



Rochester Catholic Worker

A Publication of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, Rochester, NY
Summer 2010

Ecumenism Thrives as St. Joe's — Martin Linskey

Rev. Chava Redonnet, our new chaplain, was recently ordained as a priest by the organization of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. Rev. Chava has played an active role in our community for over 23 years. Her joyous ordination ceremony on May 1 was attended by hundreds in the local community as well as many out-of-towners and foreign guests who demonstrated their support for her mission to perform the Works of Mercy in her way.

In the 70-year history of St. Joe's, it is not unusual for the community to have a chaplain. In 1978 the late Dan O'Shea was ordained at St. Boniface Church to be a chaplain at St. Joe's, and in the '90s Rev. Ron Skrowronski, a protestant minister, served as director of the House. What is unusual is that Rev. Chava is our first female chaplain.

It is also not at all unusual for St. Joe's to have a spiritual guide who is not a traditional Roman Catholic priest. In fact, it is no big deal. Ecumenism has always been popular at St. Joe's. Our weekly service is led by ministers from many religious denominations. Rev. Chava's presence is simply proof that St. Joe's tradition of ecumenism is alive and well. In fact, our present community is made up of a Sufi, a muslim, a Quaker, traditional Catholics, breakaway Catholics, and non-church goers—we are an eclectic group.

A Movement Is Not a Religion

For many in the community, St. Joe's is a spiritual center, however, we have to remind ourselves that the

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Ordination Remarks — Tim Sigrist

I've been Chava's friend and community member for twenty some years here at St. Joe's. I can tell you that the preparation for this step that we are celebrating has steadily grown within this movement over those years—under the radar, sometimes hardly perceivable.

The first push I remember was when she felt called to demonstrate at the nuclear test site near Las Vegas. We sent her along with two other Workers. The community meeting after her return gave us a taste of her ability to relate the essence of an event, which is a real gift that she's given us time and again.

Her actual ordination happened on the feast of St. Joseph, the Worker, Jesus' father. So, we can now give testament to the fact that there was a second celebration that day ... for Chava, a mother; Chava, the Worker ... a Catholic Worker.

I was at a meeting recently of servants from main-line churches who wanted to intensify and energize their institution's commitment and presence to urban people. It was an honest step, yet, among us, we knew that we didn't need another committee to study the issue, we needed committed people.

But, at this meeting, when it came my turn to say what the Catholic Worker was doing in urban ministry, I brought forth Chava's name. Immediately, a few church reps spontaneously spoke up because they were also presently using her services: Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Unitarians, too. That didn't surprise me. Chava has always had a lot of work to do.

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House is not a church. It is part of a Catholic social justice initiative called the Catholic Worker movement, which has always been independent of the Roman Catholic Church. In Peter Maurin's words our role is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

A little history may help. The Catholic Worker movement stretches back 76 years to May 1, 1933, when it was founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. The national movement's aim then, and now, is to live in accordance with the tenets of justice and charity that Jesus Christ exemplified in his life. It was not founded to replace Roman Catholicism, but to serve as a movement to build a just society within the structure of the old that is more just and inclusive according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Well, is the Catholic Worker only for Catholics? No. While many of the members of the movement are certainly practicing or former Catholics, St Joe's community is composed of members of many nationalities and faiths including Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, and Eastern religions. Agnostics and atheists are also welcome. Several Protestant churches provide volunteers and food service for St Joe's Drop-In and Meal programs that would not be possible without their efforts. In fact, no one ever asks you what religion you are; just what job can you do to help with the day's events and meals. When it comes right down to it, anyone who is willing to put their heart and spirit to work to perform the Works of Mercy and provide hospitality is well received at St Joe's.

Rev. Chava is such a person and we are thrilled to have her as our spiritual guide as we strive to perform the Works of Mercy in our daily lives. ☩

— C A L E N D A R —

July 4th Picnic	July 5
Saturday Meal Program Ends	July 10
Saturday Meal Program Restarts	August 28
Labor Day Picnic	September 6

She has been called forth, first by her family. Her three beautiful daughters beamed in the first row. And also by the people she works with and for ... with energy and heart: our hard luck brothers and sisters who are "short on home." She makes home in many ways at St. Joseph's House. We're proud of our sister.

She's our convener, often our arbitrator, our common prayer facilitator, our dot connector, our scribe. I've seen her on a number of occasions, tapping away on "Word," about some event in the life of the house that made her pause and thankfully reflect. It usually has just happened. I've read it and thought, "ah, so that's what we did, and that's what it all meant!"

