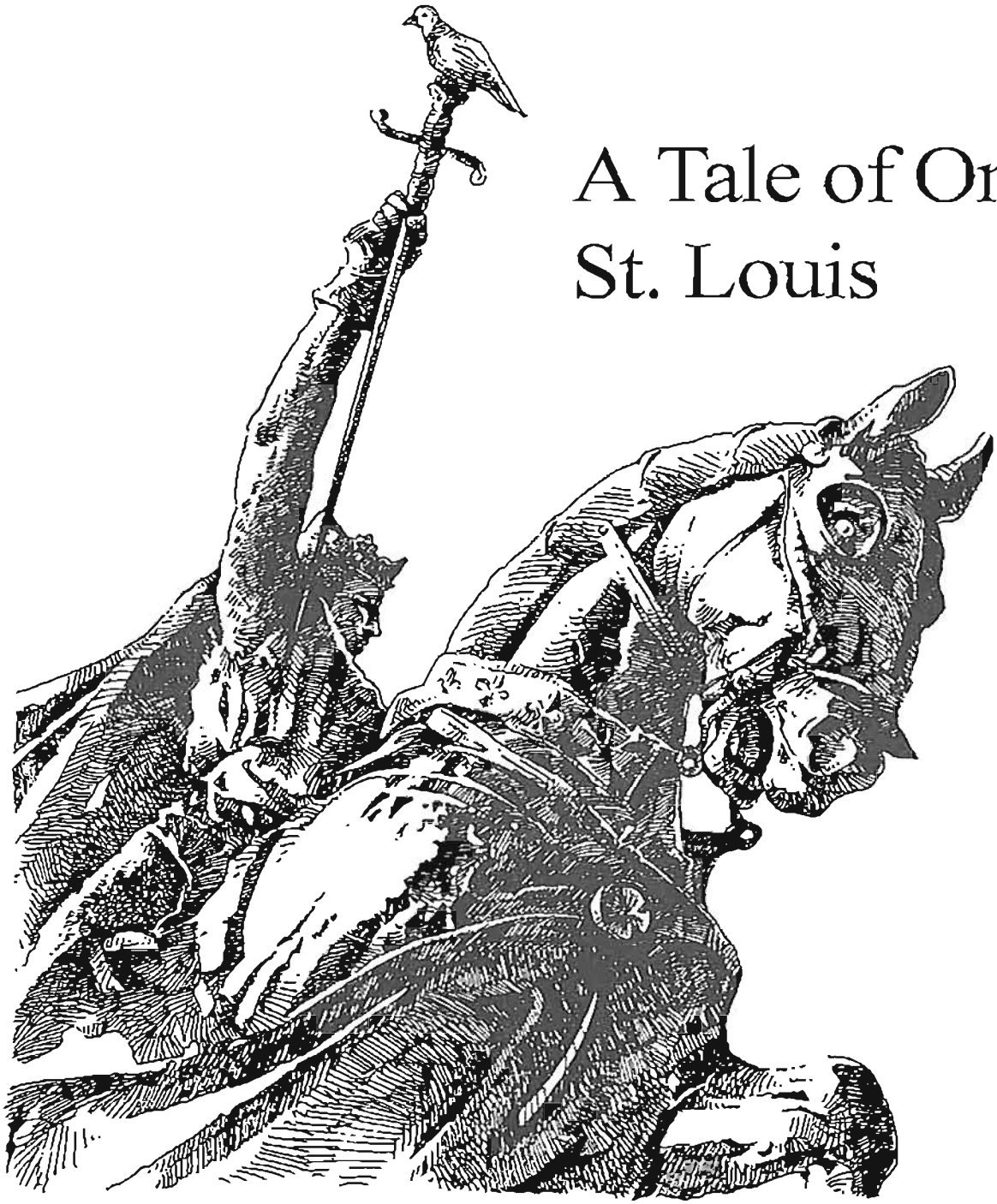
THE Round Table

Winter
1998

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



A Tale of One City: St. Louis

Why This Issue?

Much has been written in history, literature, and the social sciences about cities, their origins and development, and the forces that have shaped their rise, decline, and possible rebirth. Such an exhaustive, grand sweep is not the reason for this issue. Rather, as the title indicates, the focus is on one city, St. Louis, and some of the issues which it faces. But that has a very detached ring to it. It is really not the anonymous "city" which faces the issues. Its people do so. We do so.

Two of the articles included focus on St. Louis' ethnic communities. Patrick McCarthy describes his work with Bosnian refugees in St. Louis and asks us to be mindful of the genocide which forced them from their homeland. Angie O'Gorman notes that immigrants are survivors from whom all of us have much to learn. Both articles emphasize that we need each other, we are all connected. To hear some of the immigrants' own voices, there are quotes from Ron Klutho's students in his English as a Second Language (ESL) class at Forest Park Community College. They and others offer their reasons for enjoying living in St. Louis.

Mike Goeke begins his discussion of justice issues around urban sprawl in St. Louis with some historical background and statistics. He goes on to flesh out the problems posed to the poor who remain in the central city and inner-ring suburbs when resources are reallocated to accommodate urban sprawl. The solutions he proposes are persuasive.

In "Round Table Talk," Mark Scheu notes the community he has found among regular riders on his daily Bi-State/Metrolink commute. He also suggests commuting on public transport as an answer to the pollution created by one car/ one driver commuting that is fostered by urban sprawl.

Both Teka Childress and Mary Ann McGivern are known for their long-term commitments to global, national, and local peace and justice issues. Here they offer different visions of how to carry that commitment forward. In her article on urban development, Teka expresses concern that residents of the Karen House neighborhood should have a voice in planning its development. Mary Ann presents a range of reasons for helping the poor escape the city.

In Becky Hassler's article about health care in St. Louis she outlines the events that have led to St. Louis' current crisis in health care for the poor. She eloquently puts a human face on this crisis by describing the difficulties encountered by one uninsured man in getting what should have been routine health care.

Mary Dutcher distinguishes between acts of justice and charity in the St. Louis Catholic Church. She notes examples of both in St. Louis' past. She challenges and encourages us to seek justice in the present and to continue doing so in the future.

In "From Karen House" Celeste Gaudreault reflects, among other things, on the role of Karen House to its guests and those coming to the side door for sandwiches. For her, Karen House is a "true microcosm" of the world at large.

The opinions expressed by the writers in this Round Table are diverse, discussing both the merits of living in St. Louis and the problems we face. But the writers share a common thread. They are all guided by a deep concern about and love for the poor in our midst. That is something from which we could all learn. ✚

--Carol Giles

Front cover art by Larry Nolte
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A Tale of One Neighborhood

by Teka Childress

When people come to cook or visit Karen House, they frequently comment on the construction of new houses in our neighborhood. On North Eighteenth Street and on Hogan, approximately 40 new for–sale homes have been built, selling from about $88–100,000. Just south of Cass Avenue, approximately 200 rental units have been built by McCormack Baron, which contain a mix of market–rate and subsidized units. People's reactions to the development are commonly positive. I am generally ambivalent about what to say in response, which reflects my own mixed feelings about development in our area and the complexity of the issues involved.

On the one hand, I want to see the city survive. We have probably all heard the daunting news that St. Louis is losing population faster than any other large city in the country. I love St. Louis and I love living in the city in general. I love neighborhoods where people live in fairly close proximity, where you can walk to the store, park or school. I especially love the old brick buildings. And I love ethnic neighborhoods that have a character of their own. I feel sad that so many people and businesses have left the city and that the population center has moved further and further west. I regret this loss, as I regret the empty lots left behind, the abandoned buildings, and the closed and empty churches. Meanwhile, further west, we use up more of our natural land building highways, subdivisions and strip malls. Thus, with those who come to visit and voice their enthusiasm over the developments, I rejoice. Yes, the city needs people with resources. It needs businesses committed to staying and coming back. I applaud the city's policy that firefighters and police officers must live in the city. I welcome the new homes in our neighborhood and the people in them.

So, then, what's my hesitation in wholeheartedly embracing what seems so necessary a thing? My hesitation is that I fear for the people who live here now, who don't have many resources and who are vulnerable to being moved out if development, particularly of middle and upper–income housing, takes off. The challenge for our neighborhood, then, is: Can development be done in a way in our neighborhood that improves the lives of everyone already here? Can it build on the talents, visions, and strengths of our neighbors? Can it give them better lives, better houses, and, for some, decent jobs? Or, will the people here with less resources than those moving in simply be expected to leave?

The chances for this neighborhood to see a fair amount of development seem pretty high. The Gateway Village project, which previously had included a golf course, brought an estimated $127 million in development to our neighborhood. The city has been "land banking" land here for a long time and now seems to have targeted our neighborhood as one of its highest priorities for development as a natural extension of trying to strengthen the downtown area. The City Development Agency is planning to begin a process of development–planning by district, and I think our area is the first one to be targeted. The agency is ostensibly wanting to involve the neighborhood residents in the planning.

