



Casa Alma, the Charlottesville Catholic Worker

Houses of hospitality and a sustainable living center

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~ SPRING 2012 NEWS ~

You're invited to attend our Annual Celebration and Open House!

Sunday, May 6 from 1:00-5:00pm

Enjoy live music, food, community building activities, kids games, and sustainable living demonstrations (chickens, beekeeping, bike repair and more).

We hope to see you here at Casa Alma. Bring a friend!

LIVING IN ABUNDANCE

The fullness of spring surrounds us. Frolicking baby goats, delicate apple and pear trees, juneberry and filbert bushes, thick sheet-mulched beds and two newly-caught bee swarms have been added to the Casa Alma gardens. As our daily and weekly rhythms bring us into closer contact with the life around us, we are blessed with a deep sense of the abundance of the earth. In response, we seek to live well within this abundance, realizing our place (in the words of the late Fr. Thomas Berry) within the "communion of subjects" in the universe.

Living *in communion* with anyone or anything is a challenge—surrounded as we are by a world of economic, social and racial divisions, separation from the earth, and a culture of fear. Crossing boundaries, overcoming harmful patterns of living, and witnessing to "the abundant life" are not comfortable practices; and, there are many easy justifications for keeping our attention focused elsewhere.

However, in this season in particular, we can open ourselves to encounter God's abundance made manifest. The fullness of spring and the joyful celebration of the Easter season give us a glimpse of the type of abundance for which we are intended. "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

Celebrating new life in Christ, and rooting ourselves in this reality, brings a depth and breadth to our contemplation of what it means to live well in this time and place. May this season be one of communion and abundance for all of us!

GREAT NEWS! After a year of labor, we will receive guests in the second house of hospitality at the end of April. A single dad and his daughter will join the Casa Alma family while awaiting their Habitat home.

Who we are: Resident volunteers Steve, Laura, Emily, Anna and Ella Brown, and Hunter Link. Guests: Carlos, Eliseo and Josue.



What we do:

Casa Alma, the Charlottesville Catholic Worker, provides housing and community support to families and individuals 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.

GOOD FRIDAY PUBLIC WITNESS

By Ed Murray of the Casa Alma Advisory Board

REFLECTIONS WHILE FOLLOWING A LITTLE GIRL CARRYING A CROSS MADE FROM TWIGS

It felt uncomfortable to do it. Why, in a "free society" do I find it uncomfortable to believe out loud, in public? I have an aversion, probably for no good reason, to such public displays of piety. The old, "what will people think of us - of me?", kept bouncing around in my brain.

But after the opening song -- sung with courage, out here where the breeze carried our words away almost immediately -- and the "first station" narrative was read, there followed our semi-small procession tagging along after the delicately and simply-made cross of sticks and string, carried by a fully determined little girl, things began to feel more "right". Right for many reasons:

- life went on around us;
- most who noticed simply nodded or smiled, or maybe winced just a little, or stopped and joined for a bit;
- it became more and more obvious that we were surrounded by exactly the kinds of things that, if not controlled, lead all of us "astray" -- too much food, too much entertainment, too much drinking, buying, borrowing, meandering, ignoring...
- eventually, it dawns - this is really what Jesus



Ella leads the procession for Stations of the Cross.

Photo by John Clem

"passion" was, at least in part, about -- a God-man laying down his life, while our lives just go right on by.

Jesus' cross is about our daily lives. It's evident everywhere: in the poor guy begging with his dog in his lap, in the single mother trying to cope with perhaps one too many kids; standing in judgment of a derelict building - a monument to profligate spending and a kind of arrogant naiveté.

The reasons why Jesus came and lived, and died for us are all around us. And these stations - out in the public square, surrounded by all the world's need for redemption (most particularly in my own life) made what Jesus did and does for us make so much more of a difference. Amen. Deo gratias.



We gathered for prayer and public witness on the downtown mall.

Our vision

Casa Alma seeks to inspire and support the transformation of individual lifestyles and social structures toward **justice**: right relationship with the Divine, among people, and with the natural world.

UNDER RENOVATION AND IN COMMUNITY

The work of transforming old and neglected homes never seems to end: plumbing problems arise, mold is found hidden in the back of closets, and roof leaks develop—all in addition to the planned repairs. So we continue to devote much time and energy toward making the homes at 909, 911 and 913 Nassau street safe, warm, dry and welcoming.

Most of the home renovation work at Casa Alma is completed piecemeal, and by volunteers. Those who dedicate time, skill and energy into these never-ending tasks humble us with their generosity. Some are local professionals who fit in a job or two at Casa Alma amidst their paid work; others are experienced handymen who dig into a task and keep coming back until it is complete; and others arrive with 20 friends to complete a morning of service—willing to do whatever is needed whether they know how to do it or not.

In this way, work on the houses is more than a renovation project, with all the usual dust, disorder and delays. Instead, it's a time for people to get their hands dirty together, to teach one another, and to create a sense of connectedness. When volunteers stop digging or painting to discuss their opinions, family stories, life plans, or hidden talents, it reminds us that something new and blessed is created when people come together in acts of service. It's this connectedness that infuses the homes and even the half-completed renovation projects at Casa Alma with a sense of possibility and joy. *Join us!*



Emily with one of three new baby goats

Upcoming open house dates:

1st Sunday of each month
from 2:00-5:00pm

**May 6 (annual celebration),
June 3, July 1, August 5,**

Upcoming service days:

3rd Saturday of each month
from 2:00-5:00pm

**May 19, June 16,
July 21, August 18**

We hope to see you soon!

