

TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



Center Section: SFH Resident Len Raymond's Sabbatical in Vietnam

Spring 2015

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In the Beginning was the Relationship

by Anne Scheibner

The lessons for Lent this year started with the opening from the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word." The Word or as it was in the Greek, Logos, relates to measure and ratio - the relationship of one to another. We have engaged in this year and a half exploring whether and how all of us - resident and non-resident - relate to the work of the St. Francis House, to each other, to the communities in which we live and to God. In the beginning was the relationship of each of the residents of the House to our Neighbors and those we have come to think of as "the extended community" who came for various House events particularly for Clarification of Thought. Clarification of Thought takes place every other Friday night and includes prayer and African Method of Bible Study, table fellowship and the study of various contemporary concerns. The question of who embodies the relationships which embody the House is now in the arms of the extended community as well as the residents. And in some sense all of us together are beginning to feel like a sub-culture in the liberating sense of that word i.e. this is a place where the usual societal and even church norms do not apply. It is a place that values difference: the gifts that each of us brings and the work we do here and in the wider community. It is a place that practices and values listening. It is a place where last year's Clarification of Thought series on "What Makes an Intentional Community Intentional?" and "Porch Duty: Exploring our Presence in the World" could emerge into this year's series on "the Commons: Exploring what we share and how we share and how we can recognize the emerging Commons in our lives and region today." We are looking at Water, Land and Property, Taxes and Public Education and at how the Commons is practiced here at St. Francis House through our experiments in sharing resources including income, the library, office space and residence.

What clues have emerged so far? A year and a half ago 40 people responded to the invitation to spend an evening exploring, "What do you value about St. Francis House?" and "What frustrates you?" It was clear then that a key to many persons' frustration was not knowing exactly how to relate to the House if you did not live here. In the first part of 2014 we tried having teams of residents and non-residents do useful and exciting work in Prayer (simplifying and de-Anglicanizing Morning Prayer), Hospitality (refurbishing the bathroom and considering renewed uses for the Hermitage) and Peace and Justice (welcoming the Peace Walkers last spring with a Community Conversation and then trying to help the Connecticut Futures Commission focus on real issues of economic conversion in SE CT).

But it was Cal Robertson's request to become a resident following his mother's death in May that was the catalyst for the extended and residential community stepping up and saying, "Yes, together we can make this happen." Cal's coming has re-established a community supper time for residents, makers of the meals and members of Cal's Care Team. Cal's own iconic stature conducting a peace witness in this community since 1986 has given us a renewed center through the relationships, for example, that have been established with a young skateboarder named Gino who joined Cal and Mike on the Peace Vigil and with three generations of the Berrigan-Sheehan-Gaumer family including 3 year-old Seamus holding Emmett's "Imagine Peace" sign for a Christmas Day vigil at the Sub Base.

Another clue was a concern articulated by Deacon Ellen and others that we were in danger of splitting the wholeness of how we understand and approach our work by having teams focusing on Prayer, Hospitality and Peace and Justice as if they were separate. So we engaged in a 10 week series of Monday night conversations followed by dinner looking at the Ten Principles of St. Francis House put forward originally in 1998 (reprinted in the last *Troubadour*). A related clue was that having three working

teams with overlapping memberships was difficult to sustain and very time consuming. But the Anchor Team composed of resident and non-resident members meets as part of Tuesday Business Lunch, engages in quarterly half-day retreats and gives us a wider base for House decisions and overall support. Regular housekeeping work days are followed by a brunch and then discussion on a topic of community concern. The Peace and Justice group is now hosting a time in which SFH connected people come together to share what they are doing thereby creating opportunity for new ideas, networking and support. Regular meetings are also available for people to share spiritual practices and needs and specifically how each of us might engage in developing a "Spiritual Autobiography" which has always been required as part of the application process for residency. We are developing new ways to share both the Hermitage and the library both of which are woefully underutilized. Janice Syedullah, retired librarian and SFH board member from Hyde Park, NY, and her team have been organizing an on-line catalogue. We now have the literature, poetry and Franciscan books in the Hermitage as a resource for anyone taking a retreat day or sabbatical time. The social justice and theological books are still in the main House. Biographies are in the Victory House Conference Room.

The question of Christian identity and how to frame our understanding of that identity remains at the core of this exploration process. No one is suggesting we change the name of the House and so long as Francis and Clare are here, Jesus will be at the heart. We have always had friends and colleagues of diverse faith traditions or no faith other than belief in the possibility of social change. As St. Paul said, "All things are possible but not all things are helpful." So is it helpful or a stumbling block to say we are "an intentional Christian community" when we all have very different relationships to the Incarnate Word and very different spiritual practices? We used to be predominantly Anglican, but that is no longer the case. Our practice of Morning Prayer is on the website and hopefully we have kept the best of Anglican cadence and order while allowing much more time for silence and sharing reflection.