As I think back I would say Chava has always been destined for this day. The times and spaces and locations and, yes, jobs; many, many of them; always, a few at a time have led her to this day. She has definitely welled up from the body and was chosen by God to blossom and serve.

It is indeed a pleasure, and even more, a comfort, to be with Chava on this journey. It's been like watching a world-class Olympic athlete: achieving every hurdle AND bringing every OTHER athlete h-o-m-e, a winner, as well! ☩

Rev. Redonnet's Biography

Chava Redonnet has been a member of the Rochester Catholic community since 1987, and serves as chaplain at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality as well as works as peacemaker for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley, and as a staff chaplain at St. John's Home. A graduate of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, she is the author of *Standing in the Light*, an account of the 1998 upheaval at Corpus Christi and the formation of Spiritus (where she is a parishioner), *Don't Forget to Breathe Glory*, and *Bound in a River of Light*.

Chava is a single parent with three grown daughters, Clare, Bridget and Emily, two of whom are now living in Rochester, much to her delight.

For the past ten-and-a-half months I have experienced life as a Catholic Worker at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, and let me tell you, they turned out to be nothing like I expected—but much better.

I graduated from Miami University in Ohio last spring fully ready to jump into life serving the poor through the Works of Mercy, embracing nonviolence, and rejecting wealth through a vow of poverty; everything a good Catholic Worker should. It was the first time I ever felt truly led by God to a specific place, and I was excited to see what He had in store for me.

I studied the Catholic Worker movement in school. The passage from Matthew's gospel on the Works of Mercy had a profound effect on me, as it had on Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the founders of the movement.

Matthew does not mention that this work includes cleaning up after those who have soiled themselves, or helping someone stand up who is so drunk they have fallen over and cannot stand on their own, or trying to stay calm when someone is screaming in your face, or how to deal with having to turn a man out into the winter night with nothing but a little food and a sleeping bag.

Now, I don't want to give you the wrong impression. The good times have far outweighed these types of experiences. I have so many great memories. I tell people my favorite part of the job is walking down the street and hearing the guys most people feel wary about shout, "Hey Caroline! How ya doing?"

I'm often surprised by guests. For example, one day the health department had free flu shots for anyone in the building. One of our guests, Harry, came up to me and told me he was getting a flu shot. Now, Harry is a big, tall man who lives under a bridge. You do not want to mess with this guy. I replied, "Well that's great, Harry! You definitely don't want to get the flu." He replied, "Caroline, I'm scared of needles. I need you to hold my hand." It took all my strength not to laugh out in surprise. This guy needed me to hold his hand? I did, and I'll never forget it.

The Catholic Worker movement has always been nonviolent. In fact, Dorothy Day lost nearly all her support when she remained firmly pacifist during World War II. The nonviolent element is what initially drew me to the movement. However, my experience with nonviolence, before St. Joe's, had been strictly theoretical. Through this year, I have often questioned the practicality of nonviolence, but every time I get close to rejecting it, I think about what Jesus would be thinking and doing in my place.

This is why I challenged myself to get to several protests this year both against war and the city's treatment of the poor. Trust me when I say, protesting is not my favorite activity, but I felt a strong conviction that Jesus would support these causes, and this made me want to act. I am thankful that my time at St. Joe's and being surrounded by so many incredible, radical people has turned my experience with nonviolence from my nose in a book to me marching in the streets of Rochester.

As for my vow of poverty, as far as I am concerned it did not exist. At St. Joe's you receive \$40/week plus room and board. I never felt in want or deprived. My needs were taken care of and I adjusted to living simply. The true lesson I learned this year about wealth and poverty came from Chiapas, Mexico. I had the opportunity through Spiritus Christi to journey down to Chiapas not once, but twice, each trip unique and wonderful.

So after ten and a half months, hundreds of meals served, a couple dozen marriage proposals, new friends, a lot of tears and even more laughs, what have I learned? I have learned that, believe it or not, God knows what He is doing when He leads you to a place, to a job, and to certain people. Jesus asked us to serve the needy and St. Joe's has been a part of that experience for me. I have learned that through



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House Comings and Goings — Mirabai

On Saturday, February 27, our house was graced by a group of 18 junior high school students, 12–14 years of age and chaperones who attend several churches in the area: Christ the King, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Margaret Mary, and St. Salome.

