

TROUBADOUR

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



Center Section: Pictures of St. Francis House in Action

Advent 2016

Vol. 18, No. 3

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Seeking the Welfare of the City

By Ellen Adams

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7)

Anne and I thought it was fitting that this quote was part of the Hebrew Scriptures on October 9, 2016 when the extended community gathered at St. James Episcopal Church in New London to commemorate the 6th anniversary of Emmett’s “heavenly birthday. Anne and Emmett, and their children Nate and Sarah moved into 30 Broad Street in 2000. The plan was to get to know their neighbors and let the Holy Spirit provide the guidance on what to do next.

Many of the people they came to know were homeless. Leaders of the community gathered at St. Francis House to decide how to address homelessness when the social services department of the city was eliminated. The Homeless Hospitality Center was formed as a result of these conversations. We still have a strong commitment to the homeless and formerly homeless of the New London area. Many of our extended community are in leadership roles at HHC. Each year St. Francis House joins HHC and other interested community members to design and hold a Homeless Memorial Service on the longest night of the year. Len Raymond, a resident of the House, holds street circles twice a week where homeless and formerly homeless gather to support each other on their journeys.

Witnessing for peace is another focus at St. Francis House. Cal and Mike are the anchors for this work. They stand on the corner in front of the court house as often as health and weather restrictions allow. Each spring we host the Buddhists from the Peace Pagoda in MA when they do their Walk for a New Spring. This year Len joined them in Washington D.C. for the end of the walk and participated in a peace walk in Maine as well. An Advent vigil is being held each Saturday during Advent at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument.

On April 8th we opened the library to the public. We have a catalog of books that include poetry, social justice issues, biographies and Bible commentaries on line for you to peruse. Janet Minella-Didier, our librarian, continues to add to our collection. A book discussion takes place on the first and third Mondays of the month. We read and discuss the book together so there is no homework. We are presently reading Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman.

A Sermon on Faith, Transition and Justice

by Ron Steed

In Luke's Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8), Jesus told his disciples on the road to Jerusalem about their need to "pray always and not to lose heart." The team is on the way to Jerusalem and they don't expect a happy reception; some may be losing heart. It may be that Luke includes this parable in his Gospel because his own community was losing heart as well. Perhaps this is a parable that we really need to hear at St James. Transition times can be hard, the end seems far away and the progress seems painfully slow. There are floods and famines and wild animals to contend with. Maybe our hearts are not so very different from Jesus' disciples or Luke's community. What does it mean to be a church? Why do we come here on Sunday? What is God up to? Is He done with us?

Part of the answer sits all around us. He calls us to be the Body of Christ, all of us together. And every Sunday, we come here together to remember in two ways. First, to remember, to remind ourselves who Christ is, and what He did, and how He did it, and to remember what we should be doing in the world as well. And second, to re-member, to bring the various members of this body back together; its arms, legs, eyes, and ears, all our talents and gifts, to reconstitute a portion of the Body of Christ, in this place.

The liturgy we do here on Sundays is a rehearsal for the lives we lead in the world. It's not theatre, and it's not a stuffy old tradition (although it can be if we're careless). There is a mystery being revealed here if we are alert to look for it. First, we listen to scripture being read and preached. Paul tells us today exactly why we do this, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful... so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." We hear the Word on Sunday so that we are equipped for work, not just for coffee hour, but the work we are to do in the world for the rest of the week, every single day!

Next we pray, we complain to God like a widow seeking justice! Because THAT is what we cry to him about day and night -- for justice! And not just for us, but for everyone -- justice for all of creation. "Give us justice God!"

Then we exchange the Peace. Everyone is greeted in the name of Christ and with the sign of peace. Is anyone excluded at St James? Is there anyone sitting too far away that we won't come out of our pews and go to them with our peace? No! No one escapes the peace in this place! And we take that peace with us into the world. God knows they need it out there. When the seventy were sent to towns where Jesus himself expected to go, they entered every home with "Peace to this place" on their lips. We can do this when we get into our car, when we enter a shop,

when we get to our workplace and we do it to everyone we meet, even to those who might make it hard for us to wish them peace, maybe especially for them. St. James is not like Las Vegas. What happens here on Sunday doesn't stay here. It goes with us into the world.

