

TROUBADOUR

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



Center Section: Come and See: Residency & Hermitage

Winter/Spring 2019

Vol. 21, No. 1

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Beginning our Twentieth Anniversary Year

Where are former residents? Where is the House? Where are you?

St. Francis House began in 1999. Gladys Rodman brought her machete to the first board meeting in October and hacked out the undergrowth for what became our back yard and meditation garden. The first *Troubadour* was published in the fall of 1999 which is why this year is Volume 21. And we had our first Clarification of Thought on a Wednesday in December.

By the summer of 2000 the renovations on 30 Broad Street were far enough along so that Emmett, Anne, Nate (then 15) and Sarah (then 11) moved onto the third floor. In 2002 we bought the then pretty derelict building next door which has become Victory House. Over the years we have had many different people living here for short or longer periods of time. When we realized that our 20th anniversary was upon us, we discussed what should be done in recognition of what feels like a milestone. We'd be happy to hear thoughts and reflections from you, our readers.

We decided we did not want primarily to look backwards. On the other hand, we realized this could be an opportunity to reach out to former residents of the House and hear what they have been up to and what they see as the role of St. Francis House in their lives and what we should continue to be about. So this issue is the beginning of hearing those stories. We had more responses than we could publish in one issue! So stay tuned for more to come.

We also wanted this year's Clarification of Thought to embody awareness of our 20 years in this place and so the discussion at our extended community and board discussion in October arrived back at the theme of "Building the Beloved Community." The Beloved Community was one of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s key insights into how to engage in non-violent struggle in the United States. It is not simply that people in general and Christians in particular are called to love one another. Rather it envisions reconciliation as non-violent direct action overcoming unjust conditions and in the process of that struggle, turning enemies into friends. It embodies the idea that freedom without equality is a sham. It calls for a willingness to make personal sacrifices - and, if necessary, to suffer - as part of the work. As Canon Rodman said at the end of his address marking the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination, "So stay focused with your eyes on the prize by learning from history, practicing compassion, and being willing to sacrifice. Always remain anchored in non-violence. And so create the new music to lead us to the Beloved Community."

So we have invited friends and colleagues to reflect on the struggles of the last twenty years as the focus for this Winter/Spring Clarification of Thought series. St. Francis House was founded as an intentional Christian community with no agenda other than getting to know our neighbors and supporting whatever action/work emerged. The neighbors and the struggles which have emerged involved homelessness, urban gardening and local food production, peace witness and resisting the Mock Terror attack, supporting parents' and students' engagement in public education policy and most recently developing affordable housing/green space and community space through the creation of a regional community land trust. The schedule for this Winter/Spring series is on page 3 of this issue.

St. Francis House is a "place of prayer, a house of hospitality and a center for peace and justice ministry." The Center Section of this issue includes photos of our renewed space in the Hermitage as part of our hospitality offering for time here at St. Francis House. The length of time can range from overnights and weekends to weeklong retreats and sabbaticals. This *Troubadour* includes news of how any of you graduating from college, retiring or needing to try community work as part of a mid-life transition might be interested in exploring residency in St. Francis House as part of your journey.

We look forward to hearing from or seeing you during this anniversary year!

Hearing from Former SFH Residents

Mary J. Novak –

Today, I gratefully serve Georgetown University Law School as a mission integrator and spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition, and as chaplain to people of all faith traditions or none at all. I also serve as Chair of the Board of the Catholic Mobilizing Network (to End the Use of the Death Penalty and Promote Restorative Justice).

When I spent my year living at St. Francis House, I was discerning my next call having arrived heartbroken from the loss of the Voluntown Peace Trust vision and community. A few weeks into my stay in the lovely Hermitage, Emmett and Anne invited me to prepare a plan for my year. I thought it was a bit formalistic at first, but I trusted their wisdom and put one together. In retrospect, I know it was one of many graced moments that year.

