

Center Section: Restoring and Growing Hospitality

Summer 2016

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A Time to Reflect and A Time to Grow

A Reflection on My Sabbatical Time in the Hermitage

by Jason Wells

For [Jesus] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall.... (Ephesians 2:14)

The wall separating St. Francis House from the Hermitage has come down! Now the one-bedroom apartment at the Hermitage leads directly into the St. Francis House dining room. As a result, the Hermitage is an ideal place not only for people to find a spiritual retreat but also to encounter intimately the St. Francis House work and community. From May 2-6, I made my first retreat to St. Francis House and I want to share my experience as the first retreatant since the wall came down. Hopefully this account will encourage you to make a stay at the Hermitage or you will think of someone you know who should be invited to make a retreat.

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you. (Luke 10:8)

I came to St. Francis House, sight unseen. May was the last month of my three-month sabbatical from parish ministry. I was looking for a place to make retreat close to my home in New Hampshire. Google introduced me to St. Francis House and I decided in the spirit of adventure to make it my destination. In a spirit of openness, I resolved to say “yes” to any opportunity that the St. Francis residents brought my way. This way I could experience the community and its work fully and as a gift.

So what did I encounter? From my arrival, I met Cal and Grace who made my bed and offered me lunch. Over each meal everyone discussed their work and the common life of the House. They included me in the conversation, never making me feel like an out-of-place stranger. (Of course, the Hermitage also now has easy access to the kitchen, so I could prepare my morning coffee without a second thought! I likely would have gone out for coffee each day without this.)

The strong spiritual life of St. Francis House was evident. Each day I participated in Morning Prayer with its unique Franciscan flavor. I readily said “yes” to the invitation to Bible Study, which included members of the extended community. I especially appreciated the prayer circle at the end, knowing that Anne was praying for my concerns and that I, a newcomer, was trusted to pray for Len.

Finally, because I could so easily be a part of the community, I could accept the ready invitations to see the St. Francis House work from several vantage points. Anne invited me to the Tuesday lunchtime business meeting and the beginning of the weekend board meeting, to learn the nuts and bolts of this type of community. Cal and Mike twice invited me to stand and witness for peace with them at their familiar corner.

Len invited me to learn about his Street Circles and to see how well New London's homeless engage this process. Participating in the Street Circle's Restorative Practice as a supporter showed me a method of repairing relationships that will be valuable as I return to parish ministry.

Grace and Hannah made sure that I saw the Spark Makerspace and got to ask my questions about its unique vision. The Episcopal Church of New Hampshire has explored Makerspaces as a form of outreach to our former mill districts and Hannah made herself available for conversation and support as we continue these conversations at home.

Finally, Anne invited me to a workshop hosted at Hearing Youth Voices called “My Black is Dangerous.” The workshop was led by the Yale Black Law Students Association and sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU-CT). They trained all ages to know their rights when interacting

with police, important in a time of growing discrimination and violence. As a board member of the New Hampshire ACLU, I was familiar with the content of the training but am excited to share this program with our local director.

I cannot imagine trying to make this retreat with the wall in place. If it were still there, I would have to walk around the building and enter through the front door every time I wanted to share in prayers or mealtime. Knowing my introvert self, I would have more likely kept to myself, eating, praying and reading alone. With the division gone, I had an experience of the St. Francis House community that I otherwise would not have had.

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door.... (Matthew 6:6)

The Hermitage still maintains its place for quiet solitude, even with the wall down. Each day I felt free to shut the door and find time for private prayer, reading or just catching up with my family in New Hampshire. Each time, the St. Francis House community respected my closed door. Not once did someone come knocking or was there any noise to disturb me. The apartment lived up to the name of Hermitage, allowing silence and private space when I needed it.

Given that I am a strong introvert, I needed this time to myself. New London is also an accessible city, so I could easily slip out the back door and find coffee shops, restaurants, groceries and more in an accessible walking distance.

Gratefully, the Holy Spirit led me to St. Francis House during my sabbatical time. Over my twelve years of ordained ministry I have never found a place with the perfect balance (for me) of solitude and communal life. As I left, I felt renewed knowing that I could participate fully in the life of the community while I was there, in prayer and Bible study, by making coffee and preparing guest beds. I also knew that the community could minister to me in welcome, hospitality and open invitation, made easier by the wall coming down. For me, I plan to make future retreats at the Hermitage. Hopefully this story can help you book your retreat time at St. Francis House or recommend it to someone you know who needs this kind of retreat!

