



St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House

Christmas Newsletter, 2020



Et Verbum Caro Factum Est, Et Habitavit In Nobis (And the Word Was Made Flesh, and Dwelt Among Us)

“The St. Francis - St. Joseph Catholic Worker House would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. God bless you and thank you for all that you have done. The continued success of our mission would not have been possible without those of you who dedicate your time and resources to assist us, even during these difficult times. We will keep you all in our prayers and we hope that you will do the same. Thank you so much!”



REMEMBERING CAROLYN WEST

In our newsletter of 2014, board member Carolyn West was highlighted as our “Volunteer Hero.” This July 2020, our Carolyn passed away peacefully with her large family at her side.

We, the community of the Catholic Worker House, miss Carolyn’s upbeat presence and generous spirit. Many a Friday Carolyn would call the House saying she would be bringing by some pizza “for the guys”. Or she would call from her car parked outside the House asking for free hands to, “come help me get these groceries in there”. Yes, we miss our friend.

Carolyn lived life to the fullest and encouraged others to as well. Carolyn and her loving husband of 54 years, Robert, earned many awards from Hamilton County and Pressley Ridge Schools for their mentoring and fostering of over 30 foster children.

Carolyn loved the City of Cincinnati and her spiritual home, Miami Baptist Church. From her days owning a McMillan Avenue vegetable store, to being the first woman owner of a Finley Market stand, Carolyn made her mark on Cincinnati.

In 2004 when Carolyn answered Father Mark Schmieder’s call for Christmas cookies for his prison ministry, she baked dozens and dozens and her relationship with the Catholic Worker House began.

As Christmas approaches, we are sad that Carolyn will not be with us cooking for the House party. Yet we rejoice, believing that Carolyn was greeted in death with the words of Matthew 25:33, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” May Carolyn West share in the joy of her Master and rest in peace.

MANAGER’S MESSAGE

So... 2020. Those four numbers have become synonymous with tribulation, and our little shelter wasn’t spared. But I am thankful for small miracles. It could have been much worse.

When the lockdown came at the end of March we were already over capacity. We were then faced with the uncertainty of what was to come. So, we suspended the ordinary policy and allowed the men to remain whether they were employed or not. We spent most of April that way. A couple of the men left during that time, but most remained.

During this time there was work, and most of our men did. But even more, there was harmony for a period unlike anything I have experienced here. These may have been strange times, but aside from a few exceptions, it didn’t dampen their spirits. I’ll admit it was a little sad as they started to go their own ways. But the lockdown ended, and they did.

We got back to business as usual by June. In July, we suffered the loss of Gary Finney, one of my assistant managers, who passed away of a heart attack at the early age of 49. A few weeks later we lost Carolyn West, a longtime member of our board of directors (her story is above). Devastating losses, both.

But there were some bright spots. For the most part, no one got sick. We only had one staff member quarantined throughout the spring/summer, although it’s starting to pick up again. We also saw new volunteers step up in a big way when a few of our regulars vanished, and they have continued to do so. And I wouldn’t forget those of you who never left, remaining with us throughout, providing much needed stability during the storm.

Adversity reminded us that we are not alone.

- John



Charlie's 3/4 House, Over-the-Rhine

THOMAS | Thomas is a successful professional in his late 40s, an unlikely subject of this newsletter. However, the ravages of alcohol are indiscriminate. “I never even smoked a cigarette, but alcohol almost destroyed me,” he laments. Thomas reached his bottom after a failed relationship, severed family ties and a suicide attempt left him homeless and hospitalized.

A social worker at the hospital recommended the Catholic Worker House and Thomas’ recovery began immediately. He recalls “the staff was welcoming and compassionate and I was open to their suggestions.” Thomas credits our late staff member, Gary Finney, as a “mentor and a friend” and found “helpful insights” in discussions with Manager John Clark.

Thomas lived at the Catholic Worker from February to June of 2020, a unique time with the COVID19 pandemic. There were no new admissions to House and the current guests were permitted to stay beyond the usual 60 days. “We formed very strong bonds and the security gave me time to clean up the destruction I had created,” Thomas recalls with fondness.

Thomas is now nine months sober, living at Charlie’s ¾ House and working full time. While he is seeking a job in his profession, he is taking one day at a time to rebuild and exercising patience.

“I am speaking with family and I’m happy again!” Thomas exclaims. We admire Thomas for the miraculous recovery in less than a year and wish him all the best in the future.

MICHAEL | Michael is the son of retired policeman and health care worker, a very proud father of two (both in the U.S. Armed Forces) and grandfather to ten. But, like Thomas in the previous article, Michael has been an alcoholic since age 16: “I was a functioning alcoholic; I went to work every day and fulfilled my family obligations,” he posits.

