

September 1, 2025
Ordinary Time
Labor Day

Magnificat!



Why did you search for me?
Did you not know I had
to be in my father's house?

Dear Friends,

It seems wrong to write "Ordinary Time" at the head of this letter - the times feel anything but ordinary as government by fiat upends peoples' lives and the American empire seems to be melting down day by day. As is usual, those who were already vulnerable are suffering the most, but the insecurity is affecting many more of us: will the social security check come? Will I be able to afford health care? Will the grants I'm counting on be cancelled? Will my visa be revoked? At times like these we are very grateful that we don't rely on grants or government monies - our small budget is entirely supplied by gifts, mostly from individuals but also from parishes. We thank you for your generosity, which keeps us going. And we ask you to pray with us that we, together, will be able to build a more just and equitable structure out of the current destruction.

House news:

Both of our guests have now been granted SSI, so they are able to move forward with planning next steps. Stephanie moved out to be more accessible to family and she'll be looking for her own housing now. We've been able to help her with some needed dental work, thanks to you. Jessy has just heard that she and Mayvis (2) will be able to get SSI, so she'll also be looking for affordable housing. She's really happy that she won't immediately have to look for work but can devote her time to caring for Mayvis. Children's Hospital has been very helpful, even scheduling therapy appointments at Mary's House, where Mayvis feels at home and confident. (I can't help but wonder how long all of these much-needed services will continue to be offered.) It's a great joy to be able to offer hospitality, and to have the playroom in use again.

We continue to offer a meal on Sunday afternoons at Five Points South. Lindsay Bolcar began serving five or six years ago, and she graciously allowed us to join her. The meal has grown a lot over these years, both in what we offer and in the number of people coming. We offer a hot dinner-type meal, and also a sack lunch for later on. We try to have underwear and sox and travel-size toiletries available. Since we're serving 30+ people now, costs mount up. I'm happy to offer clean used sox when we have them, but I think the underwear needs to be new, and of course soap, deodorant, lotion, etc. even in travel sizes mount up when you're buying for a crowd. We now have a crew that makes sandwiches for the sack lunches, and some people bring the whole lunch. We're happily grateful for all the help and the donations! We gladly accept gently used clothing to share. We can also use help in passing out our various items on Sunday so that people don't have to stand in long lines. If you'd like to help in some way, you can email me (shelleymdouglass@gmail.com) or



phone 629 278 3124. The Mary's House phone is a very slow way to contact us - these are much more efficient.

We continue our twice-weekly vigils for peace and justice. These days many of our signs focus on Gaza and Palestine, and those especially are appreciated by passers-by.

We continue to remind ourselves that Black Lives Matter, that war solves nothing, that deportations need to stop - on and on. It's good to see that other vigils and demonstrations are proliferating sponsored by Indivisible and 50501, even here in red state Alabama.

Sadly we also continue to vigil against state killings. Our brother group Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty maintains a website (phadp.org) where you can find the latest information on scheduled killings, and steps you can take to ask for mercy and justice. It's especially difficult that Anthony Boyd, Chairman of Project Hope, is scheduled to be killed in October. (In a sane society no one could write "is scheduled to be killed".)

In the midst of difficulties there are also joys: Mayvis is a loving and VERY active little one, always ready to greet you with a fist-bump and a hug. It's a happy thing to see her feel at home at Mary's House. Eddy (our caretaker) is a great hand with tech and with a banjo. First Friday Mass is a great time whether we have a large group or a small one, and the potlucks always turn out to be unplanned feasts.

We're very much looking forward to our Advent retreat with Martha Hennessy. Martha is a good friend and a steadfast witness to the Catholic Worker charism. She will come not only with stories about her Granny (who happens to have been Dorothy Day), but with reflections on what it means to live a Gospel life in these dire times, and what we can learn from Dorothy's example. Because the Catholic Worker is basically an attempt to follow Jesus on the Way, you don't have to be Catholic - or even Christian - to be enlightened and encouraged by Dorothy's journey. Take a look at the flyer in this newsletter, and join us on December 4th and 5th if you can.



God's peace,

Shelley
D.



Newsletter Assembly line!

The Ginkgos of Hiroshima

We're living in a time that is confusing and disorienting by design. Flooding the zone is a tactic employed by American leadership to keep people constantly destabilized. It feels like there is barely time to ask the right questions, let alone find real answers to the problems before us. And who do we ask anyway?