Jason Wells is the Rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Concord, New Hampshire. His parish has just established Assisi House as an Episcopal Service Corps site for young people seeking to offer a year of service to the community.



Clarification of Thought Schedule

Fall - Winter

2016

Save The Dates

Friday, every 2 weeks

- September 23
- October 7
- October 21
- November 4
- November 18
- December 2
- December 16
- ♦ *Christmas Party*
Friday, December 30

5:30 Evening Prayer & Bible Study
6:00 Vegetarian soup and salad
7:00 - 8:30 Topic presented and discussed

Call 860 437-8890 or visit our website at
www.stfranchishouseNL.org

Choosing the theme for this Fall-Winter Clarification of Thought

The theme for this fall's Clarification of Thought will be chosen by a new process which has emerged from our three-year experiment with what it means for St. Francis House to be a community made up not only of House residents but also of the "extended community."

At the last Anchor Team meeting in February the idea of making meeting time available for anyone in the extended community concerned with "big picture" issues emerged—renamed "Anchor Time." This July the focus of the first Anchor Time meeting will be the Clarification of Thought theme.

E-mail stfranchishouseNL@att.net if you are not on the SFH e-blast list and would like to get news of the Clarification of Thought schedule once the details are in place, Anchor Time and other House events.

SAINT FRANCIS HOUSE

Help Raise the Roof!



Dear Friends:

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Reona Dyess

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Frida Berrigan

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The Rev. Margaret Rose

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Danielle Bellows, TSSF

Janet Minella-Didier

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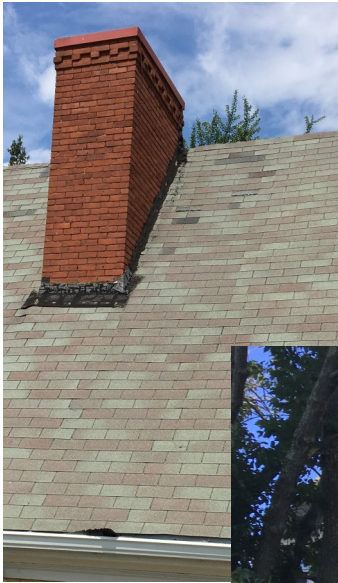
The Rev. Masud Syedullah, TSSF

TSSF : members of the Third Order
of the Society of St. Francis

Our 100+ year old building at 32 Broad known as Victory House needs new roof shingling and possible repairs. Victory House is across the driveway from St. Francis House. Since the interior rehab was completed 12 years ago, it houses our offices, conference room, reading room and 4 apartment units. As of April it is home to the Linda Powell Pruitt Womanist/ Feminist and Education Reform Library and our Biography Collection. What has become the Homeless Hospitality Center started with conversations around our conference room tables. New London Community Gardens met here and 32 Broad was the initial home for FRESH New London which for 12 years now has been developing community garden space, providing fresh produce to underserved areas of the city and involving high school students in learning both how to grow food and how the food system works. 32 Broad was home base for CURE (Comunidad Unida por el Renacimiento de la Educación/Community United for the Renaissance in Education) and start-up office space Hearing Youth Voices which trains New London high school students in participatory action research and policy advocacy.

Who has lived here? Mark Auer, TSSF and Viet Nam veteran; Laura Burfoot who returned to New London after finishing college; Riverdogs musicians Ben and Nancy Parent when they and son Gabriel moved back to Connecticut and daughter Madeline was born; George Rishmawi from Bethlehem connected to us by the Hartford Catholic Worker came one Christmas season to sell olive wood creches from the Holy Land; Nate and Zuli Jarrett as newlyweds; Dorothy Paulsen, everybody's "Aunt Dorrie," when she could no longer live alone; Alaska Bob Bassett, who had us as his Connecticut base when serving as Native American prison chaplain; Paul and Wendy Jakoboski to start their sojourn in community living and multi-dimensional work on the food system; John Robertson who helped do research for CURE during a time of transitional discernment; Marykate Glenn who came from Arizona to be farm manager for FRESH; Quaker activists Kit and Jane Johnson as they transitioned from a house to a co-housing community; Sarah Jarrett for part of her time in art school; Hannah Gant who came to work with the Francis Fund for SE CT and is now engaged in developing the Spark Makerspace in downtown New London; Anne Scheibner who moved across the driveway in 2012 to free up the third floor at 30 Broad. The various residents at 32 Broad Street have contributed more than 40 service years to the life and work of the House and the wider community.