For a true alcoholic, functioning can transit to dysfunctional very quickly. Michael is a native Cincinnati and grew up in Forest Park. One morning after a drinking binge, he awakened in Lexington with his car. Not knowing how he arrived there, Michael was terrified. He had been in a blackout and decided at that moment to seek help with his alcohol addiction. A friend recommended the Catholic Worker House, so Michael called and staff member, Andy, had a bed for him in two days.

Michael stayed at the House from March until June and agrees with Thomas that “this was a very close-knit group,” due to the COVID19 quarantine and social limitations. Michael attributes his successful recovery to the House staff and especially Manager John Clark: “All of the staff is cool, but John was everything to me! He was an inspiration and taught me to just keep doing the right thing.” Michael’s demeanor is earnest and possesses a singular purpose: “I just want to keep clean and sober and give back,” he asserts, adding quite simply, “AA works!”

At age 58, Michael is now eight months sober and lives at Charlie’s ¾ House. He works at JTM Foods and attends AA meetings regularly. He is also on staff at Charlie’s, providing him that opportunity to give back. He has found a simple routine that provides him a new happiness: “I pray every morning and every night.” Perhaps, that is all we need to know.

Best wishes, Michael!

ONDREA | “I was a hoodlum,” Ondrea admits, “hanging out with adults at age 14, using drugs, drinking, and running the streets of Lexington. I even dropped the sports that I love.” Ondrea went to prison for the first time at age 18 and has spent 20 of his 56 years incarcerated.

In 2008, Ondrea was on parole at a halfway house in Northern Kentucky and receiving addiction treatment. After treatment, he stayed at the Catholic Worker House, then gyrated back and forth with periods of sobriety followed by drinking and drug abuse over the next eleven years. This October, Ondrea again knocked on door of the Catholic Worker House. “John (House Manager, John Clark) remembered me and welcomed me in.” Now desperate, Ondrea was determined to make it work this time.

Ondrea starting using the resources of the House and the recovery community. Staff member “Richard really talked to me. He was the big brother I never had.” It was becoming apparent that Ondrea suffered from bipolar disorder in addition to his addiction afflictions. He is enrolled with IKRON and provided bipolar treatment in addition to job counseling. These efforts are working and Ondrea is approaching 90 days sober.



Ondrea volunteers now at the Catholic Worker House and achieved a profound milestone for someone who was in prison most of his adult life. Manager John asked Ondrea to buy some supplies for the House and gave him the money to make the purchase. Ondrea’s reaction was “Oh my God, SOMEONE TRUSTS ME!” Ondrea wept as he recalled this most fulfilling instance in his life. Ondrea summarizes his journey: “Thank you to the Catholic Worker House for the opportunity to give back.”

Ondrea currently resides at Recovery Hotel while he contemplates his future. He possesses a Culinary Arts degree from Cincinnati State University, but he might go into counseling. Yes, we trust you, Ondrea! Best wishes from all of us at the Catholic Worker House.

A PAIR OF POWERFUL PATRONS

Did Our Lord Jesus Christ answer to any man on Earth?

Indeed he did, but only one. Not a soul among the faithful can deny St. Joseph’s status as the second-most favored saint of all time, and husband to the first. Still, devotion to him wasn’t always widespread. It ripened on a vine that unites our house’s co-patrons, St. Francis and St. Joseph, in a charming and wondrous historical epic.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of a landmark occasion in St. Joseph’s honor, the Advent morning when Pope Pius IX proclaimed him as Patron of the Universal Church. With that, the pope – a Third Order Franciscan – extended a magnificent Franciscan dedication to the protector of the Holy Family. The tradition originated with St. Francis himself, whose creation of the first Nativity scene played no small role in the growth of popular affection toward Our Lord’s foster father. Over the centuries, no one contributed more than Francis and his followers in promoting devotion to St. Joseph.



As one Franciscan father noted: “The Franciscan Order was the first to propagate devotion to St. Joseph in the Western Church. The first Life of the glorious Patriarch was written by a Child of St Francis; the first Feast in his honor was established by a General Chapter of the Order, at Assisi, A.D. 1399; and the first Confraternity under his patronage was founded by a Franciscan missionary, Blessed Bernardine of Feltria, 1487. The members

of the Franciscan Order not only introduced and propagated this devotion in every country in the world evangelized by their missionaries, but it is also mainly owing to them that St. Joseph has been proclaimed the Patron of the Universal Church, by the illustrious Child of St. Francis, Pius IX.”

Given that history, our homeless shelter’s patron saints represent an especially appropriate and delightful pairing, even if unplanned with that historical connection in mind. Our name derives from the merger almost 30 years ago of St. Francis Catholic Worker House and St. Joseph House of Hospitality, but it’s nevertheless worth appreciating the special synergy between two of the Church’s most-beloved saints.