Then, we are fed at the Eucharist, all of us together, rich and poor, many or few, Catholics and Methodists, young and old, people of all races, none of us more deserving than another, all of us come begging to that table with our hands out and we are fed. We receive the body and blood of Christ and we ARE the body and blood of Christ.

So, we're equipped, we've complained to God for justice, distributed our peace to everyone, been given a meal. Then, we are sent out as Apostles to take this deeper reality out into the world.

We have a great sense of liturgy here; it is such a gift. Good liturgy helps us to see a mystery... a mystery that goes with us. The love and care of the choir for their music is something we witness, then we carry the same love and care to our own work. The objects on the altar are handled with great reverence; the same reverence we have for a cup of tea from the hand of a neighbor. We give dignity to everyone during the peace and at the table; the very same dignity we give to a sick patient in the hospital, or to a guest at the Lord's Pantry, or to the custodian at our workplace. If we are doing it right, people who come here are healed, they are reconciled, and they are restored. And we take that into the world with us - that is God's mission - that's what He is up to every day across Southeastern Connecticut... that is what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

And we are not alone in this work, we have the Spirit. In today's reading Jeremiah says "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts"... that happened. The Spirit dwells within us; every one of us. It's not like we get a little spirit-booster-shot at Eucharist that wears off over a week; the spirit is always there inside us, accessible even if silence is the Spirit's first language. I was a hospital chaplain for six months as part of my deacon training, and I would sometimes ask patients what they thought an encounter with God might be like. Some would say something like "I don't know... maybe there would be bright lights or angels or the clouds would part." For so many people, God seems remote... on some distant galaxy wagging his finger at us from time-to-time. The truth is incredible. God dwells within us... closer to us than we are to ourselves. This is why we can experience Christ in the face of the other and we can help others to see the Jesus that is in us. We might meet Jesus in a homeless shelter. I have, or in a grocery store line, or at the DMV -even there. More than that, we have been given other gifts as well; healing, compassion, diligence, good listening. Sometimes the gifts we think we need are not the ones the Spirit has actually given

us. We might think we need young families here and maybe we do, but is that what we have already been given? Have we taken spiritual stock of the people who have been sent through that door? I will tell you this: St. James already HAS every gift it needs to do God's work in the world, every single one. Don't lose heart. God is not done with us. The challenge for us is to keep discerning what we have been given, more than what we lack, and to keep those gifts working in our neighborhood. Our future priest, whoever they are and whenever they get here, will bring new gifts; maybe ones we are hoping for, but maybe ones we're not. Whatever they bring, we are not alone in this; the Spirit is with us and is working on us.

The stewardship of this Parish is ALSO the stewardship of our neighbors in this region. They are one and the same. In my experience in this Parish, we are most fully ourselves and most fully blessed, when we come together as the Body of Christ, witness the mystery that is here among us, and go into the world to spread that blessing doing God's mission. We are healed when we heal others; we are reconciled when we reconcile others; we are restored when we restore others. That's not an accident. Jesus says: "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Yeah... I think he will and I think he DOES... as long as we are faithful stewards of the Body of Christ and of our neighbors. Amen.

Ron is the Chair of the Board of the New London Homeless Hospitality Center and will be ordained as a deacon in the Episcopal Church in 2017. He is a member of our extended community.



The View from Outside

by David Gonzalez-Rice

"For every person there should be enough room, enough freedom to plan the use of one's time. The opportunity to reach ever higher levels of attention, some solitude, some silence. ... What man needs is silence and warmth; what he is given is an icy pandemonium." Simone Weil

Imagine you have been living outdoors for much of the last few years. Maybe when the weather is especially extreme a family member takes pity for the night, or maybe you know how to trade your food stamps for a few nights on someone's couch. There is a homeless shelter, yes, but your abuser is staying there or you can't handle the shelter's rules or the press of bodies in such a small space.