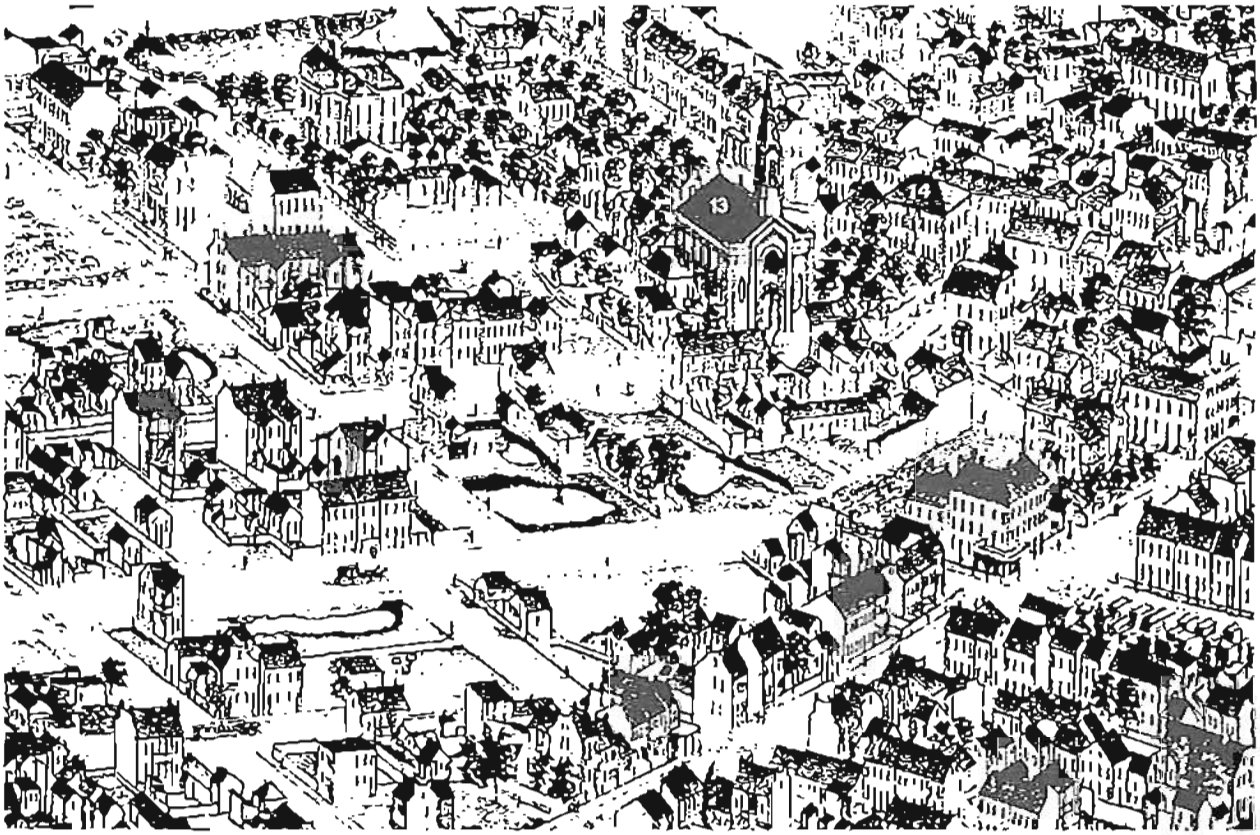
A short time ago I would have felt that the possibilities were tremendous for a strong integrated plan that benefited everyone. Everything was in place. In 1986 or '87, a neighborhood organization was formed, called Greater Pruitt–Igoe II. Seven of the area churches helped in gathering people together, and the group that formed named itself in remembrance of the Pruitt–Igoe public housing complex, from which many of the members came. Their symbol was the Phoenix rising from the ashes, a sign of their rising from the old infamous housing project to build something new. Many of these people bought their

Teka Childress is sorry she bought those golf clubs.

own homes just North of Cass and the old Pruitt–Igoe site. This group of local residents began meeting when they learned that the city was planning to build an industrial park that would displace many of them. To respond to this plan, they met for month after month to develop their own plan, which not only laid out block by block what they thought the neighborhood needed, but also proclaimed a vision that showed the value they had for the people here and the hope they had for their community.

They went to work to make this plan a reality. One of the early things they did was to form the Pruitt–Igoe Development Corporation (PIDC) to actually begin rehabbing homes for low and moderate–income people in the neighborhood. PIDC, whose board I am on, has thirteen rental units currently available in the neighborhood, along with two for–sale homes, and expects to have 22 rental units available and another for–sale home after completion of the Phoenix Project. Last year, when Mayor Freeman Bosley proposed a near–downtown golf course, which would have used half the land in our neighborhood and displaced some 300 families, the people were prepared to respond and gathered in large meetings with city officials, in which most voiced their strong opposition to the golf course. A benefit that came out of this struggle, (a struggle that seems to have ended with Mayor Bosley losing the position of Mayor), is that C.D.A. (the Community Development Agency) became more involved in planning with us. So, all things were in place to make the plan the neighborhood drew up a reality. But, as in many cases, in reality, things became more complicated. A new group in the neighborhood has formed, who are quite unhappy with the loss of the golf course and are concerned about low–income housing in our neighborhood, particularly its high concentration here. This group would like to see primarily single-family homes built for middle and upper-income people.

So, now as we are poised to meet with the city to do development planning, and for once to have a real role for neighborhood residents in planning, we have to find a way to agree among ourselves. In a way, the struggle between these two neighborhood groups represents in microcosm an important struggle in St. Louis and in cities across the country. We have to find a way to build strong mixed–income neighborhoods. We have to create a place where people of different economic groups can live and work together and help each other so that everyone's life is better. Until we do this, until we have economic development (the creation of good jobs) and community development (the creation of strong communities) going hand in hand with housing development, we will continue to have those with resources fleeing from the poor and moving away or we'll see the poor moved away. Either way we will not build the reign of God nor a strong city.



View of Karen House neighborhood. Pictorial Saint Louis, 1875, plate no. 52

Just Sprawl?

by D. Michael Goeke

The issue of urban sprawl has become a "front burner" issue in the St. Louis region due to a confluence of several factors. The first is the abandonment of the central city, which began after World War II, accelerated in the 1960s, and continues today. The second is the increasing isolation of the poor, who are more concentrated in the central cities and the inner-ring suburbs today than they were even 20 years ago. The third is the increasing use of open space, which has the dual effect of increasing pollution because we are decreasing the amount of green plants which absorb some of the pollutants given off by cars and other pollution sources, while at the same time making it more difficult to conserve our rural traditions on the edge of the developed areas.

The justice issues raised by these factors are manifold. First is the reallocation of resources to serve an increasingly dispersed population, resulting in an increasing cost to serve the same number of people. The second is the relocation of employment away from the urban core, so that more and more entry level jobs are located at a significant distance from the homes of the poor. The third is the lack of social cohesion, as the increasing concentration of the poor in our central cities makes it more difficult to provide anchors in these neighborhoods who can deal with the concentration of problems encountered by poor families. I will address each of these in turn, together with an alternative model which is both feasible and which results in a better societal outcome than that now being experienced.

First, let's define urban sprawl. I have seen a wonderful map, which could be developed on a time lapse, showing the extent of urbanized area. David Rusk has done the statistical work and has concluded the following using census data. From 1970 to 1990, the population of the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area (MSA), which until 1990 consisted of ten counties (five in Missouri - St. Louis City, St. Louis County, Jefferson, Franklin, St. Charles -and five in Illinois-St. Clair, Madison, Monroe, Jersey, and Pike), increased by 14%, and the amount of land which is considered urbanized increased by 125%, i.e., more than doubled. At the same time, the population in the City of St. Louis decreased from over 600,000 in 1970 to 396,000 in 1990. St. Louis was second in the nation in the rate of population decrease, exceeded only by Detroit. St. Louis County increased moderately, from 850,000 in 1970 to 990,000 in 1990, and the outlying counties increased dramatically. On the Illinois side, the overall population stayed roughly the same, but was redistributed from the river towns from Alton on the north

D. Michael Goeke is a long-time resident of the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood in St. Louis City.

to Dupo on the south to the bluff towns from Godfrey on the north to Columbia on the south.

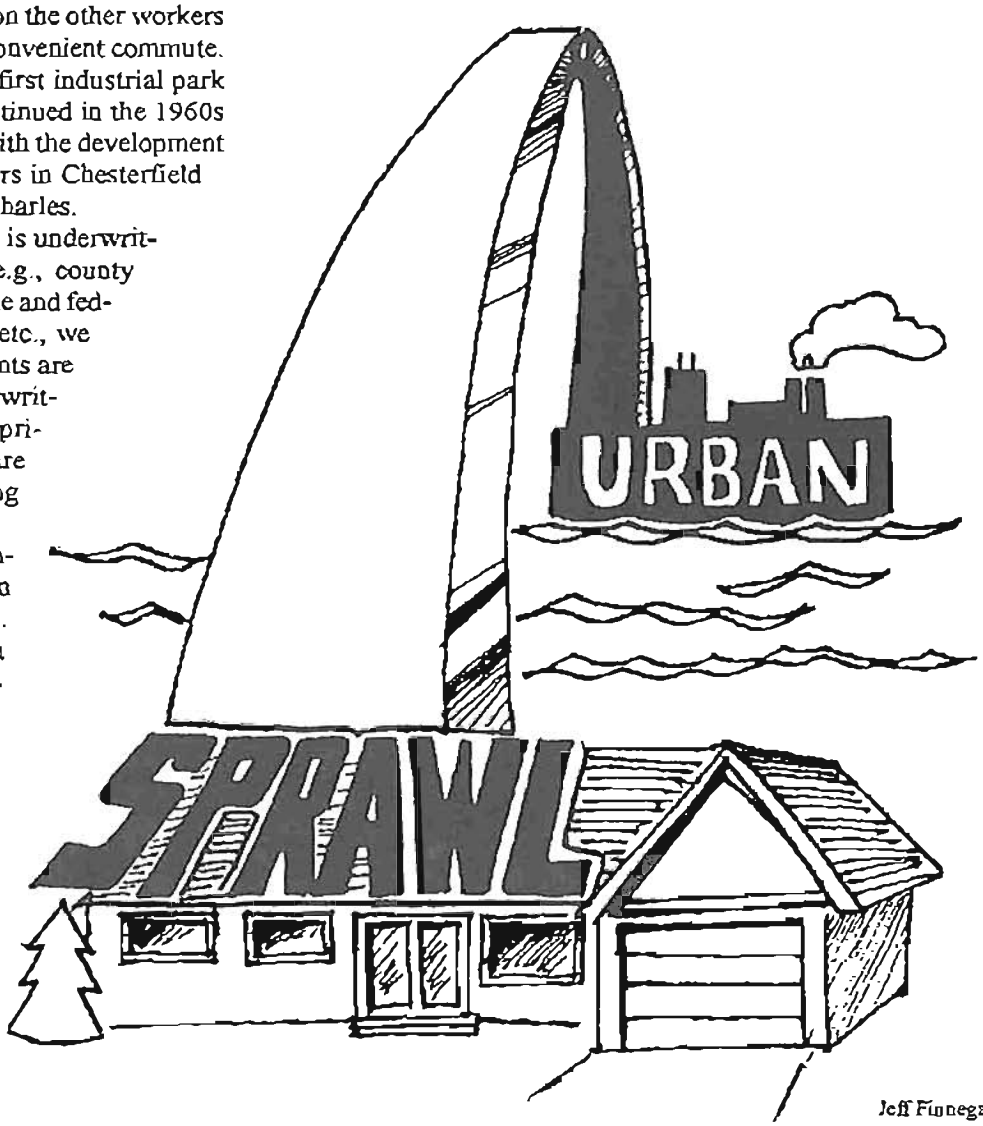
The rates of poverty concentration are equally dramatic. Suffice it to say that most of the abandonment of the central cities of the region was by the middle and upper classes, leaving a largely poor population in St. Louis, East St. Louis, Cahokia, Madison, and Alton. The reallocation of resources has not been quantified in dollar terms, nor do I want to dwell on the additional costs, other than to assert that they exist. Qualitatively, they are as follows: additional road costs to serve the increasingly dispersed population, as well as the costs of extending water and sewer lines while at the same time the older water and sewer lines of the central city need regular maintenance and replacement as they grow older; additional costs of building and equipping schools, hospitals, churches, and other "public" institutions, i.e., those used by a general population who band together to provide those services; the costs of building other public infrastructure for the private relocation of manufacturing, retail, and other employment generators which either follow the population, or in some cases induce the population shift because the CEO or regional manager lives at a distance from the existing location and decides to impose on the other workers so that he (usually) can have a more convenient commute. This happened in the 1950s with the first industrial park in St. Louis at Hanley Industrial, continued in the 1960s with Westport, and continues today with the development of office and other employment centers in Chesterfield and the Highway 40 corridor in St. Charles.