The board of St. Francis House voted in May to raise \$25,000 to cover the expense of the badly needed re-shingling of the roof. We hope to raise the money this summer so we can contract the work and have it finished in September, long before the snow flies. Please help. Thank you.



SUMMER 2016



Restoring and Growing Hospitality



Victory House shown above is located at 32 Broad Street. The west side shown here looks out on Williams Memorial Park. The close-up photo of the roof (top left) is on the driveway side between the two houses. There is a lot of roof to be re-shingled and we won't know if there is damage underneath until AFTER the shingles come off! Please help!

Below is a panoramic photo of the Hermitage. You can now walk directly from this sitting room area to the St. Francis House dining room, kitchen and chapel. The Hermitage houses our poetry, fiction and Franciscan studies collections as well as our biblical reference and secondary source material (shown in part in the bookcase to the right.)





The Hermitage bedroom looking out over meditation garden.



Views from the Hermitage: (Above) The silhouette of St. Mary Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church is part of the cityscape from the Hermitage sitting room. (Below) The raised beds of our garden are visible from the south side. (Left) The St. Francis statue is part of the meditation garden.



Retreats can be of various kinds: a day long or weekend study retreat, a week or more to be alone and/or to engage in various parts of the life of the House including weekday Morning Prayer, African Method of Bible Study, meals, visiting community work sites based on your interests or desire to explore. We also welcome guests who are in the area to visit friends or family and would like to stay at St. Francis House rather than at a commercial hotel. There are no rates as such; it is where your generosity meets our hospitality!



You Had to Be There

by Rick Bellows, TSSF

Note: On May 6 the board of St. Francis House convened for its bi-annual two-day meeting. There were lots of new and exciting developments to share: the opening of the Library on April 8, the renewed Hermitage space now accessible to the main House, the publication of *To Catch A Wave*.... On Friday evening the residential and extended community of St. Francis House was invited to meet with the board to focus on the question of "How to Communicate who SFH is: to friends, neighbors and the wider community." Board member Rick Bellows wrote this reflection which we want to share with *Troubadour* readers as we continue to ponder the question of "How do we Communicate who SFH is?"

"You had to be there," I say. I was there. That is why I found myself laughing. I was sitting in a "circle" that spread across two rooms in Saint Francis House in New London, CT. The circle included board members from as far away as Utah, New York, and Massachusetts (that's me), and others from Southeastern Connecticut, both on the board and non-board members, including residents of St. Francis House (which I'll call SFH for short). We were discussing how to get the word out about SFH. It's hard to do for several reasons, not the least of which is SFH is actually two houses, 30 & 32 Broad St. in downtown New London. It's also hard, because, well, If I could tell you why it was hard, it would be easy.

You see, it's out of character for SFH to talk about getting the word out, because SFH is just too humble. It's a hoot to watch them squirm as SFH attempts to toot its own horn. If it were I who were trying, I think I would look like a wine critic. I don't mean the kind of critic I am as one who can distinguish red and white, or wine from a box vs. from a bottle with a cork. I mean like, "It has the bouquet of nasturtiums and mud, with overtones of balsa wood." Thank God we had a poet among us—Jim Coleman, a professor from the area. He described SFH as a "culture of presence." Thanks a lot! What does that mean. But sit with that a second and Eureka! "Thanks a lot! That's it!"

Don't get me wrong. Saint Francis House doesn't have an intimidating culture as in the military or in a courtroom, where things are set up to express who has the power in the situation. SFH in contrast is a presence to empower those who have none. Most of the people of SFH's extended community are peace and justice types. Their politics tend to be liberal to progressive. But SFH is not a culture of politics. As Jim said, it's a culture of presence.

I can't tell you what SFH does. It doesn't have programs, because it won't compete with other non-profits for grants that support programs. But if you

want to start a program to shelter the homeless or feed the poor or support kids or promote nutrition, SFH will stand by you. Their support is not financial. They are not a source, but they are a resource for ideas, experience, and courage—the type of courage that really encourages you.