So, much time of the time you live outside; in the woods in Waterford, under the pier in New London, in an unheated log shack in Groton, under the Gold Star bridge, in the remote corners of the college campus. Then, one fateful day, someone shows up at the campsite with an unexpected offer, "If you want it, there is a program that will subsidize your rent and help you find a landlord who will rent to you. You don't have to live outside anymore."

What would go through your mind? Hope? Disbelief? Fear? Apprehension?

Hope again. Sheer, terrifying risky hope.

As move-in day approaches you might start to wonder: Will they think I left them behind? If not them, who will be there for me if I get into trouble? What if I get my own place and I am still depressed, addicted, or unable to afford what I need? What if I get my own place and my children still don't want to speak to me?

What will I miss about living outside?

Ha! What a stupid question! Nothing, I have nothing. I have nothing to lose.

Although, now that you ask:

I will miss dawn rising over these trees every morning.

I will miss the deer that bed down with their young on the hill.

I will miss being the captain of this campsite and knowing I have a role to play.

Now that you ask me. Yes, I will miss these things. Maybe I will get houseplants or a beta fish.

This is a composite of conversations I have had with dozens of people over the last three years. Those of us who work in homeless services are in the middle of an effort to find those who have been homeless the longest, especially those living outside and make this simple offer, "Do you want housing?"



Cal, Len and Mike in Montreal for the World Social Forum

A photo by Joe Standart reminding us of Cal's commitment and dedication. More at, <http://www.portraitofamerica.org/anniversary-portraits/>

Pictures of St. Francis House



A Newborn This Year!

A loving welcome from all of us to "Theo" — our newest member of the SFH extended community (son of Karen & David).

A summer cookout for all connected to SFH.



in Action



The first of what promises to be an annual event in a local park. Cal and Mike played a big role in making this happen.

Claire is one of the monks that visited SFH on their "Walk for a New Spring." She is sitting with Bob, a former resident and happily, a frequent visitor.



Palma, visiting from Maine, provides post Clarification of Thought music.

Board members and residents at the Saturday vigil, across from the local health food store — Fiddleheads.



Broad Street Blues

St Francis House sits in the middle of this small, vibrant, scrappy city right at the end of one of its few relatively straight and long thoroughfares- Broad Street. And we are feeling pretty blue these days, but not enough to let it get in the way of the work ahead!

People in our community- Whalers- responded to the election by drawing closer together, being more mindful and neighborly, more generous and more gracious.

Here are just a few good things that have been going on around here:

There are two refugee families in New London, being settled and supported by the Start Fresh coalition- 13 people in all, including 9 kids. One family is from Syria, the other from the Sudan.

The kids are all enrolled in school, practicing English, playing soccer, adjusting to the cold. The adults are looking for jobs, getting drivers licenses, settling into their new homes. After the election, Start Fresh unanimously agreed to accept four more families. We hope to be able to get the process far enough along before the inauguration that there is no turning these families away.

Four more families feels like a lot of work, but it also feels like a critical mass, it feels like a tipping into a more diverse micro-society. New London is doing more than rolling out the welcome mat, we are proclaiming ourselves a refuge community, standing up to hate, and declaring that we are willing to be transformed by our hospitality. Our neighbor, the All Souls UU Congregation is rehabbing a Welcome House and St Francis House is doing all it can to help.

FRESH New London, which SFH incubated, is our local urban farming and youth empowerment community organization. FRESH's response to the election has been to find a new site for an Urban Farm. Less than a month after the election, nearly three dozen Whalers came together- mostly from the lower Connecticut Ave neighborhood and began planning an urban farm oasis in a tough, blighted section of our city. It was blueberries vs. basketballs and it looks like blueberries are going to come out on top.

As I watched people come into the basement hall at the Walls Clarke AME Zion Church, I couldn't help but think we were there to do so much more than design a garden in an abandoned park, we were there to wrest our hearts and selves back from the sickening alienation and crippling fear propagated by hate speech and hate acts- to make ourselves whole again by finding good work and good friends.