The most familiar representations of Joseph remain his presence in Nativity scenes, a Christmas fixture conceived by St. Francis in 1233. He created the first such scene, complete with live ox and donkey, for Christmas Mass in a cave near the central Italian town of Greccio. So novel was the idea that he even secured papal permission, fearing that his spectacle would be attacked as sacrilegious. The result captivated the town folk, igniting a spread far and wide. Scholars credit the popularity of Nativity scenes as immensely influential in the increase of devout attention to St. Joseph.

Franciscans remained at the forefront. St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan born about five years before St. Francis died, wrote ardently of St. Joseph’s virtues. Sixtus IV, the first Franciscan pope, approved the Order’s request to observe the Feast of St. Joseph every March 19, a practice later extended throughout the Church. The Franciscan Sanctuary of La Verna, where St. Francis received the stigmata, installed one of Italy’s most beloved Nativity artworks: an altarpiece of glazed terracotta depicting St. Francis and Franciscan St. Anthony of Padua flanking the Holy Family.

Of course, in addition to the names of our patrons, our shelter proudly bears the word “Worker,” also a title associated with St. Joseph. In the century after Pius IX honored him as Church Patron, another pope, Pius XII, instituted the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. The rationale was best expressed three centuries earlier by a French bishop who’d been baptized “Francis Bonaventura” after St. Francis and St. Bonaventure and is known today as St. Francis de Sales (patron saint of Cincinnati, incidentally). He wrote:

“Truly, I doubt not that the angels, wondering and adoring, came thronging in countless multitudes to that poor workshop to admire the humility of him who guarded that dear and divine child, and labored at his carpenter’s trade to support the son and the mother who were committed to his care.”

St. Francis and St. Joseph, pray for us and bless our work!

- PXC

ST. JOSEPH AND A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE, by Jonathan Conrad

There is something about our fallen nature that compels us to disobedience. Sometimes it’s full-blown, blatant disobedience. Other times it’s more subtle like our mom encouraging us to read a book that we just can’t find the time to read. We are all guilty of it...except one: St. Joseph (I’m not counting Mary because she was free from original sin). There is so much we can learn from what scripture says about him, his actions, and more importantly, his silence. Let’s look at one story in particular from scripture that leads us to a greater appreciation for his perfect obedience to the will of the Father.

The Flight into Egypt

Matthew 2:13 says, “Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him’”. Let’s break this down a bit and really dig into what Joseph is facing in this moment.



A Death Threat

Someone wants to kill Jesus, the son of God. We often overlook the subtleties because we know the whole story, but Joseph didn't! All he knew was someone wanted Jesus dead. Why did the Lord have to flee anyways? He's God. Theophylact of Ochrid makes a very strong point when he says, "Even the Lord flees, to confirm that He was truly man. For if He had fallen into the hands of Herod and had not been slain, it would have seemed that He had been made flesh only in appearance."

What this tells us about Joseph is that it wasn't an act. Maybe it was part of the Divine plan, but it wasn't on Joseph's agenda. Joseph is scared, but there's no time for that. He doesn't ask the angel any clarifying questions which probably would have been cool considering the circumstances. Like, "Sure thing God. What am I supposed to do about work though? I don't have a work visa in Egypt and I also don't speak the language... Oh, and I doubt I'll be able to fit all my tools on the donkey considering we need to eat..." Not a word.

A Long Journey

Egypt is far away. Really far. 430 miles far. That's Chicago to Pittsburgh which, by car, is still 7 hours. The road wasn't one of those paved nature trails with cool shade during the day and a lighted path at night. Also, there weren't many Holiday Inn Express hotels back then. If they traveled 15 miles a day which is pushing it considering a child under the age of 2, and the strong likelihood they had only 1 donkey, that's a journey of almost 30 days. You still have the unbearable desert heat, and the strong possibility of bandits and other miscreants.

Suffice it to say, this was a dangerous journey. Not to mention they were traveling with a young child. Unlike our culture today where you move wherever work takes you, people didn't move...ever. I'm not just talking husband and wife, I mean generations didn't move. So there's Joseph, in the middle of the night being told by an angel to pack up and travel 430 miles to a foreign land, a land he's never been to, and the same land where his people were persecuted for 215 years. This isn't exactly the first place I'd think to go if my family is in danger. Again, Joseph didn't ask how he was supposed to do this, he didn't ask for directions. He just went.

A One-Way Ticket

The last thing I want to point out is that Joseph didn't get a timeline. It wasn't, "Go to Egypt for 6 months," it was, "...remain there until I tell you." Can you imagine the conversation with your wife, "Hey honey, an angel just told me we need to move to Fargo...tonight. I don't have a job lined up yet and we're gonna stay for a while...ish. Oh, and we probably shouldn't wait until tomorrow because the police want to murder our son." Joseph was a carpenter, this was a pretty lowly job back then. It's unlikely he had a nest egg just waiting for retirement. They lived job to job. If you can't work, you can't feed your family. There was no emergency fund laying around to cover 3 months of living expenses. This was a total and complete act of faith and obedience to the will of the Father.

