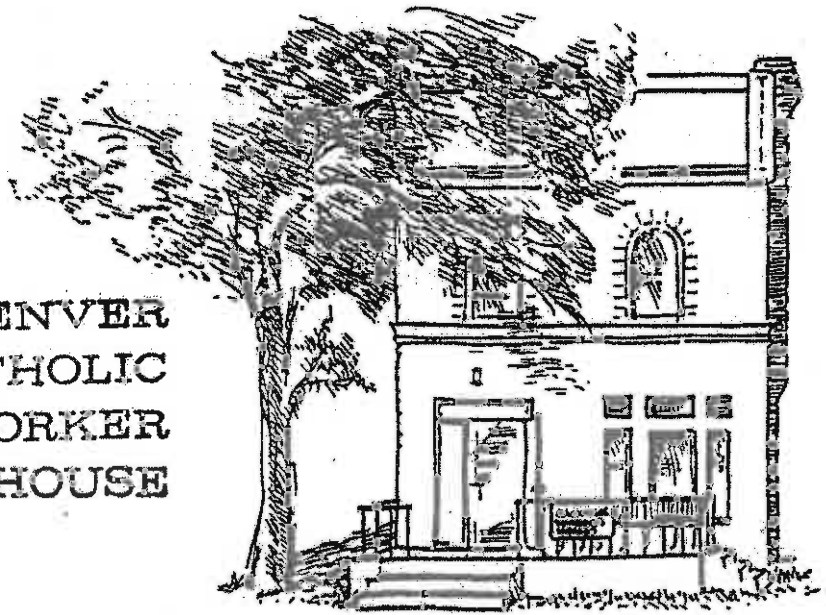


DENVER
CATHOLIC
WORKER
HOUSE



ARTWORK BY JANE BROWN

NEWSLETTER
FALL 2016

POST-ELECTIONS REFLECTIONS

When I woke up the morning of November 9th, utterly shocked by election results, it set me thinking. I think my counter-cultural life was showing!! Would I have been so surprised if I had been more in touch with what is going on around me? Had I failed to notice how, over the past 5 to 10 decades, we have watched wages no longer covering the expenses of housing, health care, food and transportation, all the while that a very small proportion of our population are amassing their fortunes. We have seen the USA engaging in unnecessary and prolonged wars. Our political leaders battle away along party lines while issues for the people remain unsettled. Racial violence glaringly shows how some are privileged and some are not. People are wantonly shooting people in schools, theaters, social service buildings, bars and wherever else they happen to be. Much of our culture has become pained, angry and mean-spirited.

Has my own counter-cultural lifestyle somehow put me in a privileged zone? Well, the only privilege I currently lack is that of being able to live with struggling people at the Catholic Worker house, and at least I have the privilege of a life with enough time and energy to be working on that.

Amazingly, in the midst of shock and dismay, I am sensing fresh and forceful energy. A friend forwarded an email about something called "Just Listening Project" in which people gathered across political and other value lines and shared from the heart – no rancor or arguments – just deep sharing and looking for the common ground. This kind of sharing might help us find the communal answers that could be healing and productive for all.

Our Native American brothers and sisters are bringing a deeply spiritual resistance to the forces which would threaten the water source at Standing Rock, and they are inviting us to join them. Such a

commitment to their children and their children's children helps us know the extreme danger to Mother Earth now and in the future. May we find ways to stand with them.



I heard that, in a very few days, 750 people in Pennsylvania offered to provide sanctuary for immigrants if President-elect Trump enforces "round-ups" to deport immigrants. Cities such as NYC and LA and Denver have pledged not to arrest immigrants who have not committed a crime. The Loretto Community is intensifying its work and organizing around the immigration issue. All of this seems to me to show that very good work has been done to help us make a quantum leap with this issue.

The temptation, at a time like this, might be to fall into some kind of a black hole, concluding that how we live our lives will have no impact on what is inevitable as the earth's health and wholeness slip away from us. And, well, it may not have any impact, but I like to think about what A. J. Muste said: "I'm not doing this to change the world but so the world doesn't change me."

– Anna

FULL MOUTHS

The more honest I become with my own violence, the more I realize that violence comes from insecurity. If I am secure within myself, then I have no reason to compare myself to others or attack them. Yet, when I am unsure of myself and afraid of another person, I forget that his/her violence comes from an insecurity as well, and I make her/him out to be a bad guy, a villain.

Politics, in simple terms, is defined by people being scared of one another and acting on those insecurities. We ourselves are self-doubting about our own capacities and our own futures, so we find a scapegoat to blame our problems on – foreigners who ruin our economy and threaten our freedom, or people in the opposing political party who don't care about my interests.

Unfortunately, nearly everything that is done in the name of security from a governmental or political standpoint only makes us less secure. Violence builds upon itself. It doesn't stop aggression. Violence is always suicidal, and we know that instinctually, but we still drop drones on other countries and are surprised when they fear and hate us in return. We view the other as a violent threat, and we forget that they are just like us – scared.