Beginning each morning in prayer with the community provided the necessary structure for my process as did weekly reflection, calligraphy classes and meals shared with my soul friend Rev. Carolyn Patierno who was on sabbatical (another grace). Rounding out my time was the gift of weekly book group discussions with area ministers, singing lessons, the manual work in the community, the New London context education Anne provided, service on the FRESH New London Advisory Board, much reading and contemplative prayer, and regular spiritual direction with a masterful director. When our dear Emmett was diagnosed with cancer and had to move to Stonington for a while with Anne, their request that I lead morning prayer and serve in other community leadership roles called me out of my quiet process as my strength was returning.

This rich time revealed the beginning of a call to ministry which I brought to the community for discernment. When they confirmed my call, I began to put the next steps in place leading to a move to Washington, D.C. to finish my theology and ministry studies. My feelings were understandably mixed upon leaving St. Francis House because, while I had grown in respect for the organization while serving for years on the board, I fell in love amidst the nitty gritty reality of day-to-day living together as part of a larger beloved community. And when I fell in love, my own broken heart mended enough to welcome the call I continue to live into today.

In its typical fashion, the SFH community gathered in 2009 to send me off (cookout photo on right) and their love carried me through my transition to

D.C. While I have returned often, my 2017 visit to this beloved community was a special treat when some of those who inspired my call gathered over a meal to celebrate this sacred journey we still share.

As you go forward, St. Francis House, I pray you stay grounded in prayer and discernment, and suggest intentional and disciplined processes with all your members and visitors. That recipe remains with me today as does your love for which I am eternally grateful.

Chrissy Guarneri –

Like a harbor shelters vessels from a storm, St. Francis House is a refuge when you are hurt, lonely, or afraid. Everyone needs to feel divinely protected; everyone needs to be loved. At a frantic time of transition in my life I was welcomed into a purposeful family life of faith and sense of community with everyone in residence. It wasn't just a place to stay, but an opportunity for spiritual and intellectual growth. This is what I believe, and what I saw manifest itself in my stay from August 2000 – June 2002.

From daily interactions including morning and evening prayers, to the introduction of the African Bible Study Method, to bi-weekly Clarification of Thought, I was able, in a rough sea, to redirect my attention to God's presence and allow the negative thoughts and feelings subside into a calmness.

We are all just a small part of a bigger life picture and my stay made me more aware of the importance of local community. I saw the battle against 'eminent domain' in New London and this started my factual understanding of economic redevelopment. I learned that for community growth there needs to be common goals, ideals and a good plan for decent trade and industry. And more importantly, when those things are 'out of sorts' in a community that people must come together when they feel strongly about an issue because each of the small parts helps keep the bigger picture in focus.

You have heard the saying "sticks and stones can break my



bones, but words can never hurt you.” Not so. The truth is that words have power; they can help breathe life into a hopeless situation or they can tear down the fragility of the spirit. Speak to encourage or discourage? St. Francis House is the most uplifting and encouraging connection I have had the pleasure of experiencing.

At a quick glance my personal offerings seem limited as I look back nearly twenty years. I cooked. I helped with homework. I knew my way around a computer and made nametags. I generated the Episcopal Urban Caucus mailing list. [Note: At that time St. Francis House was the national headquarters for the EUC.] I aided in the decision that we needed a sign; I made the sign that still hangs out front on the 30 Broad Street porch. But then when I really think about it, I realize that through the grace of God, I was given the opportunity, albeit unknowingly at the time, to offer my positive energy and never-ending gratitude on a trial run of a great concept, an intentional Christian community: a residence that kindles loving and learning, faith and freedom, patience and justice, compassion and creativity, enthusiasm and flexibility and the understanding that the idea of community comes from a shared sense of responsibility for each other.

Since living at St. Francis House, I graduated from Eastern *summa cum laude*, worked with the National Theater for the Deaf and various educational bodies and for 19 years, I’ve hosted the Chatterbox Old Time Radio show.

