while, and he told me about singing for the talent show at school. Anthony was erupting with excitement at a potential audience and began. I will never forget that night, sitting on the floor in the office, listening to an eleven-year-old boy sing of a homeless boy named Jesus. How someone gave him a place to rest and showed him love. How Jesus will give us rest and how blessed are we to be loved by God. The richness of his voice filled the room, and I cried. Tears of sorrow and joy at the simple brokenness of it all overwhelmed me as I blinked them away.

I moved in a few weeks later and have been thankful each day since. For sharing the life with the guests, community and volunteers, discussing our pending days over Rice Crispies before school, learning and acting upon the monstrosities in Iraq, SOA, and East Timor, chatting about the Rams with the men who come to the door for ham and cheese sandwiches, offering the kiss of peace to strangers at mass, analyzing other people's numbers on the Enneagram. But mostly, I loved when the doorbell during my shift was going through a period of brokenness.



Courtney Barrett is still savoring her New Year's visit to Beijing.

From Little House



The Very Stones

by Mary Ann McGivern, SL

In Sörup, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, tiny cemetery plots are tended by families who plant flowers and fir trees, and cover the bare winter ground with evergreens.

Beyond these graves, a square of headstones surround untended, swampy ground, to mark the dead of the first war. A second site was needed for the second war.

That center is a grassy field, edged by glacial stones etched with surnames, omitting given names, arranged by the villages they came from. A dozen dead from a village of six homes.

Between the two fields, an engraved, square monument reads: "in memory of those who died at war in 1914 - 1918 and 1939 - 1945. They fell for the fatherland."

In the '80s, Sörup war resisters rolled a rough-hewn boulder onto the field across from the chiseled stone. "Vergessen fuehrt in die gefangenschaft. Erinnerung ist das geheimnis der erloesung." "Denial leads us into captivity. Remembrance is the key to redemption."

The grass is cut. No weeds grow among the stones. It is a public field of mourning and shame. The people there cannot help remembering the graveyard behind St. Mary's Lutheran Church in Sörup.

St. Louis, Missouri, my home town, lays our war dead down under flat head stones (because the crosses broke and were expensive to replace) with flag and gun salute at Jefferson Barracks, a twenty mile commute.

We're proud of the wars that killed so many Germans; P.O.s, parks and malls all sport memorials. But the names of U.S. soldiers dead in Vietnam, are chiseled in granite that reflects our shame, a thousand miles away from home.

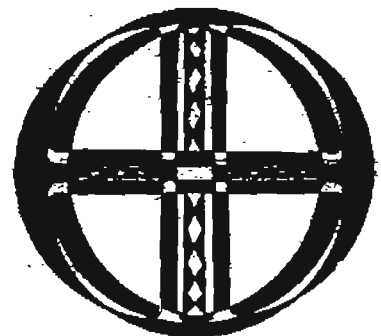
Six miles from my house, Boeing, nee McDonnell Douglas (MDC) makes fighter planes for sale to Israel, Egypt, the Saudis, and the UAE.

Boeing sells to Turkey, Greece, Brazil, Taiwan. The Ayatollah may still have old F-4s the Shah bought for Iran.

It's time to take apart, stone by stone, McDonnell Douglas/Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin. Then maybe we'd remember and feel shame for arms sold and death-deals made in our name.

It would be hard work. We'd sweat together in the sun and pile the stones in heaps, doing penance for our greed and vengeance,

erecting war memorials fit to go the distance with the pyramids, lasting till the rain and wind and heat and cold crumble them to sand.



Rita Corbin

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., is happy with her garden which is at the point of "pure potential"--no sign of blight or infestation.

Karen House Catholic Worker www.KarenHouseCW.org 314.621.4052 1840 Hogan St. Louis Missouri 63106

PERMISSION TO SPEAK FREELY, SIR

by Kate Sopko

no one can be a voice for the voiceless, but the
voiceless themselves

you see, there is no such thing as a human
minus voice

there is no such thing as being rendered speech-
less

even the ones whose tongues we cut out had the
impulse to scream

even the ones whose children we threatened and
materialized to air and ash for the words of their
parents had the audacity to keep planting and
reaping

even the ones whose vocabulary we switched to
ours had the tenacity to sing our words with their
meaning

even the ones who have no words to give have
the will to still live a non-verbal expression that "I
have a right to be in your way" to consume a
resource to experience this earth to still live
though you don't want me to

there is no such thing as a human minus voice

and I ask you, what makes us think we have the
ability to interpret for those whose language
we've never heard? much less spoken?

what makes us think we can translate what
dignity has been taken from the humans who still
have voice enough to know how much they risk
by being alive for one more day? how much they
can lose by clearing stating their catch 22 the
stuff of our off-the-cuff conversation day by day
by day

I ask you in this land where speech calls itself
free as tap water and no other commodity what
do we find worth talking about? who are we
humans plus voice?