To the extent that this sprawl is underwritten by general population sources, e.g., county property taxes, state income taxes, state and federal highway tax funds, sales taxes, etc., we as central city and inner suburb residents are paying a portion of the cost of underwriting this sprawl. This is decreasing our private property values, insofar as we are property owners, as well as creating other problems not of our making.

One of these problems is the increasing concentration of the poor in central cities and inner-ring suburbs. David Rusk makes the analogy of a nuclear reactor. Middle-class and upper-class families in a neighborhood are the "control rods" of the neighborhood. Once a sufficiently low number of such controls are removed from a neighborhood, "meltdown" is much more likely to occur. The imposition of segregation in the first half of the 20th century resulted for the African American population in a mix of middle-class and poor families within the same circumscribed area. The weakening of segregation in the late 1960s and early 1970s allowed the members of the black middle-class to vote with their pocketbooks to remove themselves from the central city, just as their white counterparts had twenty years and more earlier. This is an

excellent illustration of the fact that urban sprawl is a class phenomenon, not a race issue. The fact that the remaining issues of racism make it more difficult to move poor blacks into affordable housing in the suburbs is the single biggest counterargument to this issue. As Rusk points out, the concentration of poor blacks in "poverty" neighborhoods is much greater than that of whites, primarily because it is easier for a poor white household to find housing in the suburbs than it is for a poor black family.

Sprawl also makes it more difficult for poor people to find employment. Even though downtown St. Louis is still the single largest employment center in the St. Louis region, entry level jobs are increasingly moving to the distant suburbs. Public transportation is virtually impossible when the dispersion of population over a wider area exponentially increases the area which must be served by public transportation, while at the same time decreasing



Jeff Finnegan

the ridership along a given corridor. As an example, one of my daughter's friends attends Nerinx Hall, a 15-minute drive from her house near Grand and I-44. If she uses public transportation, her trip increases to at least an hour and a half, because she must now take three different buses to get home. Bi-State recently discontinued a bus route which had made the trip about 45 minutes because it must cut back on suburban routes which have a limited ridership. Imagine what it would be like for a resident of north St. Louis to get beyond I-270 to a place of employment. So even though Chesterfield Mall is desperate for people to sell Christmas merchandise, a city resident cannot afford to get there to fill the job.

The third justice issue is the external costs that sprawl imposes on us. The exponential increase in miles traveled as our commutes increase, or as services we need as residents of the central city are removed to the suburbs (retail, theatres, cultural events, services, etc.) increases pollution. The decrease in green space will at some point result in an increase in costs of food, as fertile land is turned into parking lots. At a minimum, the loss of green space is a quality of life issue.

Different solutions result from different policies. The one being proposed by the Metropolitan Table, a consortium of the three Gamiliel (church-based community organizing) groups of CACI, C4, and CUCA, is to set urban growth boundaries, beyond which the development of new residential or commercial property would effectively be banned for a period of time. This would preserve green space, while encouraging the redevelopment of the central city. Another policy, that of distributing affordable housing throughout the metropolitan area, would address the concentration of poverty, and provide a better nexus between jobs and people to fill those jobs. A third alternative is to ensure that if someone wants to build a new development, all of the marginal costs associated with that development are paid by those wishing to undertake the development. All of these policies are being used in different parts of the country. For example, Portland and other cities in Oregon and Washington are using urban growth boundaries. Montgomery County in Maryland has an affordable housing requirement for any new development undertaken anywhere in the county, one of the wealthiest in the country. The State of Maryland has imposed a rule on its counties that any development beyond established boundaries not receive any county or state funding for the expansion of infrastructure to enable that development.

We can and should take these issues to our public officials and demand that they respond to these problems created by sprawl. I haven't addressed the issues of alternative uses of tax dollars or how Europe has dealt with these problems (successfully by fiat), but these can also be brought forward as ways to combat the issues and outcomes of sprawl. People cannot be prevented from using their freedom of movement to escape or otherwise improve their quality of life, as they perceive it. They can be required to pay the cost of it, and we must in justice see to it that they do.

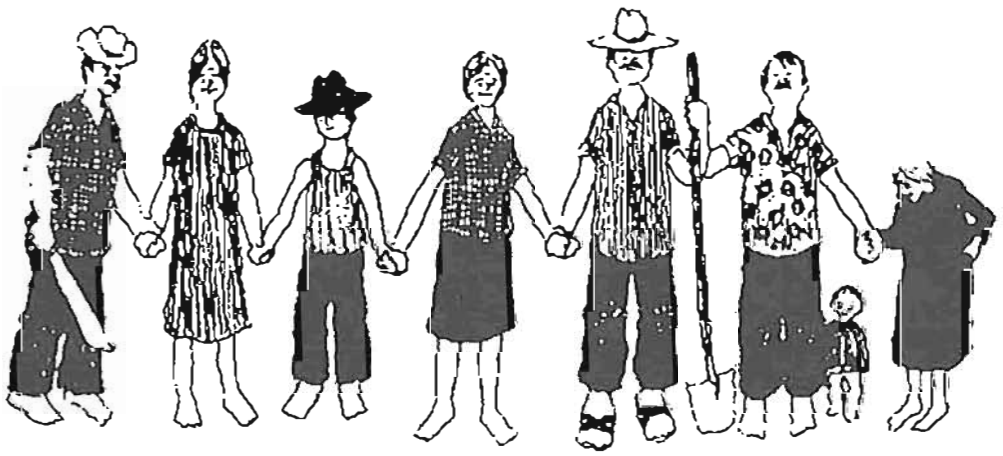
Immigrants

Reaping the Benefits

by Angie O'Gorman

You can count them if you don't believe me. The International Institute has a list. There are 112 different ethnic community associations in St. Louis, and the names read like a tour through the trouble spots of world history. Do you know what brought the Irish here? The Italian, German, Polish? Many readers will have firsthand knowledge of why the Vietnamese and Iraqi came. What about the Ethiopian, Mexican, Guatemalan, Haitian, Bosnian? Come to St. Louis and visit the world.

The presence of immigrants is not new to St. Louis. Stone and mortar 19th and early 20th century national churches still stand, witnessing to the immigrant history on which we are founded. But the trends of history are also seen in the fact that congregations now worshipping in these grand edifices are ethnically diverse. This ethnic diversification within churches is mirrored, to a large extent, in the secular sphere as well. In the late 20th century, St. Louis has become home to a wide variety of small to moderate-sized ethnic groups. This variety and size have helped us avoid the siege mentality experienced by some cities where large-scale immigration of one or two ethnic groups has occurred.



Culturally, everyone in St. Louis reaps the benefits. We have a growing diversity of food, fashion, art and business, as well as in friendship and faith. We gain a perspective on the world that is wider than our own narrow experience. Perhaps most importantly, we gain from the new energy that immigrants bring and that is so sorely needed in our city, which has been mired in greed on the one hand, lethargy on the other, and racism on both.

From the arrival of Pierre Laclede to the first bottle of St. Louis-brewed Budweiser beer; from the "Hill," Dogtown, Soulard, to the reemergence of South Grand as a viable shopping and residential area, immigrants have co-authored St. Louis.

The great secret about immigrants is that they are the survivors—the people who would not limit themselves to the economic or political oppression and limitations of their home country. They are people who still believe that struggle pays off. Many immigrants are from cultures where family still has authentic value, where community has not yet been replaced by competition, where business is an effort for mutual survival, not monopolistic greed. We have much to learn. Immigrants have much to teach.

Which is not to say that a culturally diverse society does not have its own particular problems or that immigrants do not contribute as well to the negative social and economic issues that confront us. There are now Vietnamese gangs in St. Louis as well as white and black gangs.

