

# TROUBADOUR

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



Center Section: **Remembering “Alaska Bob” Bassett**

**Advent/Christmas 2017**

**Vol. 19, No. 3**

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## **The Church of the Future**

by John Vincent

My long-time friend Geoff Curtiss kept saying it: “What is the Church of the Future?”  
So, for a start...

Church is the Gathering of Men and Women who individually have determined to be Disciples of Jesus, and have found commonality and collegueship in others who have also determined this, and who choose to meet and act together.

A Disciple is a person who chooses to put themselves alongside and behind the person of Jesus of Galilee, and adopts ernaid aspects of lifestyle which derive from the discipleship which Jesus enables.

Both Jesus and disciples in turn are disciples and servants of the Kingdom of God/Heaven here on earth, and who scheme to facilitate aspects of the Kingdom in their own contexts, by practice and projects.

The expected ways in which the Gathering of Church actually takes place would usually include identified people with agreed personal functions, and would have routines and activities which would train, sustain and develop this conscientiousness and intentionality.

This would include study together of Gospel and culture, Jesus and world-centered celebrations of this in commonly agreed forms, and specific joint practice and projects in the contexts of neighbourhood, city, nation and world.

### **ASHRAM COMMUNITY AND ST. FRANCIS HOUSE**

Both Ashram Community and St. Francis House are contemporary experimental modes for this future church.

- Based on personal commitment and life in Discipleship
- Alongside like-minded fellow Disciples in Community
- In solidarity of practice for the Kingdom of God/Heaven on earth
- In acted parables and prophetic signs within contemporary society
- Operating from or related to community houses and project bases

Aspects of organisations, ownership, decision-making, shared leadership, teaching and study, liturgy, membership discipline and devotions, are settled by the whole community of members, which meets as necessary.

This model of Church envisages small groups of 10-20 committed members, potentially in connection with other committed groups of similar intention and style –the Holy Catholic Universal Ekklesia(e) of Jesus.

John Vincent is an English Methodist minister. Since 1970 he has worked in Sheffield in the Inner City Ecumenical Mission and the Urban Theology Unit, which he founded in 1969. John’s doctorate is in Discipleship in Mark (Basel University, 1960) after study with Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth. He wrote the above piece as a parting set of thoughts while here on a visit to St. Francis House in October. We have agreed to exchange publications.

For Ashram Community, please see Publications of Ashram Press and details of activities on their website [www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk). You can also e-mail John Vincent at [ashramcommunity@hotmail.com](mailto:ashramcommunity@hotmail.com) giving personal details and interests. Or write Rev. Dr. John Vincent, 7 College Court, Sheffield S4 7FN. U.K.

## Broad Street Blues I

by Anne Scheibner

In 2006 Emmett Jarrett and Russ Carmichael were working together on the winter homeless shelter in New London. The three of us and my old friend and colleague, Geoff Curtiss, went to visit the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, England. Geoff and I met through the Urban Hearings in Newark in 1978 when I was on staff for the hearings and he was fresh out of seminary. Even then Geoff was connected with John and looking to develop a renewed vision of discipleship in the American context. John Vincent and his wife Grace who died this past May were leading partners in the work of the Ashram Community based in Sheffield when we visited in 2006.

We had a wonderful “sabbatical time” but really had not been in touch since then. In October Grace Panko called me to say that Geoff had called St. Francis House. He and John would be in Manchester, CT the next day. Since they would be “in the neighborhood” could they stop by and stay with us on Monday night? They ended up staying until Wednesday and what a joy it was to reconnect!

John and Geoff attended our Tuesday Study Group. John launched into telling his story of being a graduate student under Karl Barth in Basel. There he had had to make a decision to go with a discipleship driven understanding of church. Barth disagreed with his position but encouraged him to stand fast in his faith. Each of us seated at the table was challenged in turn to share our “snap” moment of understanding our own personal calls to discipleship. It was a riveting exercise. I am still thinking about the implications for the work of St. Francis House and how tempting it is for me even in this setting to get lost in the “dreary desert sands of dead habit” as Rabindranath Tagore wrote.