St. Joseph was a true man. He did exactly what the Lord asked of him every time and without delay. He lived the fourth commandment to the letter. He is a model of obedience that we should all aspire to follow more closely.

Here's my challenge to you: reflect on this story of St. Joseph. Imagine yourself in his shoes. Now think about your own life and where you are being called to obedience. Remember that obedience extends beyond just our parents. According to the Catechism (2199), "This commandment includes and presupposes the duties of parents, instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern, all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons." Pick something you've been ignoring, delaying, or flat out rejecting and do it. Do it for St. Joseph. I think you'll be surprised by the blessings.

St. Joseph, Patron of Workers, pray for us.

—

Jonathan Conrad is founder of The Catholic Woodworker where he crafts heirloom-quality Catholic goods and uses woodworking to evangelize.



Here's a great way you can contribute to St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House (SFSJ) while you're shopping. The Kroger Company has a program that will donate to the House based on your purchases at Kroger stores. All you need to do is register your Kroger Plus Card on-line and link it to SFSJ through the Community Rewards link on their web site. This WILL NOT affect your other rewards earned with the Kroger Plus Card.

Go to <https://www.kroger.com/i/community/community-rewards>, create an account if you have not already done so, link your card with the card number or alternate ID, and enroll the card with the Community Rewards and our agency by name (St. Francis-St. Joseph Catholic Worker House) or by number (39873).

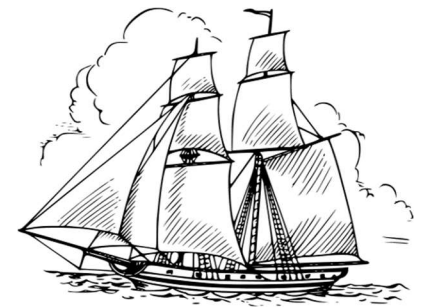
And that's it! Kroger will contribute a small amount of what you spend to our mission, and those pennies can add up to real help. So, sign up now and sign up a friend or two. Every little bit counts!

MARCO POLO CIRCLE

If they have the will, ***we are the way!*** Join the Marco Polo Circle to help us assist these wonderful men in becoming independent. Your monthly pledges will provide us with the means to carry on this important work. Simply go to our website at www.catholicworkercincinnati.org and click on the 'Donate' button. A recurring monthly contribution of any amount will make you a member!

Your ***monthly*** pledge IMPACTS LIVES daily!

- \$5** = feeds 300 people in our Soup Kitchen
- \$10** = assists with providing job search tools
- \$20** = provides 2 weeks of home cooked dinners for our guests
- \$50** = gives 20 men work boots, a prerequisite for hiring at many jobs
- \$100** = sponsors the cost of a guest's complete 60-day stay at the House



NOTE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Through 2020, with the help of all of you, our mission continues despite adversity. Through October, 151 homeless men found hospitality at the House. Of the 114 that stayed, 48 were able to find work, save money and move on to independent housing. So even though we have worked with fewer men this year due to the coronavirus, the success rate is as high as it has ever been, exceeding 40%!

This has certainly been a difficult year, and we need your help more than ever. Costs are on the rise, so any contribution is greatly appreciated. Finally, a special welcome to all our new volunteers and contributors who stepped up to help us out during the pandemic. We couldn't have done it without you!

- Bob Bertsch, Chairman

The St. Francis – St. Joseph Catholic Worker House vigilantly protects its independence and freedom from politics or distracting influences in order to focus on the mission of helping the homeless and the poor.

The House receives no government or diocesan funding and operates with simplicity and frugality.

If you wish to help us continue the good work, please send your tax-deductible donation to:

St. Francis – St. Joseph
Catholic Worker House
P.O. Box 14274
Cincinnati, OH 45250

St. Francis – St. Joseph Staff

John Clark (House Manager)
Andy Hoctor – Shawn Lloyd
Richard Johnson – Robert Taylor
Tyrone Brooks – Linn Schneider
Bob Shearman – Matthew Butcher

St. Francis – St. Joseph Board

Joyce Kiernan – Mike Harmon
Michael Dufek – Bob Bertsch
Mary Repaske – Nancy Finke
Sr. Kay Tardiff – Dan Schmits
Nancy Feldman – Teresa Stephens
Dr. John Zerbe

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cincinnati, OH
Permit #6657



St. Francis – St. Joseph
Catholic Worker House
P.O. Box 14274
Cincinnati, OH 45250