Angie O'Gorman is working on a book about her family, Post-its from the Edge.

Domestic violence in certain African and Mideastern immigrant communities is exacerbated by the surrounding secrecy that the communities encourage. Immigrant groups come with their own ethnic and racial blinders, their own cultural flaws. The human condition pervades immigrant as well as citizen communities.

That is precisely why we need each other. A multicultural society brings a fullness of perspective and human truth that can not be found in a mono-cultural society. It is precisely in such diversity that the weaknesses of one culture can be balanced by the strengths of another. But not without work. Diversity can also destroy. It can be manipulated for political and economic ends, for any number of personal and communal agendas. We have seen that happen on the national level during the last several years.

In my office at the Immigration Law Project, page 10 of the August 14, 1848 Dublin Times hangs on the wall. It reminds me daily that my great grandfather Richard had a price on his head when he fled Ireland; three hundred pounds to be exact. The Queen was after him for "treasonable activities." I am reminded that my own existence is rooted in the people who hid my great-grandfather in safe houses and ships' holds. Who gave him food and shelter until he could provide for himself. Who saw the person rather than the image of the "dirty Irish Mick" projected by the prejudice in vogue at the time.

For most of us, the immigrant in our past can teach us how to live with the immigrants in our present.

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Sharing the Burdens

by Patrick McCarthy

Even from her photograph, it was easy to tell that Nina Zeljkovic had been an exceptionally beautiful child. As I paged through the scrapbook of photos and mementos of the twelve-year-old girl shot dead by a Serbian sniper on the streets of the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, Nina's mother began to sob quietly. I could feel tears welling in my own eyes. Last month, I visited Nina's family--her mother, father, and sister—who, after learning that I had been in Sarajevo during the war and that I spoke a functional level of Bosnian, had invited me to their home in south St. Louis for coffee. I left their apartment with a sadness that stayed with me for a long time.

For four years, I have visited dozens and dozens of Bosnian refugee families in their homes. I remember each one. I listen to stories of loss, of betrayal, and separation—of lives which, collectively, represent the human reality of genocide in Europe at the end of the 20th century but which, individually, have gone mostly unnoticed and unconsidered. From this exiled group of about 8,000 Bosnians who now live in St. Louis, I have heard accounts of both unimaginable depravity and unparalleled dignity and humanity. Now people are starting over in a new place. Their time in St. Louis has provided a chance to begin healing from the physical and emotional wounds of the war.

I came to know this community in the course of organizing a scholarship for a Bosnian student at Saint Louis University, where I work as a librarian. I have helped locate additional scholarship help for other Bosnian students via the St. Louis Bosnian Student Project, a modest effort which consists mainly of a desk in my home but which has generated $100,000 of scholarship support for six Bosnian students along with raising another $20,000 of assistance for books, health insurance, and housing needs.

In addition to my work with students, I have organized a variety of efforts to provide direct material assistance to Bosnian refugees, including welcoming newly-arriving refugees at the airport, picking up and delivering donated furniture and household items, making calls to have utilities established, interpreting the myriad forms that accompany refugee resettlement, and a number of

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Patrick McCarthy is a long-time friend of the Catholic Worker from Philadelphia to St. Louis.

photo by Patrick McCarthy

other practical needs. I "squeeze" these efforts in between work and family—which roughly translates into the fact that I'm not home as often as I'd like to be and need to be, that I eat a lot of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in my car on my way to and from an endless number of meetings and home visits, and that our family phone is often tied up with incoming and outgoing calls from Bosnian families. My co-workers are no longer surprised to see me with numerous lunch companions whom they now recognize as Bosnian.

Perhaps a disclaimer is in order. I am very much an "ambassador without portfolio" to the Bosnian community here in St. Louis. As my name would suggest, I have no ethnic connection to the people of the former Yugoslavia. Nor do I have special credentials or background in international affairs or social work. I trace my involvement with Bosnians to an unsophisticated aversion to the needless suffering of others and a Catholic Worker-inspired belief that we are all called to respond to the needs of others in our midst.

Faced with a realization of genocide against Bosnia's Muslims and conditioned by years in Jesuit institutions of one kind or another, I was moved by the Bosnian war to "do something." Mainly my work has been comprised of rather unspectacular acts of human solidarity and friendship. Every other Thursday, for example, I drop my kids off at school and then drive to the home of Hatida Salihovic, and I take her to clean a house in our neighborhood. Hatida, a Bosnian refugee from the city of Srebrenica, arrived in St. Louis last summer. Hatida was seven months pregnant when the Bosnian Serb army attacked the UN-declared "safe area" of Srebrenica in July of 1995. Hatida's daughter, Dzenana, now two, has never seen her father, who, after saying a final goodbye to Hatida, was one of 8,000 Muslim men and boys slaughtered in mass executions in the days following the fall of Srebrenica. Despite indictment by the Hague Tribunal for War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia, those responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica remain at large in Bosnia, though their identities and whereabouts are well known.

One of the great temptations of our age is to view the world and its people and problems as complicated abstractions, remote from our lived daily experiences. I now know better. We are, in the end, one in the same, a fragile human family whose lives are intertwined and whose futures are bound up together, despite geographical distance, by a common humanity. In each encounter with Bosnians here, I am reminded of that fact.

As one who has had the privilege and burden to witness the human face of genocide, may I never forget.

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We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. 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

Indigent Health Care in Crisis

by Rebekah Hassler, FNP

Health care is in crisis for those who are poor in St. Louis. I recently gave a talk to some college students and asked them, "What would you do if you thought you broke your ankle?" They said such things as, "I'd go to the nearest ER to get an X-ray," "I'd see an orthopedic doctor," "Get a cast and crutches," "A prescription for pain medicine."

I told them of a phone call I received a few months ago while working in the Emergency Room at the then-Regional Hospital, the only public hospital in the metropolitan area, since closed. A man called to say he had injured his ankle a few days before. He had gone to the ER at a nearby hospital, got X- rays, and was told that his ankle was indeed broken. He received a splint and was told to follow up with the hospital's orthopedic doctor for a cast. He also received a prescription for pain medicine. When he called to make an appointment for the orthopedic follow-up, he learned that it would cost $400. He said he couldn't afford that. He was told to go to Regional.

He went the next day to the ER at Regional Hospital and received a referral to its orthopedic clinic. But when he called the clinic, they said they were no longer taking appointments because they were already overbooked. The ortho clinic at Regional was only open on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons. The clinic told him to go to the ER for a cast.

So he called the ER, and I spoke with him. He had spent three days trying to get his ankle treated, still had no cast on his fracture and was in pain because he couldn't afford to fill his prescription. By now his ankle was quite swollen, and we could not cast it for him without seeing the extent of the swelling first. He was quite frustrated and did not want to take a bus over if we were not going to be able to put a cast on him. I finally reached a social worker who was able get him an appointment at the ortho clinic.

This man had no health insurance. Another man broke his nose and had to wait a week to get into the ENT clinic. By the time he was seen, his fractured nose was set. I am sure that these are not isolated incidents. There are many cases similar to his. For him and for many others, health care is treated as a commodity. We don't have a right to it—it's about profitability. For someone without health insurance, there is no hospital by mission or by law that guarantees access to health care, except in the event of a life-threatening emergency. And in that case, hospitals are only required to stabilize patients before referring them elsewhere.

Approximately 14-17% of Missourians have no health insurance. More than 200,000 people in the St. Louis area are without health insurance. About 10,000 people are homeless in St. Louis; roughly 30% live below the poverty level, which is $13,300 for a family of 3 and $21,400 for a family of 6.

When Regional Hospital closed in June of last year, St. Louis lost its last hospital with a mission to serve anyone who came to its door, without regard for ability to pay. That is why the man mentioned above had such difficulty getting his ankle cared for. Homer G. Phillips (City Hospital #2), a public hospital for African-Americans, closed in 1979. City Hospital #1 was closed in 1985, which marked the end of a true public hospital in St. Louis. When St. Louis Regional Medical Center was created in 1985, it was a collaboration between the city and county for the specific purpose of caring for the medically indigent when the public hospitals closed. It was a private

Rebekah Hassler, a family nurse practitioner at Grace Hill's clinics, makes healthcare more accessible to Spanish-speaking immigrants in St. Louis.

Why I Love Living in the City of St. Louis

We solicited a few responses to this theme from friends in the city and and some recent immigrants. Here's what they have to say.