Everyone got a tour of the house and then split up into two groups. One group stayed on the first floor and helped make preparations for Sunday afternoon's meal. The rest of the children helped to clean the third floor residence where the staff resides. It was a great service to the house to have such enthusiastic cleaners, sweepers, and sorters of comestibles.

This spring brought us a lovely ambitious group of walkers for peace—walking together across the state of New York, bringing attention to the reality of nuclear power and its destructive nature. The walk was sponsored by a Japanese Buddhist Order lead by Jun San, a Buddhist nun. Jun was accompanied by fellow nuns and monks, Native Americans from several tribes, and by folks, both young and old, from all over New York State. They hold the vision of a non-nuclear world.

The walkers spent their open rest day with us. They were greeted on arrival with hot tea and a clothes dryer for their very damp shoes. Weary of walking 17-plus miles mostly in the rain, it was wonderful to be able to offer them refreshment and rest. Nine of the marchers were hosted here on the third floor, while others went to stay with other members of the St. Joseph's community. At our weekly Tuesday 5 p.m. ecumenical service the monks drummed, chanted, and offered prayers for the earth and all its people. Their peace work brings great blessings to St. Joseph's House.

One morning, long before we “open for business” I received a phone call from a gentleman in Gibson, Florida, who was inquiring about how to start a Catholic Worker house. I went on line to the Catholic Worker website and gave him the location of who was doing the work way down south in the peninsula. We chatted for a while and I gave him the phone number of the New York City Catholic Worker so that he could get a subscription to the *Catholic*

Worker newspaper, which is published bi-monthly. After all these years, it still sells for a penny. In 1984 I sent in \$5 and have continued to receive the paper faithfully wherever I have lived. I confess I have not been as faithful in reading each issue in its entirety.

On April 18, winter shelter ended and the house closed for five days of spring-cleaning. We were busy laundering all the bedding for the shelter and entire house in an attempt to ensure that bed bugs were deterred from surviving in this blessed house.

Last month, the house hosted a wedding reception for Quinton, one of our men who was leaving our transition program. His betrothed, Pauline, and he celebrated with us in the dining room. How blessed it is to have the wherewithal to help those in love and in need to celebrate their union.

The merry month of May found changes and opportunities in abundance. Literally first was the ordination of Chava Redonnet to the priesthood. Hurray! Caroline's family from Ohio joined us for the ordination and also to celebrate her 23rd birthday. Two of our last summer's interns, Joe, with his parents, and Timothy, came—adding greatly to the festivities. All in all it was a most spectacular celebration!



St. Joe's House staff, past and present, with friends and family at Chava's ordination

Joining in Chava's ordination, was Ruth, a Baptist minister, from a village in El Salvador. She came literally bearing beautiful, colorful, wooden painted crosses, made by members of her church as gifts for Chava, St. Joe's, and Spiritus Christi.



Ruth, from El Salvador

In the “sadness of a happy time” we said our fare-theewells to Caroline Kristoffersen. She has been with us ten-and-a-half months, cutting her one year commitment short so that she could join friends, met here at the house, on a journey/adventure to India. Caroline plans to return to the Rochester area and take up residence in our fair city.

Our beloved brother, Mark, had quadruple by-pass surgery last month and is doing well in recovery. It is a long, slow process in recovery and his spirit is strong and good. Please, hold him in your prayers.

Tom Malthaner is back in the groove after taking his annual vacation last month to Assisi, Italy, for his second visit. His absence is always felt in the House, by our community, and by our guests.

And last but not least, is the arrival of Ginny Mapes, a summer intern. Ginny is a senior at Albion College in Michigan majoring in religious studies with minors in psychology and philosophy. We welcome her with open arms as she is inclined to hug any and all whom she meets. I find her a delight, full of light, and good spirit. She is also working with Salem United Church. She will be with us until the beginning of August.

“Permanent” LEAVINGS

There is a wall in our hospitality room that has photos and names of folks who have “thrown off this mortal coil.” It is a way for us to remember those who have gifted us with their presence.

Recently, Joseph Reed, Jr., “Roll-up,” a long-time guest passed on sometime in early spring. He was a daily visitor and had been in our winter shelter. His health had not been good this past year. Yet, due to the busy-ness of the work in the house, Joe became conspicuous by his absence; belatedly, his death was made known by another guest.

