



Rochester Catholic Worker

A Publication of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, Rochester, NY
Winter 2009–2010

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality New Facade

The long-awaited ... and sorely needed ... renovations to our facade have been completed. It includes an historic restoration to the front lower one third and a new side entrance for welcoming guests. The construction was made possible, in part, through a grant from the Rochester Area Community Foundation and an anonymous donor.

St. Joe's is the oldest Catholic Worker community still based in its original location. It's been in operation at 402 South Avenue since 1941. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Movement that began in 1935, came to Rochester from New York City to help launch its programs. It is one of only two places in the Rochester area that provides a hot meal seven days a week.

Tim Sigrist, who guided the project, described the renovation process as an "odyssey" that involved many, many delays. "This was a three-year process," said Sigrist. "At first we thought we'd do it ourselves—a bit of paint or slap on some siding, until we talked with George Lorson [SWPC's Real Estate Development Coordinator]." But as a rule, our Worker community feels that the grant process takes time away from our mission. "We put all our energy in caring for the homeless," said Sigrist.

The building's history added to the delay, since the City considered it an historic building. The structure was built in 1850 for a family-owned "grocery and provisions" store operated by brothers David and Issac Abeles. For many years it doubled as a residence for both shopkeepers and their families.



(Photo courtesy of MRA Associates)

St. Joe's original plans did not include such a large windowed front, and that plan was rejected by the city. MRA Associates, their offices located on South Ave., redesigned the facade for the historic building, incorporating the classic cast iron design that frames the lower front. Passero Associates designed the new side-entrance to welcome our guests, who previously congregated on the front sidewalk.

Of course, the cost of the project rose considerably. "I only hope that this extra cost translates into two blessings," said Sigrist. "One: that the men and women who come to us for help, feel respected. And two: that the building reflects our stewardship of an important South Wedge property." ❧

This story was built from a front page article by Nancy O'Connell in the Oct./Nov. issue of The Wedge newspaper.

Police Attack Antiwar Demonstrators on Main Street Bridge — Harry Murray

Wednesday, October 7, 2009, may have been a watershed moment for the antiwar movement in Rochester. I wasn't at the "Funk the War" march sponsored by Students for a Democratic Society that day. As a result, my primary source of information is the video that is available on the Indymedia website: <http://indytv.blip.tv/file/2695340/>. I urge you to watch it in its entirety, from Jake Allen's opening speech to the events on the Main Street bridge. The video speaks for itself; it doesn't need me to explain it.

I know one thing. If this video had been from Tehran, we would have all known how to interpret it. The media would have interpreted for us what was happening in no uncertain terms: the brutal Iranian police were beating peaceful protestors who simply wanted to exercise their freedom of speech, trying to exercise rights that all Americans have.

But this happened in Rochester, and the demonstrators were being tackled and hit by the Rochester Police Department. And so the media didn't give us a clear, "black and white" viewpoint. Some media, including the *Democrat and Chronicle*, reported, for example, that the demonstrators blocked a fire truck responding to an emergency. The video makes it pretty clear that that didn't happen. It also makes some other things clear.

Thirty police cars responded to some sixty demonstrators. Although almost all of the demonstrators were white, the first person arrested was a young African-American male—apparently the only African-American male teenager in the demonstration. Can anyone who has seen the video believe that this was a coincidence and not evidence that racism is alive and well, whether consciously or not, in the RPD?

The incident the next day, again recorded on video at <http://blip.tv/file/2706912>, was in some ways even more chilling. The demonstrators held a public, open meeting in the parking lot outside the Flying Squirrel community center in Corn Hill. Numerous police cars pulled up, filming the participants and taking down license numbers. Those who hoped that this kind of intimidating surveillance had vanished with the end of the Bush era were treated to a harsh dose of the



reality that America is not retreating very far from police-state policies.

City Council did hold a meeting to hear the police version of the events on the Main Street bridge, and then allowed demonstrators to speak prior to the regular City Council meeting. Most asked for an independent citizen review board rather than a police-sponsored investigation. Recent history would indicate that this would not happen.

I would like to look a bit more deeply into the situation. The police violence against demonstrators on that Wednesday was symptomatic of the place of violence in American culture and institutions. We usually abhor what we might call expressive violence—violence that results from strong emotions. But we see instrumental violence—violence rationally applied to achieve our goals—as the most effective way of getting what we want.