Talking about how to maximize productivity and
fashionably enter a competitive marketplace how
to save face when facing the truth of our enter-
prise the voices we cut short so that the gains we
make this month will smile the faces of those
holding stock in the anonymous pain of cheapen-
ing labor

talking about options and free press we press
against walls we don't acknowledge as real and
freedom and freedom and freedom

of speech of choice of voice of voice

does our chattering survival say anything clearer
than "bring on the un-freedom to finance my
climate control?" we are saying nothing not
already said for us voiced for us made voiceless
by our own choices

AND THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A HUMAN
MINUS VOICE

no one can be a voice for the voiceless, but the
voiceless themselves once having snatched
back their tongues from the fat cats wanna
speak? invest in voice lessons.

+

(8/99)

by Mark Chmiel

I recently had a graced experience when I had the pleasure of becoming reacquainted with an old friend, Ivone Gebara of Brazil. She wanted to visit with me, as she was spending the weekend in Saint Louis before heading to Los Angeles to give a week's worth of workshops. She had come to Saint Louis to visit her dear friend, Ann Pat, a Loretto sister whose eightieth birthday was generating much celebration and gratitude. I was delighted to spend part of a sunny Sunday afternoon talking with her at Loretto Hall in Webster Groves.

A brilliant and humble philosopher and theologian, Ivone is a member of a religious community and works in Recife, Brazil, the most impoverished region of that huge, sprawling country. We first met in October 1997 when she had come to Saint Louis to inaugurate the Mev Puleo Conference on Theology and Culture, during which time she gave many talks at Saint Louis University and for activist groups around the city. Exuding warmth, kindness, and concentration, Ivone asked me many questions about the School of the Americas action last November, the grass-roots movements in Seattle, my family, writing projects, and community work.

She is an exemplar of the engaged theologian, or, in the much quoted expression of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, "an organic intellectual." She is not nestled comfortably in an ivory tower; instead, she has thrown her lot with the poor women of her neighborhood whose daily realities include "garbage in the streets, bad smells, the absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition, and inadequate health care."

She discussed her work with poor women, usually single mothers in her neighborhood and city. She and other pastoral workers offer retreats for these women on Sunday, because they are invariably working all day the other six days of the week. Ivone mentioned that they begin the retreat by asking the women to write down their life dreams, which always generates much discussion. Then, they watch a video of a soap opera, one of the more popular programs on Brazilian TV. Afterwards, the women are encouraged to identify the dreams of the characters in the soap opera and then compare and contrast them with their own dreams. A major

part of this process for Ivone is to learn, to be open and receptive.

Ivone spoke sadly of how an old model of the Church has been reimposed through Brazil, once the scene of most progressive national Catholic Church in the world. She commented on how this old model insists on giving answers of certitude to questions the women she knows aren't even asking.

Unlike some of her friends, American sisters who work in the parishes in Recife, Ivone's work is not tied to the institutional church. She said, "My work is in, do you have this word, the 'catacombs'?" That is, in those subterranean places where the poor, forgotten, and even despised live and where hope springs eternal even amid such seeming Godforsakenness.

Such commitment, of course, is not confined to Brazil. I thought of friends who are working to empower poor women in and around Karen House and who are trying to accompany them in their journey to greater life. I thought of the "catacombs" here, where men and women attend to folks who are pushed aside, those whose voices are not taken seriously in classrooms, churches, and workplaces.

In our brief time together, Ivone inspired me with her serenity and determination. Her spirit is captured well in one passage from her new book, which I encourage you to read at your earliest convenience: "We are involved in this struggle without having any idea of its outcome. We are here because we sense that it can energize us at the gut level and nourish our hope. We are here because we realize that it can be a way toward solidarity, mercy, and reconciliation among all vitally committed groups. We are here because we love life and do not want to see it snuffed out on account of our human whims and our destructive tendencies. We are here because we can no longer put up with the system of discrimination and exclusion within which we find ourselves. We participate in this struggle because it is the very meaning of our life."

May we participate in this struggle in and around the St. Matt's neighborhood, Forest Park Southeast, Hogan Street, Saint Louis University, Co-Libri, and many other locales where we can take heart that we have brothers and sisters in the same struggle as far away as Recife, Brazil.



Mark Chmiel is finishing his manuscript on Elie Wiesel for Temple University Press.

Roundtable Discussion

Teka Childress will facilitate this clarification of thought on long-term community options for Karen House guests and community. (See Teka's article in this issue.)

Please join us Sunday,
April 30th at 6:30 p.m.
at Karen House.

Thanks to Ann Marie Appelbaum of appel-tree
photographics for the photograph below.



House Needs:

- ◆ Refrigerator
- ◆ Lawnmower
- ◆ Housetakers

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Teka Childress, Mark Chmiel, Mary Dutcher, Carol Giles, Bill Miller, Barbara Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House
1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106



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