Galatians 6:2 “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”



Clarification of Thought Schedule

Winter-Spring



2019

Building the Beloved Community

Feb. 15 - *Introduction*

The Revs. Florence Clarke & Norm Faramelli

March 1 - *Land and Housing*

The Rev. Cathy Zall and Reona Dyess

March 15 - *Food Production and Land*

Alicia McAvay and Julie Garay

March 29 - *Peace Making and Music*

Marlies Parent and Madeline Labriola

April 12 - *Education*

Mirna Martinez and Laura Burfoot

April 26 - *Saints*

Robert Ellsberg

May 10 - *Equality*

David Gonzalez Rice and Deacon Ellen Adams

Evening Schedule

5:30PM Evening Prayer 6:00PM Supper
7-8:30PM Conversation

*If you need child care, please let us know by
7:00PM Wednesday of that week.*

The reasons for addressing this theme at this time are laid out in the introductory comments on page 1 of this issue. We reprinted the Rev. Canon Edward Rodman’s 2008 address “Building the Beloved Community” on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination in the Fall 2017 *Troubadour*. That issue is on our website: www.stfrancishouseNL.org - go to *Troubadour*, Volume 19, No. 2. Canon Rodman’s analysis and insights are well worth revisiting as we engage this theme.

Left photo: Farewell cookout in the SFH back yard for Mary Novak - Left to right - Paul Jakoboski, Anne Scheibner, Beth McBride, Zuli Jarrett, Nate Jarrett, Janet Minella-Didier (partially obscured), Laura Burfoot, Mary Novak (seated), (back turned) Mystery Guest, Aunt Dorrie



Come and

St. Francis House is an intentional Christian community in the downtown of a small waterfront city with big city issues. There are seven of us currently in residence at the original SFH at 30 Broad (building on the left) and Victory House (on the right). We are open to others interested in living and working as resident members. Our practices include weekday Morning Prayer, weekly community meetings and African Method of Bible Study.

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

- * Homeless Hospitality Center
- * Community gardening through FRESH New London
- * SE CT Community Land Trust development
- * Peace witness and advocacy with Veterans for Peace
- * Public education reform
- * Work for restorative practices

Resident members of St. Francis House 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 to those interested in using our library. **For those qualifying for resident membership in the SFH community, internship opportunities can be developed in the areas of work listed above.**

You can learn more about St. Francis House by visiting our website at <http://stfranchishouseNL.org> and spend some time browsing our *Troubadour* newsletters. For people who live near New London, application for membership begins with coming to Morning Prayer and attending Clarification of Thought. For people who live farther away, a visit which includes at least part of a week (i.e. not just a weekend) is suggested before writing a 2 page spiritual autobiography and giving us more details of your background and interests. The Hermitage is available for such exploratory visits.

Photo at right: *Victory House Conference Room* We provide meeting space for the groups with whom we work and we regularly host meetings for groups such as the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

This photo shows part of the extended community of the House gathered for dinner and discussion. The modular tables can be arranged to accommodate meetings of 8-16 people.



See: An Invitation



The photo above shows the Hermitage (rear right) which is accessible through an interior door to the main House as well as a separate outside entrance to the driveway/parking area. The Hermitage provides a sitting room, bedroom and private bath. Kitchen facilities as well as meals with the St. Francis House community are available to Hermitage guests. The Hermitage includes the Franciscan studies, poetry and fiction collections of the St. Francis House library as well as secondary Biblical reference works. The social justice and theology library is located on the first floor of the main House. Hermitage guests are welcomed to avail themselves of the chapel, weekday Morning Prayer, weekly Bible Study and the TV parlor or to close the door and enjoy the Hermitage as a time of solitude. We welcome guests and people on retreat, holiday or sabbatical for periods of a weekend up to 6 months.

Contact Grace Panko at St. Francis House for further information and to schedule your time with us.