So what is the shape of discipleship communities today? On the morning of their departure, John left me the handwritten reflection which we decided to use as the lead article for this *Troubadour*. We at St. Francis House continue to explore what “church” is for us at this point in history and SE CT. The Episcopal Church in Connecticut is encouraging engagement with that question through its renewed focus on mission. Deacon Ellen led a series of Wednesday night sessions at St. James, New London, on “Spirituality and Race.” Out of those difficult truth telling sessions has emerged a “Racial Reconciliation Working Group.” Byron Rushing has directed our attention to the “Beloved Community” study program which the national Episcopal Church has provided for Advent. A local focus with renewed commitment is emerging and I look forward to being part of it. We look forward to *Troubadour* readers joining the discussion.

Anne Scheibner lives and works at St. Francis House.

## Broad Street Blues II

by Mike Hatt

One of the blessings of being a resident of St. Francis House is meeting the people who come to visit. They come for a variety of reasons. Sometimes for a sabbatical, sometimes to get away and rest. Sometimes they come to New London to visit friends in the area. Oftentimes they are here to give a presentation at Clarification of Thought.

Recently we had Liz McAlister staying with us. It was a pleasure to break bread with her and have conversation. But what was really memorable was the morning she stood vigil with Cal and me outside of the New London court house. Brian from the Hartford Catholic Worker was down here to vigil with Cal as he does every first Saturday of the month. Liz hadn't seen Brian in a while and they were catching up. Then the reason we vigil showed up. Three gentlemen, neatly dressed, came up to us. One of them said to me that we were blessed for doing this witness. And then he went on to say that during the Vietnam War, he was number 6 in the draft. Then he asked if I knew who the Berrigans were! When I pointed out Liz and said that she had been married to Phil Berrigan and their daughter was living in this area, his jaw dropped. While he was still stunned, I told him about St. Francis House, Morning Prayer, Clarification of Thought and some of the social justice work being done.



Other times when Cal and I are doing a vigil, people come by and recognizing that we are vets will say to us, “Thank you for your service.” I never knew how to respond and would just thank them. Recently, however, it occurred to me that a good response would be, “Which service: then or now?” I now feel that I’m letting them know that the witness for peace is a much more important service to the community and the country than my time in the military.

Mike Hatt is a Vietnam veteran. He lives and works at St. Francis House.

In May we were part of a community coalition that took out a half page ad in our local paper when we discovered on three week's notice that Mr. Trump would be giving the commencement address at the United States Coast Guard Academy located here in New London. Members of the SFH community served on the drafting committee for the statement and in the ongoing work of community response in the areas of gun control and immigration:

**W**e, the people of Southeastern Connecticut, come together under the banner "Unify and Resist," as the 45th President of the United States travels to New England for the first time on May 17. At the Coast Guard Academy, he will address the 136th graduating class. With hard work, discipline and sacrifice, these young men and women have matured physically, emotionally and intellectually over the last four



years. They have contributed to the greater New London community in countless ways. We salute them and congratulate their families.

And we organize to deliver a message to the President. We are unified in our resistance to your policies and plans to disassemble hard won rights and freedoms. We are unified in our repudiation of your rhetoric of hate and division. We are unified in our rejection of a world where only billionaires matter.

**WE RESIST** efforts to divide our communities. We know that safety and security are the results of working through differences and coming together across racial and ethnic lines.

**WE UNIFY** behind a vision of a welcoming community; where immigrants, refugees, members of LGBTQ communities, Blacks, Whites, Asians, First Nations, Latinx and all racial/ethnic identities are celebrated, honored and accorded equal rights, responsibilities and treatment under the law.

**WE RESIST** war and militarism – drone strikes will not bring peace to Syria, arrogant tweets and nuclear threats will not bring about regime change in North Korea.