This is the case whether it be police officers using violence to "promote order" or ensure they are treated with respect, or whether it be "our troops" bombing Afghan wedding parties or homes where suspected "insurgents" are hiding, or an abusive husband beating his wife to make her more obedient. We believe that if we are not willing to resort to violence, then we are not serious about solving the problem.

A different view is presented by Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, and many other advocates of nonviolence. Gandhi, in particular, advocated the creation of nonviolent peacekeeping organizations to help to establish order in violent areas, organizations of "satyagrahis" as he called them.

continued on page 7

Certain Grace in an Uncertain World

This past year has been very difficult for most of us. Few have escaped the sweep of the financial storm that has buffeted our society. Whether it is us or our families, neighbors, or friends, we have discovered that the certainty of our lives is illusory. This year as the holiday season approaches we at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality are more appreciative and more thankful for the many kindnesses and countless acts of support provided by our friends.

We are keenly aware of the added burden of needs that has been laid upon, not only our guests, but on our supporters and benefactors. The men, women, and children who rely on us for a warm meal, a pair of socks, a hot (sometimes) shower, an emergency bed during a cold night, or just a moment of peace do not have a means to speak to you directly, so on their behalf we want to say **Thank You and God Bless You.**

We ask for your continued support for our works here at the house. We know that some who have given so generously in the past have suffered their own reversals and are not as able to help us this year. We want to reach out and uplift you with our thoughts and prayers. We trust that the mercies and kindnesses you have given will be returned to you.

If you are able to help us in our mission, we appreciate your donations. The needs are many and are ever growing. We pledge to use wisely whatever resources we receive. Every day we attempt to make the lives of our guests a little less uncertain, a little less difficult, and a little more positive and respect filled. This happens because you provide a way for it to happen. Thank you for the grace in your hearts. ☞

Healing the World with Our Hands in the Dirt — Chava Redonnet

In the middle of October, I repotted some herbs that had been sitting on my porch. As I moved catnip, horehound, and peppermint to bigger pots, careful not to disturb their roots, watered them and found a sunny window where they could stay for the winter, I thought of the people I know whose efforts to heal the world take the form of growing things while doing it in community.

I thought of my friend Rachel, a Baptist pastor, who opens her yard every Thursday afternoon to the children in her city neighborhood. All the kids know they're welcome to come and garden on Thursdays—they connect with each other, with Rachel, and with the plants and the dirt—and themselves—while spending time helping things to grow, maybe not noticing how Rachel is helping them to grow at the same time.

Then there's my friend Chris, whose effort is even more ambitious. Chris has a *microfarm*—which, as he says, is not a place but a series of relationships. Fiacre Gardens has sites all over the area—people who are sharing a bit of their land, or a few fruit trees, for this communal effort at organic farming without any actual farmland!

In October we gathered to put a cover on the “hoop house,” a greenhouse that will offer protection and light to plants that will winter over—what an effort it was. There were about a dozen of us preparing this enormous piece of plastic and figuring out the logistics of getting it over the hoop structure without disturbing other growing things. Chris has an arrangement with his next door neighbor, who allowed him to spread this huge piece of plastic in

her back yard—there is no room in Chris's yard as it's all taken up by plants! This is not a sort of gardening that one could do alone—you need lots of cooperation and help. So, besides growing food, it's growing community—growing relationships—and helping to heal the world.

My own garden is no such effort. It's my solace, my place to go and get my hands in the dirt, and revel in my flowers. Even a garden like mine is about connection. How many of these plants came from friends, co-workers, family members? How many have I shared?

My neighbor, Benny, shows up on my porch with a bag of tomatoes. Blessings, Benny—and Rachel, and Chris. Share the wealth—connect—heal the world. It's beautiful gardening. ☞



House Comings and Goings — Mirabai

Since early October we have had to deal with the renovation of our building front and the moving of the hospitality street entrance to the south side of the building. It had stopped our hot meal operation for four weeks and caused our shelter program to start at the end of October instead of two weeks earlier. We handed out lunch bags and hot coffee most noontimes if the renovation work permitted. Thank goodness that is behind us. Stop by and see the new look. The old facade was in bad shape.

In late September, St Joe's became for a few hours a mini-United Nations, as we had a serendipitous encounter between visitors from Russia and Brazil, as well as our own Joseph who is from Liberia.

Piotr Romme, from Kostroma, Russia, along with his translator, missionary Ellen Smith, was here in the United States as an International Peacemaker with the Presbyterians. Piotr's work is with the Roma people in Russia, (more familiar to us by the derogatory term "gypsies"). What seemed to strike Piotr the most in the tour of the house was the opportunity for our guests to shower and get clean clothes. He asked if we provided underwear. "If people give it to us, we have it to give away."

