



The Charlottesville Catholic Worker

Houses of hospitality and a sustainable living center

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~ FALL/WINTER 2012 NEWS ~

WE GO TWO BY TWO

As we continue to grow roots in our local Charlottesville community, representatives from Casa Alma have spent time this fall going out two-by-two to visit local congregations, civic organizations, and social justice groups. We have met in offices and communal spaces to introduce community members to Casa Alma and to discover ways of building relationships and nurturing collaboration. We went out without a “pitch”, rather with the intention to create a shared space for deep listening on the challenges, strengths, and aspirations of our local community.

For Dorothy Day, rootedness in the local community is “Christ’s technique... a neighborliness both political and spiritual in nature.” Through our two-by-two meetings, we are not only coming to know our neighbors better but we are also experiencing many grace-filled moments as we imagine possibilities for collaborative and creative efforts. Ideas which have emerged include youth internships at Casa Alma, an arts workshop, new roundtable discussion series, and shared action for larger efforts in faith-sharing and sustainable living.

“It has been a tremendous blessing to join others in this process: I know now more than ever that to build a new society within the shell of the old is the work of community,” says Emma Murphy, who brought the time, energy and enthusiasm needed to launch this effort. With an abundance of non-profits and faith organizations in Charlottesville, we believe this round of 2x2 visits is only the beginning of a long-term and evolving effort to connect and collaborate in our local community. If you know of a group or individual whom we should reach out to, please let us know – we’d enjoy more opportunities to be neighborly.

Thanks to Emma for sharing these reflections and for organizing the two-by-two effort!

CASA ALMA AND TAX EXEMPT STATUS

Casa Alma is now a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization! With this designation from the IRS, we are officially recognized as a charitable non-profit organization; we can receive donations which are tax-deductible, and a wider range of collaborative and funding opportunities opens to us.

Would Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker, approve? Actually, she would not. Dorothy maintained a strong opposition to pursuing tax-exempt status for the Catholic Worker. She explained to the readers of the Catholic Worker newspaper, “We believe also that the government has no right to legislate as to who can...perform the Works of Mercy,” and, “To ask that permission to obey Christ by applying for exemption, a costly and lengthy process, is against our religious principles.”¹

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Who we are:

Resident volunteers Steve, Laura, Emily, Anna and Ella Brown; guests Larry, Patricia, Kayla, Evan, Elijah and Maya

What we do:

Casa Alma provides housing and community support to families in need.

We sponsor times of prayer, reflection and learning, and live simply and sustainably.

We promote peace and justice in our local community and beyond.

SUPPORTING CASA ALMA

Casa Alma is an all-volunteer organization which relies on the generosity of individual donors to provide hospitality to families in need. To date, we've provided over 900 nights of housing and counting! Please consider becoming a monthly sponsor to help us in this work. In 2013, our goals are to:

- Replace inefficient and costly electric baseboard heaters with efficient ductless heating systems. Neither of the houses of hospitality nor the volunteer residence has a central heating system, and the houses can become quite cold and expensive to heat during the winter.
- Reduce our debt. Casa Alma's primary operating expense is the mortgage at 909, 911, and 913 Nassau Street. The purchase price for all three homes was \$275,000. The current balance on the mortgage is \$180,000. We intend to be debt free as soon as possible, so that Casa Alma will be sustainable for the long-term.

Could you help us? By making a tax-deductible donation or becoming a monthly sponsor you can join Casa Alma in these efforts. Casa Alma now accepts checks directly at our mailing address, or if you would rather donate by EFT or Credit Card you can do so via our website at: www.cvillecatholicworker.blogspot.com

Thank you!



Casa Alma participates in the annual United Way Day of Caring. Volunteers from local businesses have cleared debris, built paths, opened new garden beds, planted, and harvested. Thank you volunteers!



BECOME A REGULAR VOLUNTEER

As Casa Alma grows, we find ourselves in need of individuals and families to help with the following tasks in between our regularly scheduled service days:

- Office work: answering correspondence, maintaining mailing lists, promoting events, web updates.
- Basic household repair: weatherizing, painting, caulking, hanging shelves, etc.
- Animal care and work in the gardens (beginning March 2013)

We invite you to consider helping Casa Alma twice a month for approximately two hours. A three month minimum commitment would be appreciated. Children of all ages are welcome with an adult and are especially encouraged to help with animal care and in the gardens for a regular "farm day" in the city. Teens are welcome to volunteer together with a friend to complete school service requirements.