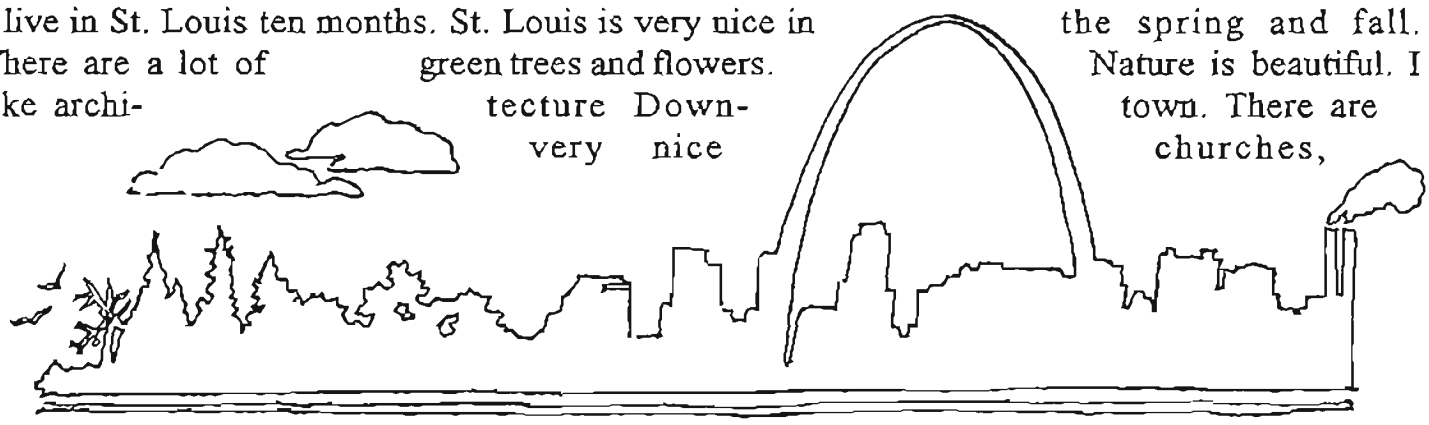
I arrived in the United States in 1995. Since then I have been living in St. Louis. I love this city and what I like most are the movie theaters, shopping, museum, and the restaurants. --Lidia M. Gollahan, Brazil

One of the things I love about St. Louis is the English Woodland Garden at the Missouri Botanical Garden. It seems very serene even though surrounded by the sounds of the city. Also high on the list is Dressel's Restaurant. The table in the window is a good place to people watch. --Carol Giles, Central West End

Nature is excellent in St. Louis. I like a fall in St. Louis. I like Art Museum here. The Art Museum is a wonderful place to spend a weekend. I like St. Louis on holidays. --Brondz Nadja, Russia

I'm often asked why I live in the city. I live here because it's a great place to be. I love my neighborhood. It's filled with people committed to the ideal that a community made up of men, women and children of different backgrounds can succeed. My children witness good people working hard to serve our city, from the viola player who bikes home from Powell Hall to the nurse who returns home late at night after her shift in a local emergency room. These are people who in the course of their daily lives are responding to the "problems" of city living with hope and determination. Mary Mitchell, Shaw Neighborhood

I live in St. Louis ten months. St. Louis is very nice in the spring and fall. There are a lot of green trees and flowers. Nature is beautiful. I like architecture Downtown. There are very nice churches,



houses, Symphony Hall, very interesting museums and art galleries. I like antique furniture and I have met here very benevolent people. They help me study English language and work. I miss my country, Russia. There live my mother and my relations, but I try to find interesting and beautiful, so I like St. Louis. --Zinoviy Rukhman, Russia

Instructed to describe my experience of city dwelling in 25 words or less, one word jumps out: Life! Specifically, human life, in all its varied manifestations. Not the airbrushed life of advertisement and TV, but the struggling, rushing, confusing life which serves as a background for people trying to survive while still exhibiting dignity and love. I am thankful that raising my children in a diverse city neighborhood has taught them not to be afraid of life. --Trish Curtis, Forest Park Southeast

St. Louis is the only American city that I have lived in since I first came here. Everything looked very strange to me. There were a lot of big buildings around me. There were many different streets as well as high- ways. I didn't know anything about St. Louis be- fore I came here. This city is very nice. I visited St. Louis Art Museum and the St. Louis Zoo. I have become familiar with Soulard Market and its fresh food. I have eaten in wonderful restau- rants. Now I know that St. Louis is as interest- ing as Saigon. Now it seems as charming and friendly to me. I have many opportu- nities to achieve my goals here. I have a chance to go to college and work in US companies. I'm now a full-time worker and a part time college student. I'm very happy with my life. --Hinh Thuy Thi Tran, Vietnam

Why do I continue to live in [a city] neighborhood? This is a question I am often asked, so the answer is one I have pondered on many occasions. In short, I am drawn by the location near my work, the amenities such as Forest Park, the Botanical Gardens, and other nearby attractions, and the ability to get to the airport via Metro Link with few hassles. However, the most important reason is that I want to witness to the fact that living among people who are not just like me is not only possible, but is fulfilling. I am not afraid of the people around me, and they in turn treat me with respect for the most part, and when not with respect, at least with tolerance. My children have a better idea of what it is to live among people who have less, meaning less respect, less resources, and less likelihood of having their lives turn around than they have. They have the ability to move in a greater circle without unreasonable fear, but with the respect of their surroundings. They also know they should be grateful for what they have, and what it means to live simply. --Mike Goeke, Forest Park Southeast +

hospital with a public mission. When it was created, Regional had ten-year contracts with both the city and the county governments which agreed to pay the difference between what Regional spent caring for their uninsured patients and what they collected from other sources (public and private). Until 1993, the city and county provided between $15 and $35 million to cover operating losses. After 1993, local governments stopped subsidies to indigent and uninsured care, relying instead on state and federal funds. In 1995 federal disproportionate-share hospital funds were cut by one-third, thus Regional lost important state and federal subsidies.

Another occurrence in 1995 that brought about the fall of Regional Hospital was the establishment of the MC+ program, which created managed care for most people receiving Medicaid in Missouri. Regional lost many of its former patients to other hospitals that were suddenly interested in providing care under this financial arrangement. As most of you know, Medicaid is a government-subsidized insurance only for poor women with dependent children, or for persons with disabilities. People who are working part-time with no benefits do not qualify. With MC+, providers are paid a flat rate for each person enrolled, and people with disabilities are not eligible. In contrast, Medicaid paid on the basis of services provided. Under the MC+ flat rate policy, hospitals have an incentive not only to recruit people into their program, but to recruit portions of the population who are less likely to need or use medical care. These include people who are healthy or those who live far from the hospital with limited access to transportation. The program is supposed to be more efficient, but has brought problems as well. In some cases, the MC+ plan has the positive effect of making health care easier for some to get, since hospitals now vy for members in their plan. However, many people, when they signed up, did not understand what they were choosing. Others chose while they were in a shelter and now live nowhere near their original clinic. MC+ gives people a plastic card but does not solve many of the problems that prevent access to health care.

Another factor that brought about the demise of Regional Health Center was that after MC+, Washington University Medical School felt the volume of patients was too low for students to learn enough, so they pulled out. Closing Regional's Labor and Delivery department was the beginning of the end. In the summer of 1997, with an unpaid bill of $9 million from the city and $2 million from the county, Regional's Board of Directors closed inpatient services (except for ten beds that keep it eligible for a hospital license). The Emergency Room, specialty clinics with limited services, such as the orthopedic clinic, and four outlying clinics remain open.

On August 17, St. Louis ConnectCare took over operating what was left of Regional Hospital. ConnectCare is the city's proposed solution to the health care crisis. It is an entity incorporated by three city employees, seems wholly unprepared to assume the monumental task, and appears to be doing so without a contract with the City. A Board of Directors has formed, with St. Louis Mayor Harmon as chairperson.

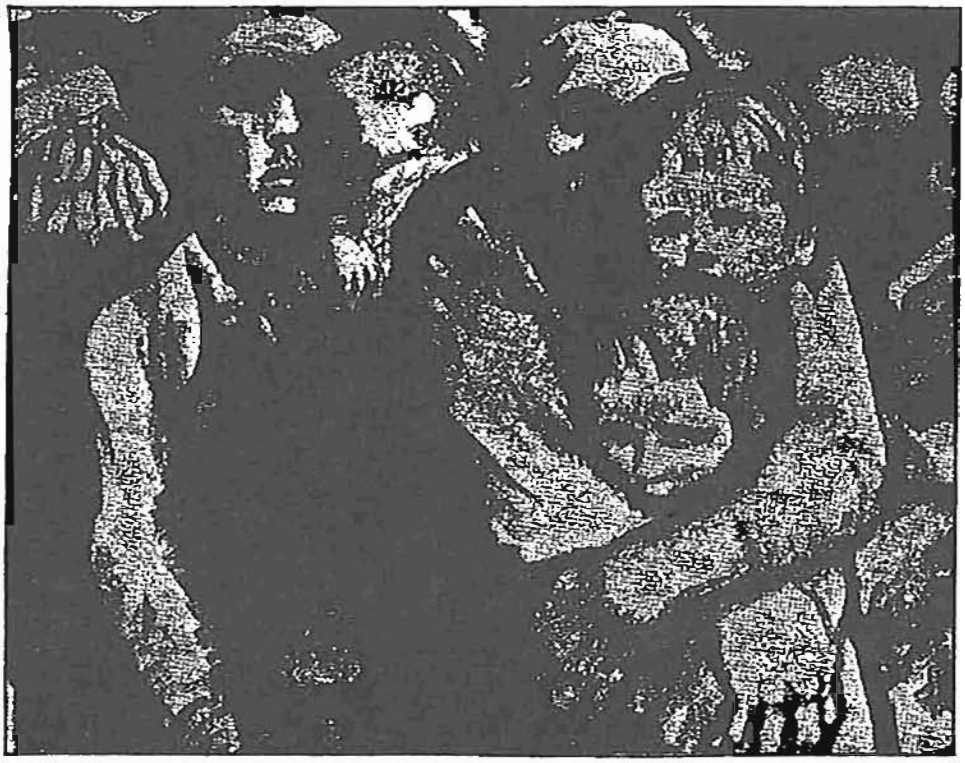
A consortium of four hospital systems is part of a voucher system in an effort to provide hospitalization to those who come through ConnectCare's system. These hospitals—including St. Louis University, Barnes-Jewish, St. John's Mercy, St. Mary's, Deaconess, Lutheran, Childrens' and Cardinal Glennon—have signed no contracts to provide health care for all regardless of ability to pay. These hospitals "take turns" admitting patients who show up at ConnectCare's ER or clinics needing hospitalization.

People talk the voucher system as if it's as easy to obtain a voucher as asking for it. A recent editorial in the St. Louis Post Dispatch stated that the problem with the voucher system is simply that not everyone knows about it. But the truth is that there are major problems with the voucher system, including:

1. There is no centralized place for medical records.

2. There is no continuity of care. A patient may be sent to St. John's for a stroke and the next time could be sent to Barnes-Jewish.

3. There are difficulties in obtaining medications. Patients are unable to afford prescriptions upon discharge



from these hospitals. They often have to bring them to ConnectCare, where they can be filled for $7.00 per prescription.