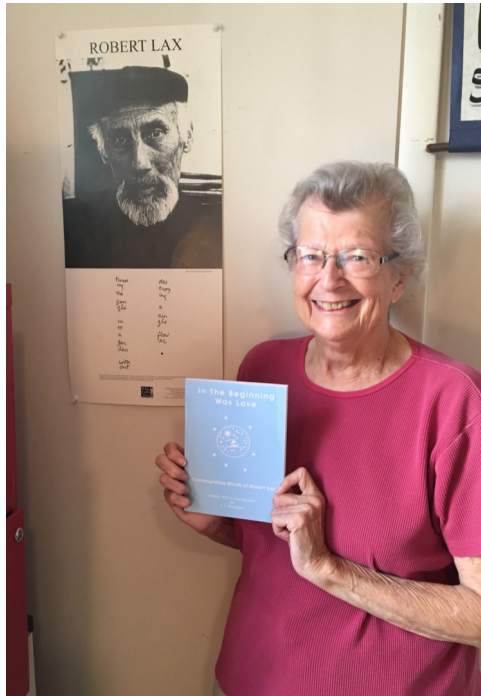
This is holy work. Yet SFH is not a church. They hold no weekend prayer services because they don't want to compete with churches. But every weekday, people from the community and residents gather to pray. They pray for those they are present to in one way or another. That's all of New London, and, well, really it's all the world. They also pray for themselves, because presence is hard work to maintain. We all know how easy it is to slip away when your presence is really needed. I know I usually want to do something or give something to justify my presence. It's hard to trust that my standing by is helpful, let alone that it is enough.

This standing by is not like politicians standing by voters or donors. It's not that fickle. SFH stands by people to let them be who they are, so they can become who they really are. SFH is like a tree on a hot day, that you can sit and lean against—a tree that supports the humanity of the poor, the homeless, the soldier and the enemy, the prisoner and the prosecutor. The tree yields apples that comfort those who are troubled, but also upset those who need a little tweak. (That's all of us from time to time.)

SFH is spreading the culture of presence in New London. Have you felt their presence yet? If not, stop by sometime, but don't be surprised later when your friends ask you to describe the experience. I won't say, "I told you so," when you resort to saying, "You had to be there," especially if you go on to say, "I'll take you so you can see for yourself."

Rick Bellows is an Episcopal priest, member of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis and board member of St. Francis House. He served as photographer and overall consultant for our publication of To Catch A Wave: New and Selected Poems by Emmett Jarrett.





***In The Beginning Was Love:
Contemplative Words of Robert Lax***
Edited with an Introduction by S.T. Georgiou

A few weeks ago we got a flyer in the mail with a handwritten note in the margin: "This new book may interest your community - Peace, Steve" What editor Steven Georgiou did not know is that we have half a dozen of Bob Lax's early published work as part of Emmett Jarrett's poetry collection available to all as part of our St. Francis House library collections. And he also did not know that Emmett knew Bob Lax in the sixties when they were both living in Greece!

So here in the above photograph is our librarian/SFH board member Janet Minella-Didier holding a copy of the new book which we ordered and it is now available for borrowing! She is standing in front of the Bob Lax poster which Emmett had in his study and which is now part of the library. Janet also recommends one of Georgiou's other books focused on Lax's work: *The Way of the Dreamcatcher: Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax*. This book also is available through our library.

Many things can be done on the internet. Reading poetry and especially Bob Lax's poetry benefits by having the text in hand. This is partly because of his own use of notebooks and understanding of the importance of place. But his experiments with vertical line writing/meditation need to be held and absorbed through the skin as well as the heart.

Lax's work can be ordered through Templegate Publishers. (www.templegate.com) Or come and browse our library!

Instead of Meditating by Emmett Jarrett (1995)

*Has it been 30 years?
It seems like 30 minutes.
(Bob Lax)*

Bright letters on the russet
spine of Gary Snyder's book
No Nature

catch my eye

I find a poem about a trip
he took in '82 with his son

another about climbing
the Sierra Matterhorn again
after 31 years

In less than
3 months I'll be going
to Greece again

to show
my son Nathaniel "this
magic Greece of the mind"

& meet Bob Lax again
over a breakfast of *loukoumi*
& warm honey

after 30 years

From *Wild Geese Flying South*

All these books can be ordered on-line or
send a check to us at "St. Francis House"
including \$5 for postage and a free will
donation

Wild Geese Flying South: New Poems
by Emmett Jarrett, 2005

To Catch a Wave: New and Selected Poems by
Emmett Jarrett, Edited by Anne Scheibner &
Jim Coleman Foreword by Dick Lourie, 2015

*Broad Street Blues: A Reader in Radical
Discipleship—Reflections and Articles from
St. Francis House Troubadour 1999-2010*

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Center Section: Restoring and Growing Hospitality
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St. Francis House
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Check out our collections of poetry, fiction, social justice, theology, secondary biblical resources and interfaith study materials, Franciscan resources, feminist/womanist and educational reform collections and biographies.

You can see what we have online by going on our website www.stfranchishouseNL.org and clicking on *Sharing* and then *Library* (in the sub-menu) or come in and browse!