Please contact Laura at cvillecw@gmail.com to explore volunteering possibilities. Thank you!

ABOUT THE CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT

**The aim of the Catholic Worker movement
is to live in accordance with the
justice and charity of Jesus Christ.**

This aim requires us to begin living in a different way.
We recall the words of our founders, Dorothy Day who said,
"God meant things to be much easier than we have made
them," and Peter Maurin who wanted to build a society
"where it is easier for people to be good."



FROM THE FAMILY

There are over 200 Catholic Worker communities throughout the U.S. and abroad. We hope that one day we will be blessed with the opportunity to visit more of these inspiring communities; in the meantime, we keep abreast of their work through their writings. Here are some words from folks in the Catholic Worker family:

"What we do here at the Catholic Worker is so small and insignificant, this practice of the insubstantial, this act of living poverty, this hope against hope. But it is absolutely essential to the salvation of the world that we give witness to an alternative reality -- that we say with our whole lives and our whole beings that there is another way to live, a more human and compassionate and meaningful way to live...The most important thing for us is to live our lives as if the gospels were true, calling us back to a more sustainable vision of community, simplicity, and resource." -Jeff Dietrich, Los Angeles CW

"The Catholic Worker is an Advent place for me, a place where Jesus is welcomed each day into the life and work of hospitality and peacemaking. Every night a meal is served to dozens of people who share in the delight of a home-cooked meal and need a place to gather together to talk about the day. I believe Jesus is present with us, helping us to connect with each other, helping us to build a community of people who care about one another." -Mary, Winona CW

"The enchanting idea that I find at the heart of the Catholic Worker is the confidence that we are enough as we are. We don't have to be housing specialists to create a home, or counselors to lead someone toward healing. Within each of us dwells the compassion that can call forth beauty from suffering, and the more we cultivate that compassion and the more honest we are about our suffering, the more beautiful our world can be." -Rachael Morlock, Rochester CW

Our Vision

Casa Alma, the Charlottesville Catholic Worker, seeks to inspire and support the transformation of individual lifestyles and social structures toward justice—right relationships with the Divine, among people, and with the natural world.



SPECIAL THANKS!

To *Dianne Murray* for making over 30lbs. of delicious homemade chocolate fudge which Casa Alma offered at the Incarnation and St. Thomas alternative giving fairs. To *Henley's Orchard* for providing apples for our annual apple butter production.

To *Al, Bill, Fr. Gregory*, and each of our *individual and family sponsors* for their extraordinary support. For believing in the vision of Casa Alma from the very beginning, special thanks to *Virginia Organizing* and to the *Church of the Incarnation parish community*.

To *UVa Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity, United Way Day of Caring, Tandem Friends School*, and individual volunteers for times of service in the gardens.

To *Cville Foodscapes* for encouragement in permaculture and to *Edible Landscaping* for a lovely paw-paw tree. To *Great Harvest Bread, Cavalier Produce, Whole Foods* and *IY* for sharing food.

To *Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville* for their advice, collaboration, and community-building activities.

To the guys at *ALC Copies* who provide generous and friendly printing and copying services. We recommend them highly!

To *Clyde Pax* and *Beth Caillouet* for facilitating roundtable discussions during our Fall Friday supper series. To the wonderful folks who went out 2x2 and all the community members who received us.

To our Governing and Advisory Boards for their ongoing support, encouragement, work, and wisdom: *Owen Brennan, Mini Nair, Ed and Dianne Murray, Bridget Davis, Carroll Houle, Christine Hitchens, and Kristen Schenk*.



Finished living room at 909 Nassau

WISH LIST

- Prayers
- Used refrigerator for hospitality house
- Hand-held trowels and weeding tools
- Work and garden gloves
- Pint and half-pint canning jars

Thank you!

Charlottesville Catholic Worker
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NURTURING COMMUNITY

Throughout the summer and fall, Casa Alma saw a steady stream of visitors and volunteers pass through our doors. Students, families, retired folks and neighbors alike came together to work the land, break bread, pray, and build community. Summer projects kept us in the gardens pulling weeds, tending goats and planting berry bushes. Our Fall Friday supper series brought us together to share meals and seek wisdom together through discussions on peacemaking, our place in the universe, and civil dialogue in politics.

We invite you to visit and get involved in the coming year! We love to give tours of Casa Alma to groups, individuals, and families, and just enjoy time for conversation. Contact us to arrange a time or stop by one of our regular open houses which are held on the first Sunday of each month from 2:00-4:00pm.