Email: stfrancishouseNL@att.net Call: 860 437-8890 Or write to us:

ST. FRANCIS HOUSE 30 BROAD ST. NEW LONDON, CT 06320



Above: The Hermitage sitting room is also available for daytime small group meetings (6-8 people) such as staff or leadership teams.

We have also hosted confirmation groups from as near as Lyme and as far away as New York City. The sitting room looks out over our wooded back yard and meditation garden as well as a cathedral-like view of St. Mary Star of the Sea which marks our urban horizon line.

Bienvenida Mendoza –

For us, St. Francis House meant life, love, solidarity, compassion and brotherhood.

We were very happy because of all of the support that it gave us in our stay for about 3 years. There, we were able to share like a family, pray together, work for the community together, and at the same time it was a great lesson for my sons because they could grow surrounded by that type of space, surrounded by care, love, and attention needed at their age, and that made them men with that very same charisma and love for the world, and had them continue with that type of work in their surroundings at all times. Since our return to the D.R. (Dominican Republic) in 2010 they still continued doing social projects, community work and spread love to everyone they interact with.

Recently, Max and Henri are working with cultural groups, organizations, teaching English to kids and maintaining a relationship with the community. They also completed a course for young leaders, called Agents of Change with an international institution that promotes and teaches young adults to be leaders and be agents of the change we wish to see in the D.R. and the world. Henri has now returned to the US to finish college and is focused on his studies.

And I, I have continued working with women, young kids, the community, and now I teach at a university after completing my master's degree in the US while at St. Francis House. All of these accomplishments make me very grateful to St. Francis House. If it weren't for St. Francis house we wouldn't be where we are now or how we are now.

And in regards to looking towards the future, some things we have in mind would be the conversations or the discussions St Francis House hosted, to make them more open to the community, invite more people or other communities. Another would be the protests, to use social media or different means to spread St. Francis House's voice to attract more supports or like-minded people. Another would be to retake gardening or the planting of vegetables, and offer it to children that are interested, or as a means for students to complete the community service work they need to graduate. Another possibility would be a type of cultural exchange in regards to gardening and crops. This could involve inviting people from different countries to share their experiences and cultures, as a type of exchange and to raise awareness or initiate a means to respond to GMOs and climate change and to learn different methods of planting in people's own backyards, to make the world greener.

Another point, would be to attract or prepare a type of course or program or activity aimed at young adults to pass on the torch or to teach them of the history of St. Francis House and the history of fights and social work St. Francis House has been a part of, and to invite younger minds and voices to the House, so that when those that began and kept alive the flame of St. Francis House are gone, St. Francis House can continue always. Thank you for existing, St. Francis House!!!



Bienvenida came up from the Dominican Republic and visited Henri at college in Connecticut this past January.

Henri Alphonse –

Right now I'm finishing my bachelors in Psychology with a minor in community engagement. I just transferred to CCSU (Central Connecticut State University) and will soon become a part of multiple activist groups focused around the environment, immigration and other social causes.

How did SFH affect me? I stayed between 2 and 3 years in St. Francis House (2007-2010), but was part of the community for a lot longer. One of my earlier memories was going to a film sponsored or supported by SFH on Depleted Uranium and its use in the war and how it woke me up. I remember being invited to many events that instilled my drive for improving this world; it helped that my parents also cared about so many of these issues. But it still was such a large influence being near and always being in contact with adults truly invested in bettering their community and world. It was around that time my dream was to be a chemist; it was a significant reason that eventually lead me to my current path on wanting to have a role in healing people and society. I remember that film, seeing other children my age and younger who had no escape to their reality. It was something I needed to see to make me aware of a

wider and not so great world, so I could care and be more involved in whatever way I could.