4. Though the patient is transported to the receiving hospital via ambulance, there is no transportation for the family or for the return home. This is a serious problem when a city resident is referred to a hospital far out in the county.

5. There is no one person responsible for the patient's care.

6. The threshold for admitting patients has been raised. It is possible for the doctor at ConnectCare to see a patient and decide to admit them, only to have the hospitals's MD not think the patient needs to be admitted and refuse.

7. There is no easy way to schedule clinic patients for diagnostic testing, especially from other than ConnectCare clinics.

Along with the loss of public hospitals, health care for the poor is seriously affected by a for-profit health system entering the St. Louis market. Several hospitals in St. Louis are now owned and operated by Tenet, a for-profit health care system. St. Louis University is receiving criticism both from the Catholic hierarchy and community groups for the proposed sale of its medical school to Tenet. The bottom line for a for-profit hospital is profit for the stockholders. Tenet says that it will treat the poor, but in some cases this may mean for a full bill and 15% interest. The poor may get the surgery they need, but their credit will be ruined, and that will prevent them from obtaining housing and other basic human needs. Can a hospital's bottom-line be to make a profit and still care for those who can't pay? Minimally, we need an independent ombudsman to track the care of these patients to assure that they are getting comprehensive, quality care. What would be even better is a safety-net hospital, such as Regional, or a single-payer system, i.e., universal health care.

St. Louis ConnectCare spent more than $8 million in three months, not including whatever money is being spent to pay the hospitals to take the indigent patients; and ConnectCare's doctors don't seem to be getting paid, which causes them a great problem. Regional asked the city for $9 million to keep the whole system open. Thus, it seems there was money available to keep Regional open—there just wasn't the political will.

We can and must do better. We need to reconsider our priorities and ensure that health care is no longer a commodity but available to all. ✚

Charity *and* Justice in the St. Louis Catholic Church

by Mary Dutcher

Past

The church does not look very different from ordinary people, a wise friend noted, when it comes to the dynamic between charity and justice. The St. Louis church has a long tradition of charitable institutions and a plethora of service-oriented religious orders. It would be hard to find a diocese that has done much better at charity, Vincent de Paul being, along with Philippine Duschesne, one of the two diocesan patron saints. St. Louis was the first diocese to found Vincent de Paul societies in this country, an act enshrined in a mosaic on the ceiling of the new cathedral.

It is easier to do charity than justice, though works of justice prevent the need for charity. Justice is more complicated and controversial. As Dom Helder Camara, former archbishop of Recife, Brazil, put it (paraphrase), "When I give people fish to eat, they call me a saint. When I ask why the people cannot get fish to eat, they call me a Communist." Dorothy Day put it more graphically and perhaps controversially, "Our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy, rotten system." Although she was speaking of the plight of the farm workers in California nearly thirty years ago, her observation is as true now and applies as well to the more general situation of the poor.

There is not the somewhat sinful "feel good" experience doing justice that often accompanies the performance of works of charity. I call it sinful because the good feeling occasioned by the gratitude of charity's recipient is un-Christ-like, rooted as it is in the terrible division that charity is intended to heal. So perhaps the moral antidote to this sinful "feel good" experience—both personally and institutionally—is to work for justice, with people acting on their own behalf in a manner that promotes self-respect instead of the degradation that too often accompanies the experience of receiving charity. As St. Vincent de Paul stated, "We should ask forgiveness from the poor for the bread we give them."

Sometimes the analogy is made that acts of charity are like band-aids. My wise friend disagrees and states that acts of charity are more like the emergency room, necessary and of last resort. Also needed are things such as brain surgery and preventative medicine: acts of justice.

"...the Church will not hesitate to take up the cause of the poor and to become the voice of those who are not listened to when they speak up, not to demand charity, but to ask for justice."

-Pope John Paul II

Historically, the church in St. Louis can take some pride in the acts of justice that occurred here. Most famous, and also enshrined in a mosaic on the ceiling of the new cathedral, was the desegregation of the parochial schools that occurred in 1947. By founding the Archdiocesan Human Rights Commission, Cardinal Ritter institutionalized a commitment to social justice and gave courage to others to work for civil rights and social justice. The names of Monsignor John Shocklee and Richard

Mary Dutcher just hit the half-century mark. Congratulations!

J. Childress (father of Teka), come immediately to mind. Both marched at Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Human Rights Commission still sponsors a Martin Luther King Mass every January.

Other notable Catholic lay voices for justice include Charles Vatterot, who was instrumental in the foundation of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, now known as the National Conference. Anne and Bolen Carter were part of the Catholic Worker community that existed here in the 1940's, then lived in Belize and East St. Louis for some years before retiring to Laclede Town and helping to found Karen House. Joe Wiley, among his myriad of justice activities, mentored St. Louis U. High grad Henry Hampton, producer of "Eyes on the Prize," the award-winning public television series on the Civil Rights movement. Harry Cargas, after doing a stint of the Queen's Work, authored books that raised Christian consciousness about the Holocaust (and was instrumental in getting Elie Wiesel to attend the 1985 Sanctuary movement conference in Arizona, where he made the now famous statement, "No human being is illegal." The Reagan Administration, not pleased with Harry, did not reappoint him to his position on the National Holocaust Memorial Council. But the Spirit of Justice had the last laugh. Appointed in Harry's place was Ivan Boesky, who had to resign in short order after being indicted on stock fraud charges.)

Just as with the works of charity, the religious orders headquartered in St. Louis provided vibrant voices for justice: the Jesuits' Markoe brothers, Claude Heithaus and Daniel Lord come to mind, as do Antona Ebo of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary and Pat Barrett of the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

I learned in researching this article another little known St. Louis justice *coup*: we are home to Local 1 of the Electrical Workers Union, just as we established, charity-wise, "Local 1" of the Vincent de Paul Societies nationally. German and Irish Catholic immigrants were among those founding the Electrical Workers Union.

So the church in St. Louis has good precedents, both in charity and justice work.

Present

The Catholic population has grown and continues to grow more wealthy and suburban. Indications of this phenomenon are the many beautiful church buildings in the city, constructed by immigrants and their descendants, that have been destroyed or sold. Although there are beautiful exceptions, such as "The Grand Endeavor" between St. Anselm parish in west county and Holy Trinity parish in the near north city, the suburban Catholic population as a whole seems distanced from the poor in the city. Because St. Louis is such a culturally Catholic city, how Catholics have acted has had more of an influence than it otherwise would have. Mary Ann McGivern concludes in her article later in this issue that, like thousands of Catholics before them, the poor—out of necessity rather than choice—must flee the city if they hope to survive, although Teka Childress in her article holds forth the dream of economically and racially diverse neighborhoods in the city.

The church, through such organizations as Catholic Charities and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, continues the tradition of a strong commitment to acts of charity. But charity is not enough, and the leadership of Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul are quite familiar with the systemic nature of the problems their organizations attempt to address. The leadership of both organizations was, as was the leadership of the Pro-Life Office, actively involved in the archdiocesan task force that addressed the issues of welfare "reform" when that legislation was pending.

The episcopal leadership seems willing to offer sustained and systemic leadership in selected justice issues, most prominently on the issue of legalized abortion, although they have stepped forward in a less systemic fashion on the death penalty, violence, welfare reform, and racism. The issue of legalized abortion, however, is perceived to be the foundational and preeminent justice issue in the diocese. There is a separate Pro-Life Office to address this justice issue alone, most other justice issues being left to the Human Rights Office. Issues such as racism, labor rights (both domestic and global), arms control and disarmament, environmental concerns, peace, immigration, poverty legislation, development, capital punishment, women's concerns and virtually any other justice issue conceivable are the province of the Human Rights Office. It would be interesting to compare the budgets of the two offices to see whether the Human Rights Office receives money equivalent by a factor to the greater number of social justice issues it is charged to address. It would also be interesting to look at a pie chart of the diocesan budget as a whole and compare the money spent on various categories, such as administration and property maintenance versus charity and justice works.

Doing justice is difficult—complicated and controversial, as was noted above—whether personally or organizationally. And the "Further, freer" principle seems to apply, whether personally or organizationally. This principle, for those unfamiliar with it, is close kin to the "Do as I say, not as I do" principle. Essentially, the "Further, freer" principle means that it is easier to perceive, pronounce and do justice work on distant situations than on those closer to home. Personally, for example, I may conclude that the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" and

the beatitude enjoining us to be peacemakers preclude my involvement in war. Do I pay federal income taxes? Do I pay the federal excise tax on my phone bill? If so, I am involved in war; and I can no longer be so blithely critical of the "good Germans" who went along with the Holocaust.

Organizationally, the case of the Catholic elementary school teachers' efforts to organize is probably the clearest example of "Further, freer," in this diocese. There is clear church social teaching about the rights of workers to a living wage and to the right to organize and form unions to better their working conditions. But it seems difficult to apply the teaching to this particular situation, placed as it is, right on the church's doorstep. There is no mention of teachers' salaries in the endowment campaign that is presently underway, for example. But if we were to pay them a living wage, it would cost much, much more than now; and it would require strategic economic planning that needs to begin immediately.

Just as doing charity has its sinful "feel good" as a moral danger, the moral pitfall of justice work is self-righteousness. The temptation to phariseeism is almost overwhelming when a cause is particularly good, speaking from my own personal experience. My wise friend notes that doing acts of charity many be the moral antidote to the righteousness pitfall for justice workers, just as doing justice work may be the moral antidote to charity's "feel good" pitfall. We probably need to do both charity and justice in complement, both personally and as church.