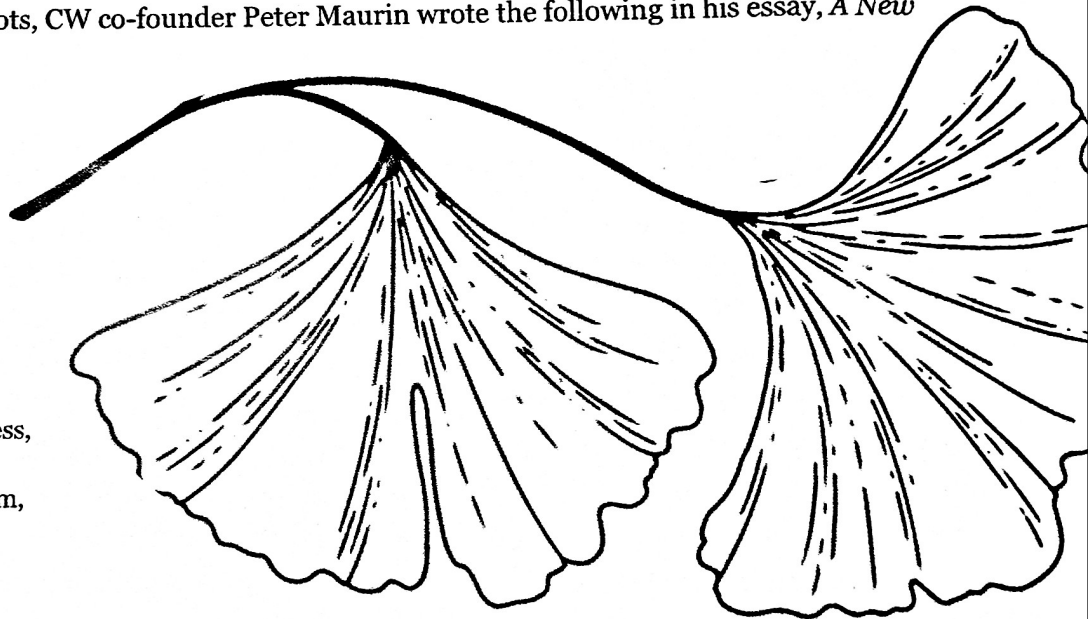
More and more I find myself sitting in silence. Though I am part of a rich faith tradition, I often find answers in sitting with the natural world. Observing the passage of seasons, of expansion and contraction, of death and new life - nature is always ready to teach me something. After a scorching summer, I look to the relief of cooler days and the dramatic turning of leaves. My favorite tree to visit is the ginkgo, with its fan-shaped leaves that turn the brightest, golden yellow in fall.

Ginkgos are ancient trees. They've lived alongside everything from dinosaurs to atomic bombs. In fact, ginkgos are among what is known as hibakujumoku or "survivor trees", ones that lived despite being near the hypocenter of the A-bomb blast in Hiroshima. With roots sunk deeply into the Earth, these trees were able to withstand the vaporizing heat of the bomb. Human survivors, hibakusha, were told that nothing would grow in Hiroshima for 75 years. Yet within the same year, these trees produced bright green shoots. Talk about resurrection!

I like to meditate on the life within these trees. Though bent, broken, and burnt, the impulse to live could not be extinguished. From roots deep within the Earth, the trees found a way back to life.

Turning to our Catholic Worker roots, CW co-founder Peter Maurin wrote the following in his essay, *A New Society*:

To be radically right
is to go to the roots
by fostering a society
based on creed,
systematic unselfishness
and gentle personalism.
To foster a society
based on creed
instead of greed,
on systematic unselfishness
instead of systematic selfishness,
on gentle personalism
instead of rugged individualism,
is to create a new society
within the shell of the old.



With the "zone" flooded with chaos and violence, creating anything solid feels impossible. But I feel a nudge from nature, calling me to remember those tiny, green shoots. The ginkgos of Hiroshima literally grew themselves anew within the burned husks of the old. It can happen. It has happened before. So despite uncertainty, I pack up my heartache and my grief, and go looking for new shoots to water.

Ashley McCormick is a board member of Mary's House. She currently lives in Leeds, AL with her husband and four children. Ashley writes a Substack newsletter called Back to the Garden about life in and about the garden: backtothegarden.substack.com



DOROTHY DAY AND THE NONVIOLENT GOSPEL:

A discipline for life in our time

A Retreat with Martha Hennessy,
5th & 6th Dec.

~~4th 7pm~~ ~~5th 9pm~~, 2025

How should Christians and people of conscience live in a time of war, genocide, and growing injustice? These are not new questions, although they feel new and urgent. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, co-founders of the Catholic Worker movement, believed that a life lived in radical obedience to the Gospel offers a pathway to hope and transformation. In the years since the founding of the movement in the 1930s, the witness of Dorothy Day has enlightened and challenged countless seekers after a way of life leading to peace and justice. People of varied (and no) faith traditions have been inspired by the very demanding simplicity of Dorothy Day's choices.

