

TROUBADOUR

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



September 1999

Vol. 1, No. 1

+++++

THE NEW LIFE: EXPERIMENT WITH TRUTH

THIS IS THE FIRST issue of **TROUBADOUR**, the Newsletter of St. Francis House and there is much more news to share with our friends and benefactors than can possibly fit into its pages. The first thing to say is that *we have arrived*. The four of us who in some sense constitute the "personnel" of St. Francis House – Anne Scheibner, Fr. Emmett Jarrett, TSSF, and our children Nathaniel and Sarah – are now in Connecticut. We parted from friends in Atlanta on 2 August and arrived here in time to spend the weekend scrubbing and cleaning the house at 30 Broad Street, New London, which is St. Francis House and will be our home.

My first insight into our new life came as I was scrubbing the bathroom floors on the second floor of the House, the one that retains more of the "boarding house" atmosphere (and odor) than the others. I realized as I scrubbed that I had lived in apartments like this on the Lower East Side when I first moved to New York City in 1962. This was not new to me! The second insight came as we began to meet our neighbors. Many of them are older people who lived in a senior housing high rise next to Williams Park, which is on the corner of our block. Some of them eat at "A Movable Feast," a monthly meal served by members of St. James Episcopal Church a block away. Other neighbors work out of the day labor pool across the street and hang out in front of the "California Market" food store. Some of these neighbors are intoxicated, some are just out of jail or waiting to go to jail. The District Court is in the next block. And some of our neighbors are lawyers and dentists and accountants who have bought up the rooming houses (like ours) which were once the homes of well-to-do New London families. Our neighbors – at least the ones who stop to chat – are quite interested in what we might be up to. When we find out, we'll tell them, and readers of **TROUBADOUR** as well. This is far more an "experiment with truth" than a program!

That phrase, "experiment with truth," brings Gandhi to mind. I was struck when we first arrived in Connecticut by Gandhi's example. When the Mahatma returned to India from South Africa in 1915, before he began the public work that led to the liberation of India from British rule, he first visited the country to get to know his people again. Second, he founded an ashram in Amedhabad where he could live with family and friends, pray and study, and from which to do the work. If I can make the comparison without presumption, I think that is what we are called to do right now. First to get to know our neighbors in New London, and second to establish St. Francis House as our base of prayer, study and ministry, or public work.

That brings me to my third insight. Most people we talk to about St. Francis House and our plans to live and do ministry here think we must be opening a homeless shelter or a soup kitchen. While it's natural to assume a "programmatic focus" for a place called "St. Francis House," in fact, the house is not nearly big enough for either of those activities. Indeed, we cannot know in advance what ministry is needed in our new neighborhood before we have lived here awhile. At this point, we have no "program" beyond moving in and becoming neighbors to our neighbors. St. Kevin of Glendalough spent two years in silent prayer in a cave before establishing a monastery there in the seventh century. I believe we are called, like Kevin and others, to move in, open our eyes and ears and hearts, pray to God for guidance, and then "Do whatever he tells us." That's what Mary said to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee (John 2). I guess that's our motto: *Do whatever he tells you.*

Right now, we are in the process of renovating the house at 30 Broad Street. For those who have not seen photos or diagrams, let me explain in a few words. The house is a 2-story frame house build in 1890, with a finished attic. The first floor was most recently rented out as an apartment, and will be pretty easily converted into public space for our work. The front room will be the chapel or meditation room. There is a living room for conversation – "clarification of thought" sessions – a dining room for eating and inviting others to share our family meals, and a kitchen in the rear of the building. Actually the kitchen is now in the front room and must be moved. There is also another room to the side where I have all my books that will become a library and office space for St. Francis House. It's already possible to do individual spiritual direction there.

The second floor most resembles the rooming house it once was and will someday be rooms for people to stay in as guests, retreatants, or members of the St. Francis House community, when and if it grows beyond our family. The heat and electricity must be connected there and a huge cleaning job done to make it habitable. The third floor, where we plan to live, requires the most extensive



renovation – a new roof, with dormers to give space and light.. We're looking at a minimum of \$100,000 to make the space livable, and rehabilitate the house's heating and electric systems. We hope to be able to keep the steam heat in part because I love to hear the knock-knocking of the radiators on cold mornings!

Until these things are done – no sooner than January, 2000 – we will live in the house in nearby Stonington that Anne's father build in 1952 when her grandfather retired as rector of Calvary Episcopal Church in Stonington village. It's not a bad commute, and I will be working part-time at Connecticut College and St. James Church, in New London, and taking Nathaniel to school at Williams on the Conn College campus every day. Sarah will stay at Dean's Mill Elementary, which she enjoyed very much last year, at least until we move into St. Francis House.