HUNGER STRIKE FOR JUSTICE

By Hunter Link, Casa Alma resident volunteer. On February 18, the Living Wage Campaign at the University of Virginia declared a hunger strike to urge U.Va. President Teresa Sullivan to adopt a living wage policy for all U.Va. employees. This policy would ensure that all employees, some making \$7.50/hr, would be paid \$13.00/hr; a wage that would allow families to cover the basic costs of living. I, a recent graduate, and over 12 other students went 13 days without food during the strike.

Why a hunger strike? The stark reality is that the lowest-wage earners at U.Va. do not earn enough money for a dignified living. Many people working full-time at U.Va. take second jobs, rely on food stamps or safety nets, or simply make choices between spending time with children and putting food on the table. The situation is even worse for the people that work for U.Va. through a contractor, doing the same jobs for less money (as low as \$7.50/hr) and no benefits.

After years of organizing, marches, petitions, meetings, civil disobedience, and dialogs, it was clear to the Living Wage campaign that stronger measures were needed. Personally, my decision to hunger strike came from the realization that drastic changes in our society requires drastic action. Hunger strikes and fasts are a well-known example of non-violent direct action, and in fact are actions as old as Christianity itself. *Continued on pg. 5*

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."



"This last week of Lent and the climax of Easter are the peak of the year. As a holy season it is unmitigated joy. Somehow the sufferings of daily life, the uglinesses around one are suddenly changed, lighted up, transformed. Love, suffering, joy, all go together. It is a mystery."

Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, "On Pilgrimage" May 1953. On the web at: www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday

The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker

"When we examine our society...we find it far from God's justice.

In contrast to what we see around us, as well as within ourselves, stands St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the Common Good, a vision of a society where the good of each member is bound to the good of the whole in the service of God....We believe this needed personal and social transformation should be pursued by the means Jesus revealed in His sacrificial love:

--**The works of mercy** (as found in Matt. 25:31-46) are at the heart of the Gospel and they are clear mandates for our response to "the least of our brothers and sisters." Houses of hospitality are centers for learning to do the acts of love, so

that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs, the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table. Anything beyond what we immediately need belongs to those who go without.

--**Voluntary poverty.** "The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." (Dorothy Day) By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's "preferential option for the poor."



*Casa Alma is supported by donations. Forty-six individual and family sponsorships make this effort possible. **Please consider becoming a monthly sponsor to enable us to continue providing warm, safe, and welcoming hospitality to people in need.***

Designated donations may be made online at: www.incarnationparish.org/donate

Please contact us for more information and additional ways to contribute. Thank you!

HUNGER STRIKE *continued from p.3*

St. Luke describes Jesus being “*led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry*” (Lk 4:1-2). Then, immediately after this trial in the desert, Jesus returns to Nazareth and describes His mission “*to proclaim good news to the poor./ He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners/and recovery of sight for the blind,/to set the oppressed free,/to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” (Lk. 4:18-19). Jesus unambiguously calls Christians to work for justice in the world. We prayed that our own fast would also awaken hearts to this call.



I decided to hunger strike because I believe that our institutions, especially ones of education, should be geared towards human needs and centered on the compassion of Christ. Jesus treated people's needs as holy, and we should do the same.

During the strike, I was inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, which clearly calls for a living wage and the prioritization of human needs in business. I drew upon the history of working for justice that is part and parcel of my Catholic faith. I drew courage from the writings of Dorothy Day. I drew strength from the prayers of my friends and family. I felt blessed to have this opportunity to apply the teachings of the Church and of Christ to my life.

Although we were forced to conclude the strike before a living wage was implemented, the momentum generated by our action has encouraged us that new victories are just around the corner. The outpouring of student, faculty, employee, and community support convinces us that people were ready to continue to pressure the administration for change. We attracted national attention, even drawing support from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).



Impressed by our action, the SIEU has begun to work with us to unionize U.Va.’s workforce. Far from being a loss for the Campaign, then, the hunger strike has created new opportunities. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways!

I have faith that we can continue organizing to make our structures and systems ones that prioritize human needs. Please keep the Living Wage Campaign in your prayers. You can learn more about the Campaign and the strike at www.livingwageatuva.org

Hunter shown at left during the hunger strike, photo courtesy of the Living Wage Campaign

ABOUT HUNTER

I recently graduated from U.Va. with a degree in Global Development Studies. I was disappointed by the secular paradigm in the program that failed to address deep spiritual causes of structural sin and suffering in the world; I was taught that the problems were “over there” in the Third World and that I could be trained to go and fix them. Yet, it is clear that many of the problems “over there” start at home in the destructive policies and lifestyles of the world's most affluent inhabitants: United States Citizens.

I am drawn to the gentle personalism of the Catholic Worker that seeks not only a transformation of systems, but of hearts. Peter Maurin wrote that we must “bring the social order to Christ.” I believe that the Catholic Worker can act as an example of the “beloved community” and bring the light of Christ to a troubled world.

GIVING THANKS

Casa Alma continues and grows because of the many individuals who make it so. We are deeply grateful for the dedication and generosity of Al, Phil, Ross, Carlos, Josue, Eliseo, Hunter, Bill, Shelly, Juan, Todd, John, Kate and John, Kristen, Owen, Mini, Ed and Dianne, Bridget, Kate, Christine, Emma, Carroll, Tom and all our sponsors.

Many thanks to the APO Service Fraternity, UVa Catholic Student Ministry and the UVa Isaiah 58 Engage Charlottesville alternative winter break participants (pictured below) for bringing energetic volunteers to work on the houses and gardens.



WISH LIST

- Prayers
- Grocery cards or non-perishable foods for community meals and guests
- Canning jars
- Hay, straw or goat feed
- People to chop firewood
- Honeybee swarms

Introduce Casa Alma to friends and family. Witness the transformation of houses and gardens. Check out our **new video** at: www.youtube.com/user/CasaAlmaCW.

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