Gather with us in Advent to reflect on the choices Day made then and the choices we can make now to move toward lives of justice leading to peace. We'll be led in our reflections by Martha Hennessy. Martha is the seventh grandchild of Dorothy Day, a retired occupational therapist, a mother and grandmother. She divides her time between the family farm in Vermont and Maryhouse Catholic Worker in New York City, where she practices the works of mercy. Martha has been imprisoned for her protests of war, nuclearism, and torture. She has traveled to Russia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Korea, and Palestine to understand the impact of US military policy on people around the world. She travels and speaks widely in the US and Europe, drawing on her faith, her experiences in the Worker and in peacemaking efforts to offer hope of another way, "so old that it feels new" to "blow the dynamite of the Gospel". We look forward to reflecting with you!

Date & time: Friday Dec. 4, 7 pm to Saturday Dec. 5th, 9 pm

Place: We'll meet at Avondale United Methodist Church Samaritan Place,
500 40th St, Birmingham 35222

Cost: \$65 for the weekend, but we have plentiful scholarships, so don't let cost keep you away (meals included in the cost)

There is no overnight accommodation at the church, but we may be able to help you find local hospitality with a family. And of course there are hotels.

To register, email shelleymdouglass@gmail.com or phone 629 278 3124. We're limited to 50 people, so don't wait too long to call!

What Are Ordinary Times?

The Catholic Worker was born in the depths of the Great Depression. I don't remember the Depression, but I grew up with grandparents and parents who lived through it. My mother used to tell stories about going to produce stands at the end of the day and picking up the rejected bruised and wilted vegetables. I don't remember the Second World War either, because I was a baby when it ended, but I was a year old before I met my father, and our lives were determined by his moving from the Army into the nascent CIA. I went to junior high school at an American school in Karachi, Pakistan, a decade after the partition from India, and saw the horrific results of sectarian violence, and the abject poverty it left behind. I graduated from high school in occupied Germany and returned to a USA rent by struggles over segregation and racism.

When I reached the University of Wisconsin I found the Catholic Worker newspaper in the vestibule of St. Paul's University Chapel, and in the same literature rack I found Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness*. My freshman year was the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, so the arms race was very real to me. President Kennedy was assassinated during my sophomore year. I was lucky enough to be part of an earnest group of students who were excited about the Second Vatican Council and who met regularly to reflect on scripture together, with a commitment to living out what we discerned. The world was changing. The civil rights struggle absorbed our interest and gave us the sense that we could make a difference. We were very naïve, but our instincts were good - we distrusted the power of wealth, we believed in working for justice, we questioned the reliance on violence, and we believed in the innate dignity of the human person, made in the image of God. We were greatly inspired when Pope Paul went to the UN and declared, "No more war! War never again!" And "If you want peace, work for justice!"

I began this newsletter by saying that this is no ordinary time, but as I thought back over my life, and over the longer life of the Catholic Worker, I realized that we have lived through these kinds of times before. The Worker was founded in a time of dire poverty and injustice, also a time of great wealth. The Worker protested against fascism and genocide, spoke out against anti-semitism, stood with labor unions, protested racism, all long before our current disrupted time. True, this is no ordinary time - it's a new time in a continuing struggle. (And before someone points it out, I must say that all the efforts we've made have been flawed by human error and blindness, and thus far from perfect, yet it's important that they were made.)

I'm struck by the bedrock commitment to the works of mercy, the simple acts of sharing and service that every Catholic Worker community undertakes in some form. We meet God and we find community in sharing bread and clothing, soup and soap, hospitality and the stories of our lives. Experiencing the community that grows from sharing confirms the theory: we are family. At our best we recognize the humanity of our sisters and brothers in action as well as in theology. I think the face-to-face meeting of strangers who turn out to be friends is essential to the change we're seeking.

That commitment to our neighbors includes neighbors who are defined as "enemies" and thus it leads us into resistance to the acceptance of war and other forms of violence - like the death penalty. If we're all one family, if every one of us is the image of God, then killing anyone, even someone who has killed, is defacing that image.

The evils confronting us now come from the same roots as the evils we've confronted in the past: love of money, love of power, refusal to recognize our common humanity. Whether they come from the corporate boardroom, the White House, or the pulpit, whatever disguise they wear, those are evils. The amazing thing is that however many forms evil takes, love finds creative ways to resist.