We are not "a" church and certainly not "the" church, but I have come increasingly to understand that we are "church" - prayer, table fellowship, study.... This time after Emmett's death has been de facto a time of exploration as to whether, when and how we would have the Eucharist as part or not part of the life of St. Francis House. It would be unthinkable to celebrate Emmett's "heavenly birthday" (this year will mark the 5th anniversary on October 9) without such a celebration although even four years ago we revised the form of the service to be much simpler with the community as a whole in the role of celebrant. Up to this point we have always had an

ordained person as part of the circle and in the leadership role. Those of us who came from catholic and evangelical traditions will continue to grapple with the meaning of "sacrament" and what it means to be "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" in our time and place even as our christology shifts from the explicitly verbal to the implicitly incarnational. Part of our current exploration of "sharing" and "alms giving" as part of our community life is rooted in the desire to love one another so that "all may have life and have it more abundantly."

So we now return to the core issue of what identifies "members" of the House whether resident or non-resident. The interest in doing "spiritual autobiographies" may turn out to be one thing that we all do and possibly in ways other than writing. If writing turns out to be useful, we will help each other do that. This could turn into a regular form of "accountability" and not just a one-time exercise. We are making copies of Robert Ellsberg's *All Saints Ancient and Modern* available to members of the local extended SFH community who cannot attend Morning Prayer but wish to participate in some way. We read Ellsberg's "Saint of the Day" every morning. Those saints include Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Simone Weil and Steve Biko as well as Carl Rahner, Clarence Jordan and William Stringfellow. We are exploring whether we can share that saint daily through the website. A requirement for residency has been to be a member of a local faith community as well as an hour a day of personal spiritual practice. We are currently looking at what our various daily practices are and whether the requirement to be part of a local faith community should be broadened to include any "member" or changed even for residents. Perhaps daily use of some form of the prayer attributed to St. Francis might be considered as well.

One clue as to where we are is that at least for me it is becoming increasingly awkward to continue to refer to members of the St. Francis House community as "resident" and "non-resident." We will still have to deal with the discernment of "Who is going to be a resident and why?" and even more basically, "Who is going to be a member and how?" But I think we will know when we are on the other side of this particular period of exploration. Then we will be able to speak of "the St. Francis House Community" and have a clarified understanding of the relationships - among the members and to the wider community as well as to God - within which our particular St. Francis House Community lives and moves and has its being.

Anne Scheibner grew up in SE CT and served on the national level with the Episcopal Women's Caucus, Urban Bishops Coalition, National Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission and the Episcopal Urban Caucus. She has lived and worked at St. Francis House for the last 15 years.

A Heavy Joy:

A Vietnam Veteran returns to Vietnam

by Len Raymond

When I stepped off the plane in 1968, something in the “air” changed forever. A painful touch of lost-aliveness has faithfully been with me since that year, a year spent as part of the 69th Signal Battalion at the air base next to Saigon — doing communications work. That was probably one of the best — meaning safest — assignments one could get in the war. Returning to Hanoi instead of Saigon, in the fall of 2014, I once again found a country I fell in love with and got to share this love with my daughter. To my surprise, I now see a people growing to become a nation to change the world in a big way. And it is not that they don’t struggle with problems. It is how they do the struggle: they gently don’t give up, be it political corruption, heroin addiction or even to simply support someone whose car breaks down.

The “Vietnam War” was essentially a war we lost although officially our involvement ended in a “truce” with the war being lost after we left. It is telling that although there was fighting between the northern and southern regions of the country, the Vietnamese do not call it “The Civil War,” but rather “The American War.” And engagement with Americans has not stopped. In a beautiful twist of fate, this year’s February issue of *The Nation* magazine reported that Vietnamese forgiveness is becoming famous for “the healing it has brought to the American vets who come back to confront their demons.” It pains me to admit I am one and it is not that I directly did anything harmful, but rather the gut-wrenching awareness that I am part of a nation that did. Vietnamese have said to me, “The war was long ago” and “Ghosts are to blame.” — sadly *true*. Just think of the “domino theory” — unquestionably a ghost that haunted our American psyche and drove us to war — a ghost even Dwight Eisenhower embraced.