Models of hope in our local church who embody this for me include our very own Teka Childress, Jim and Kathy McGinnis of the Institute for Peace and Justice, Virginia Nesmith of the United Farm Workers, Maureen Filter of Project Respond, Marilyn Lorenz of the Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America, Bill Ramsey of the Human Rights Action Service—not to mention our dearly departed Mev Puleo and her husband, our very own Mark Chmiel, who has been active in solidarity on behalf of both East Timor and Brazil. I have focused on women and left out many names because otherwise the rest of this article would be a list of such people. ("Our very own" refers to being part of the group that puts out The Round Table.)

Another relatively contemporary source of hope for me was the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, with its national center located here in St. Louis and with significant church participation, both personally and organizationally. It was probably the most effective peace education campaign of the century—dare I say history? Whenever I am tempted to despair about the state of justice work—in many ways, the conditions we've been struggling about seem worse than when we started—I think to myself, "At least we no longer live under the threat of a nuclear holocaust. At least we still exist."

But to be truthful, I must add that the federal government still budgets obscene (given the cuts in welfare and health and human services budgets) amounts of money for research, development and production of nuclear weapons. Further, President Clinton's recent statement that the United States government would not hesitate to strike first with nuclear weapons against chemical and biological weapons is quite alarming and not at all reassuring about the prospects of having successfully avoided a human holocaust, whether nuclear, chemical or biological.

In many ways, my discernment of the signs of the times is that we are in a new moment in social justice work. The globalization of the economy, however, which is one of the major signs and which seems to be increasing the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" both domestically and internationally, reminds me that the wisdom of Paul VI will always remain true, whatever the situation: "If you want peace, work for justice."

Future

New moments inevitably cause me to think of the future. One of the heartening considerations in that regard is to think of the number of young people who now have service projects as a required or voluntary part of their Catholic education, as well as the number of young people who have traveled to places such as Haiti or Honduras as part of their education. Such experiences were not part of my formal education, all 21 Catholic years of it. I am hopeful these young adults, as they mature and grapple with the new moment we face, will be better prepared and grounded in social justice theory and practice.

Too, when one considers the relatively brief time that has passed since the Church began to enunciate a contemporary social teaching—I would date it to the encyclical Rerun Novarum in the late nineteenth century—we are barely toddlers in this endeavor, historically speaking. Imagine how much better we are going to be in, say, fifty or five hundred years, as the young people are routinely exposed and educated about the church's social teaching and more and more experience accumulates upon which to reflect and improve. Ultimately, though, we probably need most to remember that the salvation of human history is in God's hands. ✚

From Abroad

(We thought this letter quite appropriate for our "From Abroad" feature section. To receive the fuller written description mentioned in the letter, contact us.)

2821 25th Ave.
Oakland, CA 94601
(510) 463-6211
November 2, 1997

Dear CW editor and friends,

I am Rey Lopez, a Filipino American and former Catholic Worker at St. Francis Catholic Worker house in Chicago. I am also a member of the Christian Peacemaker Reserve Corps in Chicago.

For the last three years, I have been advocating for the rights of foreign seafarers in major U.S. ports, such as Long Beach, San Pedro, San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, Tacoma and Seattle. After three years of setting up a support network for foreign seafarers in need in American ports, I finally settled down in Oakland, California, to start a house of advocacy and hospitality for international seafarers in the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement.

I will be extending my ministry to the Port of Manila in late 1998 by opening what may be the first Catholic Worker house in Pasay City, Metro Manila, a house of advocacy and hospitality for foreign seafarers in need in the Port of Manila, Philippines.

In the early days of the Catholic Worker movement in New York City, a great number of the first guests, workers, and volunteers were seafarers. The maritime industry has radically changed, and the exploitation of seafarers has worsened. Around 85 percent of seafarers in American Ports are foreign seafarers from other shores, mostly people of color from Third World countries. Today, most ships fly the flag of convenience, and foreign seafarers are treated like modern slaves on board these floating sweatshops.

There is an urgent need for advocacy and hospitality for these foreign seafarers when they are in need in American ports. Enclosed is the call paper of my ministry, which sums up the situation of international seafarers today. Please share this material with any individual or organization who may be supportive of the ministry. Call me if you have any questions.

There is an urgent need for the American public to be informed what is happening on these floating sweatshops of the seven seas.

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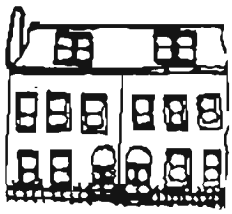

From Little House

by Mary Ann McGivern, SL

In the last few months I've come to some grim conclusions. I don't think any longer that the burden of the poor in the inner city of St. Louis can be lifted. I don't believe people of good will can accomplish justice here. We can lighten the load of the destitute a little by our works of charity—but our very good works make misery tolerable and permit continued exposure to lead paint, crack drive-by shootings, and all the rest of the brutalities of structural poverty. I fear that those of us with enough compassion to read and write in this journal are enabling or even becoming complicit in the inevitable deterioration of the lives of the poor we serve.

Things are too bad in the city. There are no jobs here. The schools are dreadful. The health care system is decaying. So are the houses, despite the spate of new construction around the Worker. Drive the seven miles along Martin Luther King from Rock Hill to Jefferson. The last time I counted, all the blocks but four had at least one boarded-up house or storefront.

It's different from New York, where the destitute and billionaires live together on a small island. In St. Louis, the poor have been placed on their own island, where no one with a decent job need ever pass them by. The city has become the depository for the poor, and the depositors have walked away.

For two decades, members and supporters of the broad Catholic Worker community—all of us who work at the houses, contribute money and goods, and read and write in this journal—have argued, demonstrated, prayed and strategized for decent health care, housing, jobs and schools. Many have moved into the city to live out our common vision of justice. Indeed, the Kopavi and St. Cronan communities predate Karen House by a decade. Many volunteers have come to us with battle scars already from waging the good fight. Others learned at this department of the Catholic Worker University and then went on to others battlefields. We all understand and actively oppose structural violence. Now I'm beginning to think it is time for us to say we failed here and do something different.

The something else I propose is to help the poor move out. Say to them, "Run for your lives." Or else we will surely be complicit in their destruction.

Where can they run to? St. Charles, Franklin County, Collinsville, or Madison, Wisconsin. Anywhere we can help them find a house, a job, and a good school system. What will happen to the land and houses and schools they leave behind? Probably speculators will come in and invest and make the inner city desert bloom—but it won't happen while the poor live here.

My thinking has been stimulated by Mark Chmiel's series at the Washington University Newman Center on Elie Wiesel and Noam Chomsky, by a new review of Hannah Arendt's Eichman in Jerusalem—A Report on the Banality of Evil, and by remembering a wonderful account of a stand against evil, Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, about Huguenot resistance in Vichy France. I've pondered the evils that hang over my neighbors, prayed, wept a little, and concluded that it's time to help people move out. Things are too terrible here.

I don't think we should close Karen House or the Little House. But we should think of them as way stations, pockets of resistance, underground railway entry points, exits from the neighborhood.

This is strong stuff; but the letters in the newspaper from St. Charles residents blaming the poor in the inner city for living here was the penultimate straw that broke my back. If it's the fault of the poor for living here, then the poor should get out and we should help them. The final straw was when the school board told the state legislature how much money the schools in the city would need if busing ended—$750 million to build schools for the former busees, raise salaries, improve curriculum, and repair the neglected schools of the children who never got to go to a county or a magnet school. Politicians chided the school board angrily for telling the truth. That's when I knew it's time to help the poor escape.

Is there a house for sale on your block in the county (any county)? Can we raise enough interest-free loans to buy it and rent it to a Karen House resident? Can we buy a second house? A third house? We are not HUD. We can't find housing for ten thousand people. But twenty families can help one family escape and adjust to a new life.

And we can shout, with all our might: RUN FOR YOUR LIVES! ✚

Mary Ann McGivern, SL, will host a series of salons to invent jokes about the military budget and the foreign arms trade for material for an article. If you'd like to engage in banter with like-minded peaceniks, give her a call.

From Karen House

by Celestia Gaudreault

As I ruminate over what, with my two months' perspective, I should write about, "From Karen House," my mind keeps playing with the titles of two songs. The first is Dan Schulte's beautiful "Here I Am Lord." The second is the unforgettable, (except for its author and how he got to his unique relationship), "I'm my own Grandpa." The first title fits because, well, here I am at Karen House, a very special house of hospitality, of which I had never heard until last year at this time. I'm truly grateful to God for directing me here through my oldest daughter, Monique, of Arnold, and Bishop Edward O'Donnell of Lafayette, Louisiana (formerly of St.Louis). The second song is evocative of my situation as well, because though I can't really claim to be my own grandma, still I fill a dual role of grandma (age–wise at 66) and baby (duration–wise) in this household.

The rest of the community ranges from college sophomore, Mary, through thirty–somethings Tim, Becky and Diane, to Mitch and Teka, who have bravely endured the trauma of turning forty. They have all accepted me with a great deal of warmth, encouragement and a grand sigh of relief when I professed that I feel no compulsion to mother them. How could one attempt to mother a bunch of Catholic Worker anarchists, anyway? I'm grateful to Mary Ann of the Little House, who enticed me to Holy Trinity, a wonderful, active, racially integrated parish created from several formerly ethnic parishes in close proximity. I'm now happy to call it my parish home.

I experience Karen House as a true microcosm. All the paradoxes, dilemmas, joys, sorrows, generosity, selfishness, satisfaction, and aggravation that one finds in the world at large can be found condensed within these once stately, vintage-1904 convent walls. In their present permutation, these walls seem to creak in their efforts to contain childrens' and sometimes adults' venting at peak decibel levels of pent-up energies and frustrations. How does one go about convincing a six-year-old, full of indignation and in full voice ("He hit me first"), that this is a nonviolent household and that retaliation in kind is not the way to go? For that matter, when, occasionally, someone who comes to our door for sandwiches, adamantly rejects bologna or peanut butter and jelly and demands ham and cheese, how do I remember, in time to avoid giving a sour response, Dorothy Day's favorite quote from St. Vincent de Paul. He said, "We should ask forgiveness from the poor for the bread we give them." It is easier to remember quotes like that and Jesus' admonition that after having rendered conscientious service, one should say to oneself, "I am an unprofitable servant; I have done only that which I ought," during prayer times than when the occasion demands such mindfulness.