Martin Scahill, the grandson of St Joe’s founders Tom and Beatrice Scahill and a Marine Corp veteran died at the young age of 25, leaving a wife and three children. A memorial Mass at St. Boniface was held in April before a packed church.

Also Peg Winegarden, 1916–2010, one of the founders of St. Joe’s died in March. She was a graduate of Nazareth Academy ’34 and Nazareth College (Magna Cum Laude) ’38, and she earned her MSW from Catholic University. Her memorial service in April featured the Dady Brothers. ☞



left to right: Mary Farren, Sue McVey, Peg Winegarden, Tim Sigrist

Reflections *(continued from page 3)*

doing what God asks, He brought me much closer to Him, I better understand myself, and hopefully, have made a small yet positive impact on His beautiful world.

St. Joe’s was an exciting way to live out the Works of Mercy. My next experience of serving the needy leads me to Calcutta, India, for two months with three friends to work with Mother Theresa’s nuns, the Missionaries of Charity. These women work with the poorest of the poor, and I do not know how Christ will change me or use me, I only pray that He does. ☞

February Visit to New York State

— Martha Hennessy

Martha, who is the granddaughter of Dorothy Day, was invited to speak at several Catholic Worker houses as part of a trip to Syracuse, Rochester, and Ithaca, to see the various houses of hospitality in upstate New York.

I want to talk about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement and the influence they have had on so many of our lives. It is crucial to share stories with each other as a way of supporting the Works of Mercy while they are being carried out today. The work of feeding and housing the poor, and ministering to the imprisoned and dying is the daily resurrection of both Dorothy and Peter, our co-founders. This is how we keep them with us.

I am reluctant to rise to this cause of speaking; out of shyness, and because of feeling overwhelmed with Granny's legacy. I don't live in community or in voluntary poverty and I don't provide hospitality to the poor, thus my sense of inadequacy and imposition. But I sure am having fun visiting so many fantastic people involved in the movement these days. When I first enter a Catholic Worker house I'm hit with a vague feeling of desolation, perhaps due to my memories as a child when visiting Granny in Tivoli and New York City. It is not easy to step into chaotic, sometimes stark surroundings, and see the obvious suffering of others. This feeling is very quickly replaced with one of homecoming and love. I feel warmed and inspired by the people who live at the houses and who share in the excitement of what draws us to Dorothy and Peter and their vision. I especially love the kitchens, and getting to work in them.

Coming to St. Joe's in Rochester held an eerie familiarity, and I felt a thrill to think that Peter Maurin himself walked in this building. The large three-story brick building has housed the Catholic Worker since 1941, the longest running same setting in our history. It is a testament to the continuity and longevity of the movement. The story goes that Dorothy didn't approve of the arrangements made early on with the city that in the end made it possible for the Catholic Worker to not be run out of the building. A new facade on the front of the building kept up appearances, placating the city as well. In my recent travels around the country to various cities, I am alarmed to

see how whole neighborhoods of beautiful old-construction houses are being let go, abandoned. It is as though our capitalist system is bent on devouring itself and we are incapable of preserving some of the best aspects of our culture and wealth.

I spent some time in the main room where the men congregate before meals and sleep on the benches in the coldest season. I met Larry who talked about how his life was saved, literally, by this place. I recognized a deep spirituality springing from him in his suffering and gratitude. He clearly saw and understood our need to return to basic humanity. St. Joe's and the folks who work there are our saints for today.

While in Rochester I was also able to visit both Bethany House and House of Mercy. What a study in contrasts. Bethany House, the Catholic Worker community that deals with women and children, had recently relocated to a well-suited, former convent building on the grounds of Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish. Various resources, such as baby supplies, and job and apartment hunting are provided to women and children there. We shared a lovely Mass and dinner and celebrated the birthday of a community member. I met the group of wonderful folks working at the house and was inspired by their dedication. The House of Mercy, run by Sister Grace, was equally inspiring despite the greater obstacles faced in their neighborhood. Sister Grace is the Mother Teresa of Rochester, taking in the poorest of the poor. We were given the pleasure of having a most soulful song sung for us as Mike played the piano while we sat on broken couches. Once again, I was put in touch with a deep well of such suffering and injustice placed on people caught in poverty, addiction, and illness. The House of Mercy lives in daily precarity with the city wanting to "remove from sight" those who congregate near the door and who remind us of our own failings. Race relations in America continue to fester in our collective consciousness, the remnants of psychic trauma we have yet to deal with.