**WE UNIFY** around affordable health care for all people and equal access to preventative care and reproductive health.

**WE RESIST** the gutting of our government agencies – from the Environmental Protection Agency, to the National Endowment for the Arts, to the Department for Housing and Urban Development and we RESIST the heavy burden these cuts put on non-profit agencies to tend a frayed and tattered social safety net.

**WE UNIFY** around good jobs to rebuild our infrastructure and prepare our communities for the future.

**WE RESIST** the sidelining and defunding of international institutions like the United Nations.

**WE UNIFY** behind a clean and healthy environment – where land, water and air are protected for future generations and substantial investments in clean and renewable forms of energy ensure a coal free, nuclear free future.

**WE RESIST** the "border wall" and the "Muslim ban" and call on the spirit of Lady Liberty to continue to lift her "lamp beside the golden door."

**WE UNIFY** around good, public schools where children are nourished for a good day of learning and educated for a better tomorrow.

**WE RESIST** the growing gap between rich and poor, the vanishing middle class, and the further entrenching of corporate interests over people-centered practices.

**WE ARE THE UNIFY AND RESIST COALITION AND  
WE WILL CONTINUE WORKING TOGETHER ON THESE AND OTHER ISSUES.**

*Signed by the following members of the Unify and Resist Coalition:*

ACTION TOGETHER CT NEW LONDON COUNTY · IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY & SUPPORT CENTER · NEIGHBORS MAKING NOISE  
NEW LONDON GREEN PARTY · RAGING GRANNIES OF GREATER WESTERLY · RISE UP MYSTIC · ST. FRANCIS HOUSE · THINK LOUD  
TOGETHER WE RISE CT · WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE NEW ENGLAND · WELCOMING REFUGEES/START FRESH, INC. · WE STAND TOGETHER

*The above organizations have contributed to the publication of this message: paid for through St. Francis House, New London.*



# Remembering "Alaska"

August 28, 1956 -



Bob with Sr. Clare from the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, MA at a Clarification of Thought gathering at St. Francis House

Any death is a shock, a breaking of precious threads in the web of relationships that binds a community together. But when someone as deeply connected to all of us as Bob dies totally unexpectedly, it is a rupture. Coming in from Alaska on September 2, we were making plans to take Bob for his hip surgery on September 13 in Hartford and to have him at St. Francis House for part of his time of recuperation. Instead September 13 found us at his wake in Norwich where his mother, sister and nephews still reside.

Although born and raised a Roman Catholic, Bob was deeply drawn to Native American spirituality and served for many years as one of Connecticut's two licensed Native American prison chaplains. He also worked for many years out of the AIDS clinic at Backus Hospital in Norwich. That work was part of what made us recognize and welcome Bob as a sojourning member of St. Francis House. His wide range of friendships enriched our life as well including our becoming an annual stop for the Peace Pagoda in their Walk for a New Spring.



Mike leading ceremony in memory of Bob with members of the extended community in the SFH Meditation Garden at 30 Broad Street.

*I felt that I was just getting to know Bob on his various visits from Alaska and like everyone else, I'm mourning the loss of his presence and humor and knowledge. Last month I was honored to be asked to lead a small informal ceremony for Alaska Bob after Morning Prayer. There was some sage and a feather left by Bob to use to smudge and to invoke the four cardinal directions and the element associated with each. We assembled in the Meditation Garden and started in the East with the element of Air calling on inspiration and clarity on our journey as well as Bob's. We moved to the South calling on Fire for passion and energy. Next to the West, the element of Water, for the collective unconscious and accepting death as a small part of the whole. We honored the element Earth in the North asking for strength. We ended by calling on the Great Spirit in the Heavens and then gathered for breakfast and telling "Bob stories" for an hour around the dining room table. The pheasant feather and the clam shell in which the sage was burned are currently on the altar in our chapel. Mike Hatt*



# Bob" Bassett

September 5, 2017



Bob's clam shell and feather.