Upcoming open house dates: **January 5, February 2, March 2, and April 6.** *See you then!*



TO THE RESCUE

Anna Brown, volunteer resident of Casa Alma and a Girl Scout Cadette, is currently working toward her Silver Award with a food rescue project. Thanks to the generosity of local stores, Anna has collected over 500 pounds of fresh produce and bread in the last four months. She's distributed food to the Church of the Incarnation Food Ministry and to Casa Alma guests.

"I chose this project because so much food is wasted in America each year [estimates begin at 30 million pounds]. I think this is an issue that needs to be changed. I hope that people will become much more aware of how much food is wasted...so that food can go to people who don't have enough to eat." —Anna

GUEST JOURNEYS

Since we've opened our doors, one grandmother, two single parents, one couple, four children, and three immigrant men have been guests at Casa Alma. Each guest comes to Casa Alma with a unique set of challenging circumstances, but most lack steady work with decent pay. Without exception, each of our guests has been hardworking. Several have been day laborers who traveled over 40 miles to search for work; one guest was employed full-time at a fast food restaurant and took consecutive shifts to improve upon the \$7.25/hr pay. One guest juggles two part time jobs and one seasonal job to try to get ahead.

Were it not for Casa Alma, these individuals would be making choices between paying utility bills and buying food; they would be falling deeper into debt; and some would be homeless. Casa Alma's houses of hospitality provide a safe and welcoming refuge and time for families to address some of the root causes of instability in their lives.

Guests at Casa Alma have saved funds for deposits and first month's rent; they have reduced their debts and improved their English language skills; several are currently working toward obtaining a Habitat home. Thank you to all who have helped Casa Alma host and accompany Josefina, Yeimi, Moises, Carlos, Eliseo, Josue, Larry, Patricia, Kayla, Evan, Elijah, and Maya. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers as they continue their journeys. If you have skills, time, resources or needs to share, please let us know so that we can work together and accompany one another.

TAX EXEMPT STATUS *continued...*

Today, many Catholic Worker communities maintain Dorothy's perspective—they do not form organizations, preferring to remain informal and unincorporated communities of people caring for one another and the poor. They do not apply for tax exempt status "because they believe their work is an act of conscience, and they wish to carry out their activities without government regulation."²

Many other Catholic Worker communities create non-profit organizations and pursue tax-exempt status in order to own and steward property for the common good, to develop a broad base of services, and to divert funds from the works of war to serve the poor. Like Casa Alma, many Catholic Worker communities enter into partnerships with other non-profits and do not view tax-exemption as 'seeking permission' to house the homeless or feed the hungry, rather it is viewed as seeking a deeper accountability to the broader community for the work already being done.

Since our founding, Casa Alma has been incorporated as a non-profit organization. We moved down this path because it enabled us to purchase the Nassau Street properties and maintain them for the benefit of the broader community. In the years since then, we decided to pursue tax-exempt status wholeheartedly as a means of stewarding the generous donations of time and money gifted to Casa Alma and to ensure that the Nassau Street homes will continue to be available to serve people in need.

Applying for our tax-exempt status has required a lot of effort. Dorothy Day wrote of this process, "Only...after their application has been filed, and after investigation and long delays, clarifications, intercession, and urgings by lawyers - often an expensive and long-drawn-out procedure - this tax-exempt status is granted." Following our initial application, Casa Alma did submit an additional 54 pages of documentation to the IRS (decidedly not the most fun of tasks), however, we have not found this process to be expensive nor has it required legal representation.

We submitted our application in January 2012, requested expedited processing in September, and received word on November 8 that Casa Alma is a 501(c)3 exempt organization. We credit the grace of God, the source of guidance for Casa Alma from the beginning. At each point in our development as a Catholic Worker, we've experienced surprising moments of grace as new opportunities opened when we least expected them.

An incredible grace has been our partnerships with the Church of the Incarnation and Virginia Organizing, which have both helped to realize the vision for Casa Alma, and have accepted donations on Casa Alma's behalf. As a 501(c)3, Casa Alma will now move toward financial autonomy, however, we will continue to work closely with these groups and all those individuals who feel called to help create Casa Alma, and to help us live right relationships more deeply. As always, we will continue to endeavor to keep God at the center of all our activities, and be attuned to the movement of the Spirit in all that we do.

*Tree planting and
garden harvests*