A question that comes to mind: By what spiritual/psychological radar can one dependably detect the elusive line between serving and unhealthy enabling? Other questions surface as I look beyond the walls of Karen House. How do I feel about the little clusters of pretty, middle-income houses that are springing up nearby? Great to have new life breathed into this old boarded-up, falling-down part of town! But what will happen to our many neighbors who can't afford this type of housing? Will they be pushed out? If so, where could they go? The many closed churches, like St. Liborius next door, whose architecture qualify them for the national register of historic places, remind me of C.S. Lewis' vision of the after–life in The Great Divorce. In it, he saw the things of the spirit as very bright and solid, whereas all that we consider most solid appeared to be diaphanous and ghostly. How solid an investment, after all, are bricks and mortar, for us who are church, when less than a century after their blessing, they have become gorgeous white elephants? Would Jesus, perhaps, be better served in home and store–front gatherings, where most of the dollars collected could go to sustain those for whom "his heart was filled with pity"? Mk 8:2

My sense of paradox and questioning unexhausted, I'll close with a meditation song about the greatest paradox of all.

Yahweh, the Eternal,
Yahweh, you simply are.
All transcendent, Life and knowing
The universe, spark of your power.
Emmanuel, God is with us
You chose to make a home on earth
Always God, but now so human,
for a woman gave you birth.
Yahweh, yet Emmanuel,
What mystery your names express!
Infused completely with your spirit,
Jesus, Savior we confess.
Yahweh———Emmanuel ✚

—Celestia Gaudreault

Celestia Gaudreault brings much to Karen House including Peanut, her little dog.

From our Mailbag

These letters are in response to the Spring 1997 Round Table issue on Beauty.

Dear Round Table,

Many thanks for the Spring issue of the Round Table—beautiful as well as thought provoking. The piece on "Dorothy Day's Aesthetic" and the editor's note to Cardenal's article cut through the hagiographic "b.s." that now plagues Dorothy's memory.

Peace,
Brian Terrell

Dear Round Table,

...As Catholic Workers, we must take seriously the preferential option for the poor, and like Dorothy Day, we must support the positive achievements of progressive regimes, but we must never give our full support to any State which uses violence to achieve its ends. Dorothy Day lauded Castro's accomplishments in Cuba, but she did not give a carte blanche to communism.

While in Nicaragua I saw many posters and books commissioned by or about Ernesto Cardenal and his community in Solentiname. Numerous artworks depicted Cardenal celebrating mass with a Sandinista emblem and gun on the altar. No matter how well intentioned I believe such combinations are blasphemous. Governments of every stripe love to compare their fallen soldiers to Christ but Catholic Workers should know this is a lie. Christ died. Christ did not kill. Cardenal was only a "guide and teacher" for the Sandanista revolution but also a very naive apologist.

Your article contained a footnote saying, "Dorothy Day was a major advocate for Augusto Cesar Sandino." I would appreciate it if the source for this statement could be given in your next issue. Dorothy had a long-standing admiration for and friendship with Thomas Merton who was Cardenal's Trappist novice master until they broke with each other over nonviolence. It's hard for me to believe that Dorothy Day would have been uncritical of Cardenal and his "poetic" soldiers of revolution...I pray that the Catholic Worker movement will be a voice of absolute clarity for nonviolence in every situation. The world needs it.

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

Editors respond:

Dorothy's own words are the source about her advocacy for Augusto Cesar Sandino: "The work that we were engaged in was to publicize and raise funds for General Sandino, who was resisting American aggression in Nicaragua...the work of our committee was to raise funds and medical supplies. I did the publicity." Quoted in By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day, p.190.

We agree with Scott Duffy that Dorothy Day was a pacifist. She did express sympathy, however, for the Colombian revolutionary, Camilo Torres, who left the priesthood and took up arms. We believe the assertion that Ernesto Cardinal and Thomas Merton broke their relationship over the issue of nonviolence is incorrect.

Dear Round Table,

Your Spring 1997 issue on Beauty was wonderful and I found it very inspiring. This is an aspect of Dorothy Day's life that is often overlooked...

Sincerely,
Marie de Paul Combo, SCL

Dear Round Table,

Greetings from Rock Island! The Round Table just arrived and I sat down and read it cover to cover. Great topic, great articles, great issue! Your journal is a consistent favorite of ours; this issue was particularly inspired.

Because I find the RT to be so readable, I feel compelled to offer some criticism about its own aesthetics. The graphics struck me as remarkable poor, ugly even--how ironic in an issue devoted to "beauty." The originals, I'm sure, are quite beautiful; good art/good politics...But printing is its own art, reproducing type and graphics, and this is where I respectfully protest. The computerized reproduction of your lovely graphics corrupts their beauty and offends the critical viewer (well, me anyway.)...I realize that this sort of graphic reproduction and computer use is becoming more common all the time. If people listened to music through fuzzy static all the time they would lose their ability to distinguish good music from bad...all music would be devalued. This, I fear, is what is happening with printing. I might expect it in the callous, artless, make a quick buck "out there," but in the C.W.?? Anyway, despite my objections, congrats on a terrific issue, and keep up all your good works.

Blessings,
Chuck Trapkus
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker

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Round Table Talk

by Mark Scheu

I've come to realize there are many different types of communities. There is one's family, of course. This community one has little choice in and you are stuck with it for life. And then you create a new community if you marry and have children. Over this community you have more choice but it seems even less control. Then there are intentional religious communities. They are very special but certainly represent no haven from the ills of the world or of humanity. There is the community of your friends, those whom you do choose to spend time and share experiences with outside of your immediate family. And there is the community of your fellow employees. I suppose there are many others. One unique and eccentric community I've come to treasure is the one I've discovered by commuting to work daily.

I travel to work via a Bi-State bus and the Metro. When I mount the steps of the bus and hand my metro ticket to the driver, I glance down the aisle of the bus. A quick survey of the seated passengers and I feel at home, among familiar faces. It is a strange experience when you regularly commute on a bus. You come to recognize and expect the same group of passengers every morning. Most take the same seat each trip. A few prefer the front, others gravitate toward the rear, some prefer the side benches which face toward the aisle, as do I. These companions become familiar to you, each with his or her distinct appearance and habits. There develops a peculiar, unspoken bond among those who commute on public transportation. At least so it seems to me. We are traveling together and we must all reach our destinations together or none of us will. I come to recognize them, and I feel they come to expect and accept me.

It is a familiar concensus that I will not dispute that communities are in decline in our nation and culture and have been for some time. In short, we are less connected to one another, more isolated, more focused on the individual. There are many explanations for this: technology, capitalism, American individualism, and so on. I daresay we are indulging the wrong needs in the wrong way. In various circumstances this trend has momentary benefits, but it comes at a price: the fragmentation of our common life — family, neighborhood, civil and so on. Unfortunately it seems our political and economic system is geared to encourage this. Thus we build large networks of highways and parkways and beltways to allow one to drive readily to work and back daily, witness the proposed Page Avenue Extension. We have encouraged people to own their own vehicles and to use them to go everywhere, no matter how irrational. My neighbor gets in her car to drive two blocks to a convenience store and on another day will drive to Kansas City and back. It's as if the thought never occured to walk the two blocks or perhaps to take the train to Kansas City.

Lately I have recognized two developments which can be in part attributed to these trends: urban sprawl (doesn't that even sound ugly!) and road rage. Urban sprawl allows one to have one's own little plot of land in a quasi-rural setting away from the ills of society, especially those bred by poverty and unemployment. The knee-jerk solution to these problems seems to be segregation — to separate out of their reach. In so doing, we forget that this is a common endeavor, that we are truly all in this together. Instead, it is easier for some to flee the problems than to deal with them. Then we lose both the concrete and the intangible benefits of real neighborhoods, where people live in proximity to one another, know one another, and interact with one another in meaningful ways.

Road rage also I would posit is the logical outcome of this tendency towards isolation and individualism. When each of us is insulated from one another by the formidable metal box of our own vehicle, there is not only considerable if not irreparable cost to our environment, witness the greenhouse effect, but also to our social-psychological selves. Perhaps sports/utility vehicles and pickups, for which there is little real need in St. Louis, have exploded in popularity because they are all the more formidable and isolating. In any case, we end up competing with one another on the roads, especialty as they grow as crowded as our own lives. We lose touch with our common endeavor, the need we have not only to tolerate one another but to assist one another. Kropotkin called it mutual aid. The success which our endeavors meet depends more upon cooperation than competition.

Isn't that what community is all about? That we are most whole and successful when we work together in small groups where we know and help one another. I don't have any grand solutions to the loss of community in our society. I will oppose the Page Avenue Extension, support pubic transportation, and try to relate meaningfully to my family, neighbors, and friends. And tomorrow I expect to settle into my regular seat on the bus, glance around, and secretly acknowledge my community of fellow travelers. ✚

Mark Scheu had a version of this essay published in the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

Recent maintenance expenses have left us low on funds. Donations at this time would be helpful.

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Gathering to discuss this Round Table issue will be held at Karen House on Friday March 20th at 7:00 p.m. All are welcome.

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Charlie King Concert

Tegeler Hall SLU
Friday, March 6, 1998
8:00 p.m.

Benefit for St. Louis
Economic Conversion Project
Tickets call: 726-6406

SLECP is looking for a half-time staff person to work on reducing weapons sales world-wide.

Kevauna
The Kavanaugh's Irish Imports
in concert
March 13th and 14th
7:30 p.m.
Incarnate Word Academy
Tickets are $6.00
available at
College Church Rectory
and Catholic Supply

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, Mitch McGee, Bill Miller, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

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