Bob having coffee on the porch of St. Francis House with other residents of the House.

In 2006 Bob came for two weeks and when we realized that those two weeks had turned into two years of regular sojourns with us, we explored with him whether he should become a Member of the House. It became clear to all of us that although deeply rooted in the works of mercy, the Gospel was not the presenting well-spring of Bob's spirituality although he always attended Morning Prayer when he was in residence. But his desire to be with friends in need of his help or on one of his regular mission trips with the Red Cross or participating in or preparing for Sun Dance in South Dakota or on his way to one of Connecticut's Men's Prisons made it clear that our welcoming him as Friend and Colleague whenever he showed up rather than expect him to engage in the House's regular practices was the best way for him to contribute to the life of the House and for us to honor and support his gifts and vocation.

Bob's generosity of spirit was immense. Sarah Jarrett came up from D.C. for his funeral. Joanne Sheehan and Rick Gaumer's children Patrick and Annie mourned him. Patrick's wife Frida Berrigan commented that not many people are able to develop relationships with the children of their movement friends and continue those relationships on a real level as those children emerge into adulthood. Bob could and did.

*Bob was a gifted cook and baker. When Reona heard the news of his death, she sighed and said how she would miss the wonderful smell of freshly baked banana bread wafting through the House early in the morning before Morning Prayer. Then she looked embarrassed. "Is that a selfish thought to have?" she asked. "No," I said, "He would have loved to hear you say that!" The photo at right shows Bob relaxing before one of our cookouts. This may be one of the many times he brought salmon from Alaska to grill. We will miss him and his many gifts of hospitality. We will have "Bob Bassett dip" in his honor at this year's Christmas Party and for many occasions to come. Anne Scheibner*





### St Francis House: A Call for Residents

St. Francis House is an intentional Christian community in New London, Connecticut. We are looking for people interested in living and working with us. We are currently a residential community of 6 living in two adjacent houses. Our practices include weekday Morning Prayer, weekly community meetings and African Method of Bible Study.

We are looking for people able to make at least a one year commitment with the possibility of extending that time. Community members are active participants in the physical maintenance, hospitality and prayer life of the House, share meals regularly and make a monthly contribution on a sliding scale towards the expenses of the House.

We try to be an active force for the common good in our city—we vigil for peace, host a bi-weekly Clarification of Thought series, co-sponsor the annual Homeless Memorial Day Service and open our doors for people interested in using our peace and justice library and collections.

Saint Francis House is anchored in the New London community in many ways. House residents support and work with many initiatives. We have a special commitment to supporting community action which St. Francis House members were partners in starting, including:

- \* Homelessness with the Homeless Hospitality Center
- \* Community gardening through FRESH New London
- \* Community Land Trust development for Southeast CT
- \* Peace witness and advocacy with Veterans for Peace
- \* Public education reform with Re:PublicEd
- \* Work for restorative practices

If you would like more information or an application for membership, please be in touch with us by emailing [saintfranchishouseNL@att.net](mailto:saintfranchishouseNL@att.net). You can learn more about us, by visiting our website: <http://stfranchishouseNL.org>

In addition to looking for resident members, we also welcome guests and people on retreat, holiday or sabbatical for periods of a weekend up to 6 months.



### Clarification of Thought Schedule



Fall - Winter

2017

#### *The Poor People's Campaign: 50 Years Later*

**Friday Schedule** 5:30 Evening Prayer;  
6:00 Supper; 7-8:30 Conversation

| Date     | Topic                                     | Presenter                       |
|----------|---|---------------------------------|
| Sept. 22 | Poverty and Homelessness                  | <i>David Gonzalez Rice</i>      |
| Oct. 6   | Race and Poverty                          | <i>Pam McDonald</i>             |
| Oct. 20  | The Church and Community Development      | <i>Rev. Dawrell Rich</i>        |
| Nov. 3   | Urban Ministry and the Signs of the Times | <i>Rev. Ranjit Mathews</i>      |
| Nov. 17  | The Principalities and Powers             | <i>Bill Wylie-Kellermann</i>    |
| Dec. 1   | Politics, Polity and Advocacy             | <i>Byron Rushing</i>            |
| Dec. 15  | Reflections and Wrap-Up                   | <i>Deacon Ellen Adams &amp;</i> |