Our "new life" has begun. I suspect it has been happening for a long time but the pace of change has increased dramatically. We are learning from Francis, who sought to live "according to the form of the holy Gospel." We are learning from Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. We are learning from Gandhi, who had the courage to make his entire life an "experiment with truth." We expect to learn from our mistakes, as he did, and to share our learnings and our mistakes with friends and readers. The very notion of an *experiment* with truth is liberating to me! But finally we are simply seeking to follow Jesus, to be Christian disciples, to "do whatever he tells us."

■ Fr. Emmett Jarrett, TSSF

St. Francis House Board of Directors

Emmett Jarrett, TSSF, President & Treasurer
Anne Scheibner, Vice President & Secretary
Karen Marks Charlie Palmgren, TSSF
Dick Marks Linda Powell Ed Rodman

FALL BOARD MEETING
St. Francis House, New London, CT
Saturday, October 9, 1999



"Where your treasure is...."

"FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, there will your heart be also." Picture St. Francis stripping himself naked in the village square. This was his first public act of identification with being a man of Christ instead of a man of the world. The reverberations of the totality of the act have been felt through the ages and when Emmett first announced his vision of our moving to New London and starting a ministry known as "St. Francis House," I was shaken to the core. "Not a chance," said I. It took five months of prayer and Bible study to get us to a place of making a joint commitment to setting off on this new journey in ministry. The shape of "what we are doing" is not clear and discovering the way as we go is part of the journey. Each step gives rise to new problems and new opportunities. But here is what we have done so far:

We incorporated St. Francis House and bought our 100 year old boarding house in St. Francis' name for \$95,000. We have made a \$40,000 loan to the House which will be forgiven over the next five years as the ministry unfolds. St. Francis House and the community which forms in it and through it, is where we expect to live for the rest of our lives. The house will not be "ours" in the sense of property we can sell or leave to our children. But it is an investment both for us and for them in the kind of community we hope will embody our commitments to justice and will help build the idea of equity into their lives as well as ours.

I made a gift of roughly \$50,000 of Compaq stock – my only really successful personal investment started with \$4,000 some 20 years ago – to Equity Trust's community loan fund which enables affordable housing, community-supported agriculture, and other community-based initiatives. Equity Trust then lent \$55,000 to St. Francis House. Two years from now we will begin to repay that loan. The Loan Fund will give priority for the use of those funds to community-supported agriculture in southeastern Connecticut, since we hope to be part of developing sustainable agriculture in this region and to find new ways of uniting rural and urban areas.

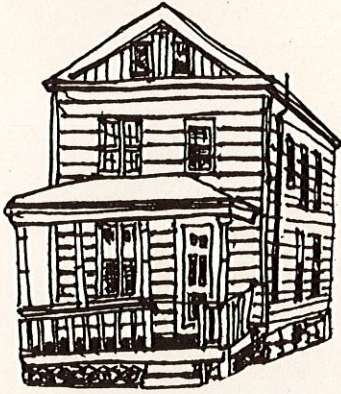


We put our house in Stone Mountain on the market and realized for the first time, having previously lived in church-owned rectories, how mortgages work. After five years of paying \$1,300 a month, we had only \$5,000 of equity in our home! My thought was immediately that we should be able to "recycle" homes within the community of faith through some combination of small loans from church members and thereby avoid repetition of the cycle of making purely interest payments for the first 10-15 years of a 30-year mortgage. To our great joy, we hope to be able to turn the house over to a couple who are members of our former parish. They chose to assume our mortgage and we will be holders of a second mortgage of \$40,000 at 6% to be repaid over 15 years.

Over the next few months we will be involved in major renovations. Emmett has described some of the details. We don't know exactly what will be needed but even with everyone pitching in and a considerable amount of "sweat equity" we are still looking at \$100,000 plus an estimated \$20,000 in basic operating costs. These costs do not include any "salary" for us although they do include utilities, property insurance, soup supplies and local taxes. (We decided not to ask for exemption because we want to pay our fair share for municipal fire, police and other services. Part of the experiment is to see how we can begin building a base for ministry without making "professional" level salaries a part of the "program." We hope to be part of a network of people around the country who are making their own experiments with the truth vis-à-vis material resources. We need the ongoing prayers of our friends and readers. We also need for those who are able to be financial partners in the start-up and rehab part of the ministry to be in touch with us as soon as possible. If your heart is with us, please put your treasure there as well.

We have applied to the Internal Revenue Service for 501(c)3 tax exempt status. All contributions can be considered tax-deductible pending IRS approval. St. Francis House also now has a brokerage account in New London through Advest for anyone who wishes to make a tax-deductible capital gift.

■ Anne P. Scheibner



IN THIS ISSUE –

Emmett Jarrett, TSSF

“The New Life: Experiment with Truth”

Anne P. Scheibner

“Where your treasure is....”

A Prayer of Thomas Merton

A PRAYER OF THOMAS MERTON

MY LORD GOD, *I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

■ **Thoughts in Solitude**

**Saint Francis House
P. O. Box 2185
New London, CT 06320-2185**