Upstairs we met Joseph, and he told his story, of fleeing the violence in Liberia, of being on the streets here, getting into recovery, becoming ill and coming to live at St Joe's, and of how his life has healed since then, how good God is, how good it is to be in community, and of his attempts to remain in this country.

On the third floor they found me and I greeted Piotr in Russian(!)...and then they encountered Eliana, who was here for a few days visiting from Madonna House in Canada. Eliana is originally from Brazil. Piotr also put our experience here in perspective when he said Chava was lucky to have a car—most ministers in Russia get around on bicycles. He told us of the time a dignitary from his denomination came to visit, and they had to share a bed—which is common for visitors in Russia, but unthinkable here.

It was such a privilege to connect with these visitors—God moves in hearts all over the world, and in that spirit of sincerity and docility we can find the

connecting point, the place where we know, God is with us all.

We were sad to hear that the monthly publication, "Peacework," of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Boston has ended. St Joe's connection to "Peacework" goes back 32 years when Pat Farren, then the director of St. Joe's, was told to do community service outside of Rochester for his CO (conscientious objection) stand in a Vietnam local trial. Pat decided to relocate in the Boston area and started volunteering for the AFSC. He started "Peacework" and was its editor until his untimely death in 1998. To honor his work and legacy, AFSC has had a annual lecture series on peace work.



Pat Farren flashes the peace sign in the early 1990s

By the time you read this, **Caroline**, our newly appointed kitchen manager, will have gone and come back from a week's pilgrimage/retreat in Chiapas, Mexico, with a group from Spiritus Christi.

Caroline's parents, Erik and Peggy Kristoffersen, spent several days recently visiting. Mom and younger sister had also made a visit before in early September. Caroline's sister-in-law, Katy, has come to celebrate her 26th birthday here and to spend a week with us during her fall school vacation. She is a middle school choir director in Denver, CO.

Eliana Chagas, a lovely Brazilian woman, living at Madonna House in Ontario, Canada, graced us with a visit. She gifted us with a newly released book featuring letters shared between Catherine Doherty, the founder of Madonna House and Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. ☞

**A Day of Sunshine for the Alpha and Omega:
Project Homeless Connect, October 15, 2009**

— Chava Redonnet

The day began with morning prayer at St Joe's. We gathered in the library off the kitchen on the third floor; just **Mark, Mirabai**, and me, this morning, as **Tom** and **Caroline** were already at the War Memorial setting up for the day.

We prayed as we always pray, for our community, our guests, and volunteers, for the president, for everybody's well-being and safety during the renovations at St Joe's. I added a prayer about my own anxieties for the day: what will I eat? And will I be warm enough? and realized those are the same anxieties our guests have, day after day. Today, the homeless people and the comfortable people meet, and boundaries blur. It won't always be easy to tell us apart. Who's here to help? And who to be helped? It's never a clear distinction—more a matter of degree.

After prayer I wait while Mirabai prints and cuts some fliers for our table—a list of meal times that someone could carry in their pocket. **Marty** and I head over to the War Memorial, where a couple hundred people are already in line. First perk of being server rather than served: we can just walk in. Before we find the St. Joe's table, on walking into the arena, there's **Debbie Sigrist** and her foot clinic, and they need some help. That's where I'll spend much of my morning, washing feet, anointing with lotion: the sacrament of foot care.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," the man next to me tells the woman wiping his feet. "How does it feel to wash the feet of the Alpha and the Omega?"

I have no doubt that the Alpha and the Omega is indeed here: the God who made us, loves us, and is with us always is here, lined up for coats and pants and help getting IDs and all the myriad things a person needs to function. God is here in the people who have come to help, cutting hair, massaging feet, sitting patiently at tables all day to let folks know what they have to offer. Friends are here—**Grace Miller** and **Rita** from House of Mercy—**Fran Morse** from

Dimitri House—this room is full of love. Washing feet I look over at the other volunteers—serving, laughing, talking as they wash, massage and offer comfort to aching tired feet, and tired souls, as well.

One of the men getting his feet washed leads us in song: "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine," we sing, "you make me happy when skies are grey. You'll never know, dear, how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away." A woman tells me how she used to sing that to her late husband's grandchildren. As I rub her feet she speaks with sadness of her life since he died, the homelessness that resulted from widowhood and a job loss, but her tears are for her husband, and she tells me how they loved each other, how he thought she was perfect. "You get to keep that," I tell her. "That's part of you."