At our annual extended community retreat/anchoring time at the Voluntown Peace Trust in June, we spent time reflecting on what we had learned through our spring Clarification of Thought series on "Peace and Security in SE CT." In the light of that reflection, we decided that we needed to use the fall series to prepare for next year by focusing on "The Poor People's Campaign: 50 Years Later." In our fall issue of the *Troubadour*, we reprinted Ed Rodman's talk on "Building the Beloved Community" from the 40th Anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. Rereading his words got us off to a deeply reflective start. This has been an exciting series and we will share what we have learned with you all in upcoming issues of the *Troubadour*.

## ST. FRANCIS HOUSE 2017 ANNUAL APPEAL



Dear Friends:

This has been a year of struggle and celebration in many different ways.

Our spring Clarification of Thought series focused on “Peace and Security in SE CT.” Deacon Ron Steed led us in an in-depth look at “Just War Theory and Redemptive Violence.” Sr. Megan Rice, SHCJ, an old friend of Cal’s, spoke movingly about our life in the age of nuclear weapons and her time in prison for her witness at the nuclear materials facility in Oak Ridge, TN. Ronna Stuller, our longtime colleague on the SE CT Peace and Justice Network spoke on the “History of the Local Peace Movement” with another old friend and colleague, Joanne Sheehan of the War Resisters League and the Voluntown Peace Trust. Tim Bowles, former CT state representative, helped us take a hard look at local efforts to promote Economic Conversion. And Cathy Zall, executive director of the Homeless Hospitality Center, led us in a concluding session reflecting on “In What is Your Security?”

On April 4 we did our annual observance of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Riverside Church address with both a witness at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and taking turns reading the address in its entirety. This year was the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s “breaking his silence” on the Vietnam War and next April 4 will be the 50th Anniversary of his assassination and the Poor People’s Campaign. So we decided to focus this fall’s Clarification of Thought series connecting various areas of concern with the overall theme of “The Poor People’s Campaign: 50 Years Later.”

This year we have also had to grieve the death of Emmett’s pilgrimage partner Eric Swanfeldt in May, Paul Jakoboski’s in July and the totally unexpected death of Bob Bassett in September. In October we welcomed the Rev. Ranjit Mathews, the new rector of St. James Episcopal Church, New London, to be part of our St. Francis Day community celebration of the lives of all our local saints including Emmett (d. 2010), Mark Auer (Vietnam vet who lived with us for 4 years and died in 2007), SFH board members Eunice Waller (2012), Linda Powell (2013) and resident Dorothy Paulsen (2012) as well as Dr. King whom it seemed appropriate to remember since October 4 falls exactly 6 months between his journey from Riverside to Memphis.

This past January’s inauguration marked a transition for all of us. We count on all of you to be part of the journey of the SFH community in whatever ways you can: your time, prayers, talent and treasure. Please note our call for new residents of the House if you or anyone you know might be moved to discern whether a time of residency here might be part of your vocation as well. We ask you to share this call with friends and colleagues whom you think might be drawn to life at St. Francis House.

Our prayers and best wishes for all of you this holiday season and the coming year. Come and visit!

Reona Dyess

Mike Hatt

Grace Panko

Len Raymond

Cal Robertson

Anne Scheibner

Saint Francis House  
P.O. Box 2171  
30 Broad St.  
New London, CT 06320-2171

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**Website: [www.stfranchishouseNL.org](http://www.stfranchishouseNL.org)**

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**Annual St. Francis House Christmas Party**  
**FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2018**

5:30 Evening Prayer 6-8:30 Festive Buffet  
Bring a favorite food, song, poetry, music  
or story to share