Before enlisting I had already suspected the war was a grave mistake, but it was wisdom not in my heart. I wanted to know, first-hand, the truth and I also wanted adventure. Enlisting to get trained in electronic communication got me a safe adventure and I’ve since realized “truth” is a life long mission. Visiting Hanoi has brought forth a spiritual call which I did not expect; it has become more than a personal trip. Is not every veteran’s trip to Vietnam in some sense a proxy for all of us, for our nation? Surely, all of us as Americans, must regret that we were so easily fooled by ghosts and so tragically did such massive harm.

I made an American friend in Hanoi, Chuck Searcy — also a Vietnam veteran. He stated in the February article in *The Nation*,

In so many ways the Vietnamese hold us in high esteem, aspiring to match our idealism as they understand it from afar, assuming that we are such decent and honorable people . . . In a lot of ways it makes those of us who live here want to be as good as we can be as Americans.

True! — this statement aptly captures my experience in Hanoi. Now, I too am up for “being as good as we can be.” I suspect this will consist of bringing forth “balance” as both a goal and a methodology for advancing well-being, ideally in an international partnership with others so interested.

I have come to accept there is more to life than “aliveness” (aliveness made a useful, yet troubled appearance during my wartime year). On this fiftieth anniversary year of the starting of the war, a year of taking stock, I visited virtually all the museums in Hanoi, read most of the Wikipedia articles on Vietnam and talked to many people. I have discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, there is powerful beauty in ordinary achievements of “balance.” I wrote a haiku poem about it:

Soups shouting balance
Establishments testing mess...
Old-new, tasty fresh!

And now, I am set on working to create a conference for Southeastern CT with a focus on restorative practices, measuring well-being and volunteerism, all held in a theme of balance.

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I stayed in a small, warm-hearted hotel two blocks back from the buildings at lake-edge in this picture.

Len's Sabbatical

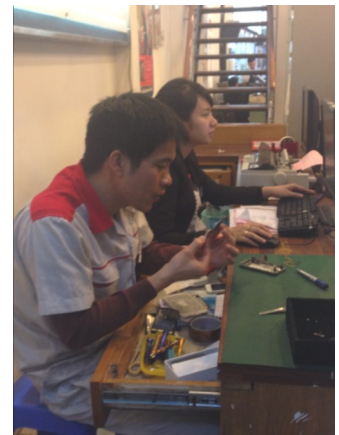
November 28th
– February 4th

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Bonds between people, even nations, carry something beyond just being alive. And there are many such bonds growing out of Hanoi. There is Trang, who facilitated a restorative circle I put together and seems eager to learn much more about this restorative thing. There is Tuyet, my landlady, who with immaculate sense of community, filters who can and cannot stay at her hotel. There are the two university students who wanted to practice English with me a second time. There is Madame Minh who was present when John McCain parachuted into the small lake in my neighborhood and now struggles with cancer. There is the tour guide Chi who asked me out on a date and then changed her mind. And of course, there is the taxi driving, pocket-picking and likely heroin addicted soul that got my new iPhone — mentioned to put all things in balance... :). Lastly, and perhaps the best bond of my trip, my 21 year-old daughter, Brynna, was with me for the first four weeks of the trip. She even wrote one of the haiku poems at my blog, www.Hanoi-Yes.com.

Ghosts and all, Vietnam holds a special place in my heart — a heavy joy. Out of this joy, I am certain Vietnam has much more to give to the world. In one nation, citizens are still in touch with that smallness best called community, citizens are growing through that bigness best called forgiveness and citizens are engaged with that normalcy best called balance. My haiku celebrating this heart:

Paddies bathe the shore
Soul awakens, mountains strut
Biking rooster crows



At the Apple Store in Hanoi — getting a new battery installed in my old iPhone — \$20.



in Vietnam

My daughter Brynna and I enjoying our first egg coffee — very sweet.



Above, Chuck Searcy and I at Friendship Village, in the outskirts of Hanoi, with a resident and veteran of the war who was injured by Agent Orange.

Chuck told a story of half a dozen cars waiting behind a car needing repair at a single-lane bridge while a mechanic was picked up from a village. Chuck's American friend got very upset at the wait. The car was blocking the bridge and could have been moved. To help him feel better, the Vietnamese all got behind the car and made a compelling show-of-effort to push it out of the way. The Vietnamese were choosing not to go on their way until the car was repaired — *community at work*.