Other volunteers have more stamina than I. **Tim** and **Debbie Sigrist**, **Terry Riley** were here washing and massaging feet long before I joined them, and long after. I don't know how they do it. The last man whose feet I wash is named Jeff. His feet are worn and callused, the tireddest feet I saw, and his skin is dry. "Can I have some lotion on my legs, too?" he asks, and indeed his skin looks like the desert. I rub the lotion into his legs and feet, and we listen to the little girl getting her feet washed by Terry beside us; she's chattering away, perfectly comfortable letting a stranger wash her feet. Lots of children here today.

Caroline and I leave a little early. We're both spent, two introverts, all peopled-out. Two hundred people are lined up for coats, and Tom and Tim stay to help. A lot got done today: people found access to services they needed, people are going home with clothes and haircuts and socks, lots of socks. Mostly I think they're going home with the love that was in that room, today. I know I am. Helper/Helpee: the distinction is blurry. ☞

Project Homeless Connect brought together a variety of services for homeless people in Rochester, NY under one roof—help for veterans, child care, legal assistance, help getting social security and other identification, haircuts, clothing, food vouchers—and foot massages. St Joseph's House of Hospitality participated.



To the Donors of the Catholic Worker Food Program in Borgne — Somane Augustama
(translated by Sarah Ahimsa)

This is a little story about my life as the coordinator of the food program for the elderly in Borgne. I am a person who loves all kinds of people; whether they are rich, poor, disabled, black, or white, I love them all. When I saw how difficult the situation had become for the poor in Borgne, how their life was going, I was sad. They didn't have anyone to help them with their situation. They had become people who are no longer considered part of society.

I never wait for them to beg me for help. When I have resources, I go out of my way to help them—before they ask. Because of that, they have become my friends. They come to my house all the time. When I don't have money to give them, I share my food.

I am part of the Brainstorming Technology Center, which is a center that embraces all people in society. Whether they are poor, rich, disabled, we sit with them; tell jokes together, and when we have food we share it. We have a good friend, engineer Sarah Brownell, who is also a member of the Tech Center. When she came to work at the center, the poor told her about their struggle, and since she is a person who loves them so much, she brings them gifts like food and a little money.

When she comes back from Rochester she carries beautiful little gifts for them and they are very happy. Our friend Sarah married Kevin Foos who is a good person. He has a sensitive heart for everyone, especially those who can't take care of themselves like the poor. When he came to Haiti the first time, they made it so that he couldn't sleep because they were asking him for help. (Not only the poor but others also.) Even though he gave them a little money or food, he still decided that he would make his contribution at the Poor House. That's what made him love all the poor of Haiti.

The third time he came, he sat with us at the Tech Center and saw how the poor came to ask us for help. He said he would sit with the people who help the poor in the U.S. to see if they can give a little help to



Somane Augustama

the poor in Borgne. When he told us of this dream, we all were happy and there was a big round of applause. We are thankful that this dream for our brothers and sisters has been realized.

At the Tech Center we had a number of young women who wanted to volunteer, so we formed a committee for the program. There are now two volunteers who receive stipends. They choose me to be the program coordinator. That means, when we have money, I am responsible for shopping for local food. I am very happy because I see that we started with 25 people and now have 50. I am happy for the great work that all the people involved in this program are doing for Haiti and especially for Borgne. We ask God to bless all the work we are doing for our brothers and sisters.

So ladies and gentlemen, please stay strong in the work you are doing to help our brothers and sisters in Borgne who are in need. I am thankful to Kevin and his wife Sarah and the Poor House in the U.S. (St. Joe's) that still think about the poor in Borgne. I love the committee in Borgne that works to cook the food and I ask them to stay strong and not get discouraged. Even in difficulties, I am still staying strong through faith. ✞

A Communion of Past, Present, and Future: A Visit with Mary and Margie Faren

— Harry Murray

On July 29, the past, present, and future of the Catholic Worker came together in a cottage on the shore of scenic Canandaigua Lake. Seven of us—**Tom** and **Mirabai**, myself, three college students who had come to spend the summer or part of it at St. Joe's (**Joe**, **Sarah**, and **Timothy**) and **Caroline**, a recent college graduate who had arrived earlier that month to become our most recent long term Worker—piled into my van and drove down to visit Mary and Margie Faren to give the newer folk a taste of the history of the house.