These days I can't get around as well as I did, so one of my commitments is to share the actions that others are taking. Even on facebook (the limit of my sophistication so far) I can find amazing reports of protests: huge marches against the genocide in Gaza, groups of people armed only with cameras standing face to face with masked ICE agents and walking them out of their neighborhoods, mayors and governors refusing to cooperate, bishops and pastors accompanying people to immigration court, mutual aid groups helping each other - a new form of speaking truth for every form of repression. We know that in spite of these actions people still suffer, are deported, are killed. We grieve, and grief calls us to further action.

No, these aren't ordinary times. They're dangerous times calling for brave action. Brave action often has costs. The amazing and beautiful thing is that more and more people seem to be taking these brave actions, being will to risk standing up for the human family. I pray that when we rebuild what's being destroyed we'll build a better world, a peaceful world of justice for all people.

Snellky D.





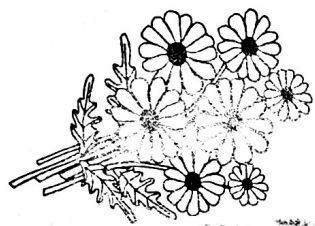
We Always Have Needs



And you help us by filling them! We need prayers for our guests and ourselves and especially for peace and justice in this world. We do need money -for groceries and diapers, toilet tissue and paper towels, for supplies for the street meal, for electricity and water bills, and yes, for stamps and paper for this newsletter.

If you'd rather give "in kind", at the house we need size 4 diapers (no Parents Choice please), wipes, non-perishable food like spaghetti and sauce, mac and cheese mix, fruit cups, tuna, canned chicken, instant mashed potatoes, canned vegetables, especially corn.

For the meal: single serving fruit cups and puddings, peanut butter cracker packages (& similar), single serving chips, bottled water, travel size toiletries, gently used t-shirts, pants and shorts, both men's and women's; socks, either new or gently used, new underwear, especially men's sizes medium and large but also women's medium. As fall approaches we'll be needing warmer clothing, blankets and ponchos, and hand warmers.



Thank you!

WE THANK YOU for all you do to help us and for all you do to make this world a better place.

Thanks to those who give monthly, so that we have a base income to rely on.

Thanks to those who give when they can, surprises that always come when we need them.

Thanks to the priests who give of their time to celebrate with us.

Thanks to those who give "in kind" - clothing, food, time and energy.

Thanks to those parishes which help us with donations of money, food, and other necessities.

Thanks to St Francis Xavier, St Peter's, and St Mary's.

Thanks to those who deliver sandwiches for the meal, to those who regularly pack whole lunches, and to those who help serve. Thanks to Lindsay, who started it all!

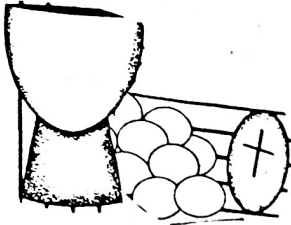
Thanks to those who join us at our vigils for peace and justice.

Thanks to all who stand for justice and for peace, whether near or far.

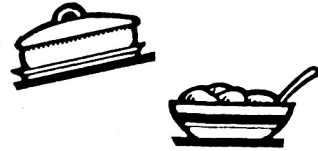
Thanks to those who continue to work for a better world especially now, when so much of the progress we seemed to have made is being dismantled.

As
Thank you to
everyone helping to
get this newsletter
out!!





Come and Join Us!



First Friday Masses: 6:30 pm in our living room, followed by potluck and conversation
Friday September 5, Celebrant Fr Joe Culotta
Friday October 3, Celebrant Fr Hugo Esparza CP
Friday November 7, Celebrant Fr Jon Chalmers
No Mass on Friday December 5: join us instead for our Advent Retreat with Martha Hennessy
More information inside!

Vigil with us for peace and justice on Wednesdays from 7:30 to 8:30 am and on Saturdays from 5 to 6 pm, at the Fountain at Five Points South. We have signs, or bring your own. We follow a nonviolent discipline.

Vigil against the death penalty whenever a killing is scheduled. We're sad to announce that we have two vigils coming up this fall: one for Geoffrey Todd West on September 25, and one for Anthony Boyd, Chairman of Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, on October 23. We vigil from 4:30 to 6pm at the intersection of Arrington & Woods N. in Birmingham, by the art museum and the County courthouse. We are relieved that the execution of David Roberts was delayed for a mental evaluation and competency test which means he may not be executed at all. Please go to the website of Project Hope (phadp.org) for actions you can take against these and all killings by the state of Alabama.