I ended my whirlwind Rochester tour with a talk at Nazareth College and a visit to one of the most recent Catholic Worker houses to open: Peter DeMott House in Ithaca. ☞

Martha's remarks about the three Syracuse Catholic Worker houses and the Peter DeMott house in Ithaca will be in the next issue of this newsletter.

The Military-Welfare Complex? — Harry Murray

A few weeks ago, Sister Grace Miller of the House of Mercy walked into the Department of Human Services welfare office on St. Paul Street as part of her tireless advocacy on the part of poor residents of Rochester. She was astounded to see three TV screens in the waiting room blaring out recruitment ads for the U.S. military.

Appalled that the poorest of the poor were being subjected to this media onslaught, she complained to the director of DHS and her assistant, who told Sister Grace that this was part of their effort to get people on welfare employed. Not stopping there, Grace took the issue to the Monroe County Legislature, which claimed to know nothing about it.

We are now more than a year into the Obama era, and it has become startlingly clear that, no matter what person occupies the office of president, the system grinds on relentlessly, grinding down the poor in our own land and across the globe. The Pentagon

thrives under the new president, overcoming any impulses toward fundamental change, just as it managed to beat back calls for a “Peace Dividend” in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In upstate New York, we see the military thriving, particularly with the establishment of the drone control center in Syracuse. Military recruitment is another indicator of the ongoing destructive capacity of the system. In Rochester, we have seen the school board genuflect to the might of the military, sending student information to recruiters even without parental approval. Now recruitment is targeting the poorest of the poor, those desperate enough to apply for welfare. We pit the poor of America against the poor of the rest of the world.

There is a ray of hope. We have not received official word, but when I went in to check out the welfare waiting room last week, the TV screens were dark. Perhaps it was just a coincidence, or perhaps Sister Grace had had an effect. Thank God for her witness. We will keep you posted as we learn more. ☞

Food Program in Haiti — Sarah Ahimsa

The pancake breakfast held in March raised enough for three months of food for 50 people at \$750 a month. That’s only \$15 per person per month. The program also creates three jobs in the community and provides local farmers with a market for their produce.

One of my favorite participants in the food program, Ton Jol, died last month. I am saddened that I couldn’t be there with him in his last days. His smile and kind words, despite the frailty of his body, always brightened the meals. He was also the one that was always selected to speak on behalf of the group during formal events. Please send your prayers out to all the food program participants as they deal with aging in a place without ramps (or even stairs!), handrails, medication for chronic illnesses, or a comfortable place to rest. Despite their difficulties, if you ever make it to Borgne for a holiday, you’ll see that they still can, at ages 70–90, dance circles around any American! ☞



Ton Jol giving one of his elegant speeches at the Christmas party in 2008.

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality

Rochester Catholic Worker Community

*Some of us live in houses; some of us live on the street; some of us have a room of our own, or a bed and a place to keep; some of us have a cot or piece of a couch or patch of floor to return to each night; some hold special positions of power and roles with specific responsibilities, some do whatever they can. Our aim is to try each day to **"build a new society in the shell of the old"** as we practice the various works of mercy and labor with whatever resources, physical as well as spiritual, that we have been given at the time.*

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Sugar

Boots/Sneakers

Jeans/Cords

Jelly/Jam

BLEACH

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Forks

Paper Towels

Hoodies

39-gal Trash Bags

Razors

Bath Towels

Socks

Paper Towels

Toothbrushes/Paste

Deodorants

Bread Report: Community Supported Bakery

We recently started a small-scale bread baking project. With a St. Joe's trainee putting on an apron, measuring out flour and scaling out pound-and-a-half loaves, 30 members of the community signed up for one fresh loaf of organic whole wheat bread a week for ten weeks. This small-scale model—bread subscribers who buy a fresh loaf—makes it possible for us to deliver fresh bread to those who cannot afford a loaf.

Good, fresh bread is going to those who can afford a loaf and that same bread is going to those who cannot afford a loaf.

Call St. Joe's and speak with Mirabai to place your order.

Celebrants for

5:00 p.m. Tuesday Ecumenical Service

We suggest that you call the House in case the service time or celebrant has been changed.

June 15

June 22

June 29

July 6

July 13

July 20

July 27

August 3

August 10

August 17

August 24

August 31

September 7

September 14

Fr. John Firpo

Sr. Grace Miller

Fr. Bill Donnelly

Fr. Jim Callan

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