45 Years Later

and doing a Restorative Circle in Hanoi

To the left is Cong Café — a.k.a. Communist Café — where, on the second floor balcony, the five of us below met for the restorative circle we did. I trained Trang (center) to facilitate and I suspect she is now the first person in Vietnam trained in the restorative approach. All spoke in Vietnamese with Trang translating when I spoke. They gave me beautiful nods of support when hearing my thoughts and feelings. The circle was on the rescue of John McCain when he parachuted into the lake across the street. Three of them experienced that event. I videotaped the circle with my iPhone, something they wanted for posterity. Ms. Minh, on the right, holds court nearly every day at her lake-side tea station across from the café. She has a following of friends that regularly visit for tea. Currently, I am looking for translators for the video I want to create and post to Hanoi-Yes.com.



Cong Café



My favorite breakfast — noodles, beef and lots of tasty, fresh vegetables.





BROAD STREET BLUES

by Anne Scheibner

For several years now we have been honored to welcome the Walkers from the Buddhist Peace Pagoda in Leverett, MA on their Walk for a New Spring. This year the Walk is ending in New York City after visits to 50 communities over a 45 day period.

The 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference will be meeting at the United Nations and on April 26 the walkers will be part of an international march and rally to join with "activists and concerned citizens from around the world in demanding honest and forthright dialog from world leaders" to prohibit and eliminate the more than 17,000 nuclear weapons already in existence. Those who cannot be in New York that Sunday, April 26 are being asked to participate in a world-wide "wave" by ringing bells at 1 p.m. We certainly intend to do this at St. Francis House and hope that other communities of faith will participate as well.

The postcard which the Walkers distributed to members of the SFH community to send to President Obama, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and our elected representatives says:

"We the people state that the true nature of Nuclear Weapons is in their potential to destroy all of life on Planet Earth. We believe that no Nation has the right to create, hold or use such weapons for any reason. We take a stand here and demand that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty abides by its promises to work toward the security of a World free from Nuclear Weapons as the only sane course to be taken.

We are occupying the Planet with this renewed statement calling for the ban and elimination of all Nuclear Weapons...."



As the founder of the Nipponzan-Myohoji Buddhist Order, the Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii stated in 1964, *"Peace is essentially the intrinsic Law of the human heart and mind.... Peace is fundamentally the law that answers the survival of the realm of sentient beings... We must resolve how to live together on this planet Earth instead of how to kill each other. Otherwise we are doomed to perish by modern weapons... especially nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction."*

We hosted the Walkers for a luncheon discussion and they also attended our Clarification of Thought session on the evening of March 27. We want to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have been part of providing meals for Cal Robertson and the Community of St. Francis House. The food has been great and we have been blessed that so many of those who have prepared the food have eaten with us as well. If we have left anyone out, know that the stars in your crown have been multiplied! Cal is shown below seated at the head of the table.



Our thanks to all the dinner providers from the extended community: Eric and Jodi Johnson, Marlies and George Parent, Carolyn Patierno, Glennys Ulschak, Tricia Conklin, Laurie Gorham, Jana Flaherty, Joanne Sheehan and Rick Gaumer, Ellen Adams, Axel Westerberg, Karen and David Gonzalez-Rice, John and Kathy Delaney, Scott Corna, John George Robertson, Mike Hatt, Jackie Allen-Doucot and Brian Kavanagh, Gail Johnson and Grace Post Panko. And to resident members: Bob Bassett, Reona Dyess, Richard Dunham, Hannah Gant, Sarah Jarrett, Len Raymond, Anne Scheibner. Let us know if you wish to join this team!

Clarification of Thought Schedule

Winter –Spring



2015

the Commons

Exploring what we share & how we share and how we can recognize the emerging Commons in our lives and region today

February 13: Introduction to the Commons
Hannah Gant and David Gonzalez-Rice

February 27: Water
Len Raymond and
Rob Schacht, Hunts Brook Farm

March 13: Principles for a Thriving Commons
Hannah Gant, Metamorphosis

March 27: Land and Property
Joanne Sheehan, Voluntown Peace Trust

April 10: Taxes—A Shared Purse
David Gonzalez-Rice

April 24: Public Education as Commons
Mirna Martinez, Republic Ed and
Anne Scheibner

May 8: Commons at the Local Level
Ronna Stuller, New London Green Party

RETREAT DAY OF REFLECTION

For members of the extended and residential
St. Francis House community:

Saturday, May 30

9:30 a.m.— 3 p.m.

At the A. J. Muste Center

VOLUNTOWN PEACE TRUST

Extended Community Retreat

Please save this date in which we will come together at the Muste Center at VPT to take a deeper dive into some of the questions that are being raised as we move into an understanding of SFH as an extended community of people, some of whom are in residence.

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