As the weather has gotten colder, the New London Community has sent half a dozen Water Protectors off to the plains laden with blankets, food, medicine and our hopes for our Earth Mother. And then, we have watched the news from Standing Rock with a potent combination of heartache and hope. And at least for now, hope has the last word.

Ancient spirituality, a strategy of solidarity and occupation called tens of thousands of people to Standing Rock in the last few months, and on December 4th word of the Army Corps of Engineers' decision to seek another route was handed down. Victory- powerful people progress- even if partial and incomplete.

Hearing Youth Voices, another organization SFH supported in its infancy, won a \$50,000 award from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation beating out larger cities and organizations through good old-fashioned organizing!!

These are just four good things countering my Broad Street Blues. I'm grateful to be part of a community where people meet each other's eyes, try to meet each other's needs, and are working so hard on behalf of one another!

Frida Berrigan is a nationally known peace activist and the author of *It Runs in the Family*. She is a member of our extended community.

A Reflection on Homelessness

by David Gonzalez-Rice

"There is a certain asymmetry in the way we talk about homeless. HOMElessness is the problem, HOUSING is the solution. Catch that! A small slip from HOME to HOUSING but it is worth probing.



Home is something more than housing, and though it shows up in nonprofit slogans and campaigns, making a home is not actually on the menu of services. Affordable housing is hard enough to provide. And surely a home is more than any nonprofit or state agency can provide.

And still the gap between housing and home is where the conversation inevitably turns when we offer a rent subsidy to someone staying in a tent.

"Yes, I want a roof over my head, but what might I stand to lose in this transition? What have I lost before that I am afraid to lose again?"

Excerpts from a sermon David Gonzalez-Rice gave at All Souls UU Congregation in New London are scattered throughout this issue of the Troubadour. He works for the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. David serves as housing program manager at the New London Hospitality Center and is a member of our extended community.

ST. FRANCIS HOUSE 2016 ANNUAL APPEAL

Dear Friends:

In the wake of the recent election, we are feeling an even stronger call to be present to one another. Now more than ever there is a need to dedicate our attention to prayer and study and strengthening the social fabric where we live. It is this combination of contemplation and action, both individually and as a group, that will improve our efforts to preach the Gospel through the actions of our daily lives.

These are some of the ways the Spirit has moved us to act this year:

Hannah Gant has continued in the work establishing Spark Makerspace as a site and community supporting individuals to discover their vocational gifts. She is now also responsible for helping New London & Groton unify efforts through leadership of the Thames River Innovation Place initiative.

The area Episcopal churches, with the help of the diocese, are setting up a re-entry program in New London. Ellen Adams, an active member of the extended community, is helping to establish this program that will provide housing and support for women coming out of prison. St. Francis House provided office space to write grants and to interview people needed to do the work for this new initiative.

The Francis Fund has continued to provide loans to the New London Homeless Hospitality Center to buy and rehab houses that are used to provide homes for people who have been homeless.

This fall, our Clarification of Thought was on Modern Slavery. We were made aware of how many people are still enslaved and how the issues of debt, addiction, and technology influence our lives. Dan Brewer and Jodi Johnson are gathering a group to discuss what actions we can take to be more responsive to people in need as a result.

The Hermitage has been used more this year. Grace Post Panko, who became a resident of St Francis House in October, makes sure we do not overbook and oversees this important ministry.

Anne Scheibner is taking her first sabbatical since St. Francis House was founded in 1999. She is in San Diego for two months, immersed in printmaking. She plans to take a few more steps away intermittently, in the New Year.

Now is the time we turn to the larger community for financial support to continue the ministries of St. Francis House — ministries for lifting up New London and Southeastern CT with love and humanity for all. Your gift is part of what makes this possible!

Thank you for your part in this work and witness,

Cal Robertson

Mike Hatt

Jodi Johnson

Grace Post Panko

Ellen Adams

Hannah Gant

David Gonzalez-Rice

Len Raymond

Anne Scheibner

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Center Section: Pictures of St. Francis House in Action

May Joy thrive
in our hearts
this season!