The Faren family (along with the Scahills, of course) is legendary at St. Joe's. Mary was one of the founding mothers, becoming involved in a Catholic Worker Study Group while she was a student at Nazareth College in the 1930s. This group, along with two others, founded the original house in the mid-1930s, and went on to purchase our current house in 1941. She and her husband Art were mainstays of the house for decades, until Art finally turned the house over to then seminarian Dan O'Shea in the mid-1970s.

Their son, Pat, was director of St. Joe's during the Vietnam War, until he was sentenced to do community service at least fifty miles outside of Rochester for his conscientious objection to that war. Margie, their daughter, lived and worked at St. Joe's for awhile in

that era, then went on to become a major part of the Catholic Worker in Worcester, MA. For a number of years, she has been living with and helping Mary.

Margie served us tea and cake, while Mary told of the founding of St. Joe's. Although we didn't celebrate Eucharist in a liturgical sense, there was a real feeling of communion as persons who had been part of the house at so many different stages throughout its seven decades came together to share food and stories. It was inspiring for those of us who are now a

tad past middle age to see the young folk, who represent the future of the Worker, learning of its past from one of our remaining elders, to see gathered in one room representatives of the whole long history of the house.

The sense of communion opened into a sense of providential surprise as Jean Jesserer, who had lived at St. Joe's when I stayed there in the early

1980s, dropped by. She was passing through and hadn't known we were coming, but stayed and shared, telling us of the project that Sister Peg Brennan (who had been director of St. Joe's in the early 1980s) had started in northwest Rochester.

It was a sacred time, a sacred place, a sacred gathering—one that renewed us all, giving us a sense that we are all part of a larger community, a larger project, extended through time, the embodiment of the Works of Mercy, the Body of Christ, that shall never pass away. ☚

Main Street Bridge *(continued from page 2)*

I suggested, in this spirit, at the City Council hearing that they take steps to transform the Rochester City Police into a nonviolent organization along the lines of Gandhi's "satyagrahis." I know this suggestion will be ridiculed, but I believe it is our only hope. ☚



— C A L E N D A R —

SOA Watch, Columbus, GA	Nov. 20-22	
Thanksgiving Dinner	Nov. 26	Noon
Foot & Hair Clinic	Dec. 13	1-3 p.m.
Christmas Dinner	Dec. 25	Noon
Foot & Hair Clinic	Jan. 24	
Foot & Hair Clinic	Mar. 28	

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.

George McVey — Editor

Tim Sigrist

Tom Cleary

Harry Murray

Chava Redonnet

Don Strickland

Trish Pielnik

Caroline Kristofferson

Martin Linskey — Webmaster

Matt Rieck — Layout

Joseph Moore

Linda Condon

Mirabai

James Arnold

Kevin Ahimsa

Sarah Ahimsa

Rich Behrend

Tom Malthaner

Mark Janeshek

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality

P.O. Box 31049

Rochester, NY 14603

585-232-3262

cathwork@frontiernet.net

www.saintjoeshouse.org

NON-PROFIT

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Rochester, NY

Permit No. 1233

Address Service Requested

Please let us know if you do not wish to receive our publication.

House Needs:

Prayers

Butter/Margarine

Laundry Soap Powder

Men's Underwear (32-44)

Sugar

Boots/Sneakers

Jeans/Cords

Jelly/Jam

GLOVES

Hats

Foot Powder

Forks

Sleeping Bags

Hoodies

39-gal Trash Bags

Razors

Bath Towels

Socks

Paper Towels

Toothbrushes/Paste

Volunteer Opportunity

Help Staff the Night Shelter.

Will Train.

Can Sleep on the Job!

Plenty of choice hours.

Good supervision.

Call Tom at 232-3262.

Celebrants for

5:00 p.m. Tuesday Edumenical Service

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

Nov. 17

Nov. 24

Dec. 1

Dec. 8

Dec. 15

Dec. 22

Dec. 29

Jan. 5

Jan. 12

Jan. 19

Jan. 26

Feb. 2

Feb. 9

Feb. 16

Feb. 23

Mar. 2

Mar. 9

Craig Bullock

Donna Ecker

Deacon Chava Redonnet

Deacon Tom Cleary

Minister Sandy Whalen

Pastor Marc Egbujar

Fr. Larry Tracy

Pastor Thomas Felton

Mae Lee

Fr. Dick O'Connell

Rev. Lawrence Hargrave

Deacon Chava Redonnet

Fr. Richard Brickler

Mirabai

Fr. John Firpo

Fr. Bill Donnelly

Fr. Jim Callan