The most important and impacting experience was the community that made up St. Francis House. There were those that stayed for years that you shared a smile and a wave saying hello with small conversations. There were those who returned seasonally like Alaska Bob, that you could tell were stopping by because of the energy in SFH even before being told. The ever caring Anne who always was there for us, asked about school, baseball and everything and who taught us how to care for plants when we helped with the vegetable garden. We got attached to the garden and on the walk back from school, I remember checking on the strawberries before going home to put down the oversized book bag I carried. Something that might have helped in forging my patience: I remember Otis, whom I sometimes walked and whom I named my dog after. I will bring Otis back from the Dominican Republic this summer when I visit. Otis, that cute beagle that I always associated with SFH whenever I thought of it as a child.

St. Francis House should always pay attention to the community continuing to uplift it and always value things like the garden, the people with amazing stories and convictions, the films, the connections formed around good food and the space where people always smile.

Robert Middeke-Conlin –

[Note: “Vista Bob,” as we still call him, worked with the Homeless Hospitality Center in 2010 after finishing a masters degree at Yale.] Well, it’s been a very interesting time since I left St. Francis House. As you may know, I was accepted as a pre-doctoral fellow at the prestigious SPHERE lab in Paris to study history of mathematics as part of the European Research Council funded Mathematical Sciences in the Ancient World (SAW) project. My project used discrepancies in economic texts to reconstruct mathematical practices and scribal education in the Old Babylonian period. I successfully defended my PhD in June of 2015, but my degree wasn’t officially granted until 2016, which left me a gap to volunteer my time working as a church sexton at a lovely inner-city church that also serves as a community center in Allentown, PA. Following graduation, I found myself as a post-doctoral associate at Yale University editing ancient economic texts for a future book, and then in early 2017, I moved to Berlin, Germany as a visiting post-doctoral fellow at the Max-Planck Institute for

the History of Science (Berlin Center for the History of Knowledge) where I am studying numeracy among ancient scribes. So far, my first book, *The Making of a Scribe: Errors, Mistakes, and Rounding Numbers in the Old Babylonian Kingdom of Larsa*, has been accepted and will come out this year as part of the Springer series, *Why the Sciences of the Ancient World Matter*. This is in addition to the articles I’ve written. At the moment I’m finishing up my second book and looking for my next position.

Basically, my research reconstructs mathematical practices and education in the early 2nd Millennium BCE in southern Iraq, focusing on mathematics used in everyday life and professional practices. I examine how mathematics was useful to the average person in an ancient society. I also examine how numerically literate this ancient people were, as well as how this numeracy affected the functioning of the economy. To put it another, more general way, I research fact, knowledge, and the impact of education on society – an important topic in this day and age.

That’s a very cursory summary of what I’ve been up to professionally, and does not mention travels, such as my visit to Rio as part of the International Conference on the History of Science and Technology in 2017, or my recent trip to Rome to discuss a special journal issue on water history. It seems my work is in demand and so I have little free time. But, I do find time to run, and run I do! I love to run distances, in particular marathons and ultra-marathons. The hardest part of my life right now is living apart from my wife and the love of my life, Becca. However, even this is good because she is building her career and with it bringing change to Northeast Pennsylvania as a Lutheran pastor. We have two dogs, our little weirdos: sweet Koko whom those of you who were at the House in 2010 have met and Pi, an irrational pit-bull who is new. Sadly, Daisy passed a few years back.

My time at St. Francis House has guided me in my life in three ways. First, my day begins and ends with a silent, contemplative prayer and reflection that has evolved from my experience with the collective morning prayers and worship at St. Francis House. This is an important part of my daily routine that is augmented while I silently workout – all are times of reflection and prayer. Second, I still feel a drive to volunteer my time in order to benefit my community and don’t see this going away. Finally, and most significant, my time at St. Francis House has helped me focus my research to questions that I believe will have a positive effect on the world.



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“Building the Beloved Community”

Center Section: The Hermitage and Residency -
An Invitation to “Come and See”



**The Annual
St. Francis House
Community Retreat**

9:30 am - 3 pm

Saturday, June 1

**The Voluntown Peace Trust
A. J. Muste Center**

**539 Beach Pond Road
Voluntown, CT**