The only way I know how to make sense of this past election is to understand that many people in this country feel excluded and are scared. The results should not have shocked me as they did. None of my black or indigenous friends were surprised by the results, and it does me no good to simply write off 42% of active American voters as racists or as sexists. What ought to scare me more than a candidate endorsed by the KKK becoming president is the misguided notion held by many that if only Trump's opponent had become president, then we wouldn't have to work as hard on these issues. Racism and sexism are systems of oppression, not just individual biases – and all of us have responsibility in dismantling those systems:

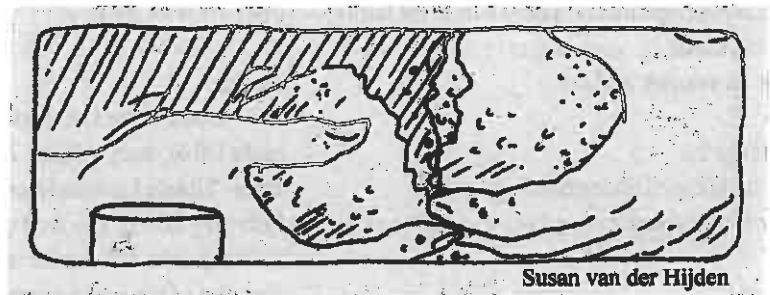
In responding to our current political reality, I feel that we must remember that hatred comes from fear. And it would serve us all to remember that what people are most scared of is the unknown.

Some people believe that if we elect certain people or pass certain laws, then certain people will simply go away. Muslims, Mexicans, immigrants, poor and homeless people. They'll all just vanish and we won't have to deal with them anymore. The good news is that enforcing all these laws is impractical, and I think most of us will still be here regardless of what legislation gets passed. So, we had better find ways of getting along and not being afraid of one another.

Mennonites have taught me that the way to peace includes casseroles. It is very difficult to hate someone when you're sitting across a table from him/her and both of your mouths are full of potatoes. And it is near impossible to scream under those conditions. I believe that is why Jesus spent so much time breaking bread in people's homes. In the Gospel of Luke, the disciples recognize Jesus after the resurrection "in the breaking of the bread." And that is how we still recognize him.

My point is I think most of America is afraid of the rest of America, but no matter how scared we are, or how mad we are at people from opposing points of view, I don't think many of us are going anywhere. We're stuck in this together, because we belong together. Democracy fails when we forget that we belong together. So rather than being afraid of one another, I think we should spend more time breaking bread, trying to get to know one another.

– Marcus



STRANGE TIMES

2016 will go down as a strange year for many of us. The Catholic Worker House burned down, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, and the Cubs won the World Series. There were lots of other strange happenings that escape my memory in this moment, but those three stand out as highly strange occurrences.

In many ways, I had begun moving on from the Denver Catholic Worker by the time the fire began to blaze in those early morning hours of late January. Sure, I was there one night per week cooking dinner and leading the liturgy, but in many ways it felt as though I was simply visiting the community, rather than participating in the ongoing life of the community.

The fire reinvigorated the presence of the Catholic Worker community and its work in my life. Before I knew it, there were people filling my home for worship and conversation, there was stuff filling my garage, there was a long-time friend from the worker moving into our downstairs bedroom, and there were other folks from the community filling our third bedroom on a temporary basis. The fire began to breathe new life into my values of community, hospitality, and solidarity.

In the months since the fire, we have mourned not having a central place for our community to call home, but the opportunity to look to one another and say, "Who are we now? What do we want to do together in Denver, now?" has come as something of a gift.

Some of us have stepped into new endeavors with local partners like Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and Together Colorado to speak out for racial justice and speak up against systemic white male patterns of oppression. Others of us have partnered with the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado

and have gained traction with local churches and businesses that desire to see the city of Denver take a more humanitarian position on homelessness and create an alternative to the camping ban. We've been able to say that there is an affordable housing crisis in this city that is directly related to a rising homeless population, and we've gained a hearing.

There is good (albeit small and slower than we would prefer) progress for justice in our city. But as the November election reminded us, we can't trust too deeply in that progress. When we do, we wind up overwhelmed, discouraged, and feeling out of touch. So we remain connected to one another; we maintain our radical roots in the Catholic Worker experience; we continue to cultivate alternative practices and an alternative voice that speaks of peace, justice, goodness, inclusion, hope and community in strange times like these; and we embrace the love of a God that loves this strange world deeply and eagerly desires to see the restoration of the whole world.

– Cole



MARK ZWICK: IN MEMORIUM

Amid the hubbub of the recent elections, an event occurred that did not make the national headlines but was monumental in the universe of the Catholic Worker and in the world of immigrants in and around Houston. Mark Zwick died at the age of 88. He will be sorely missed.

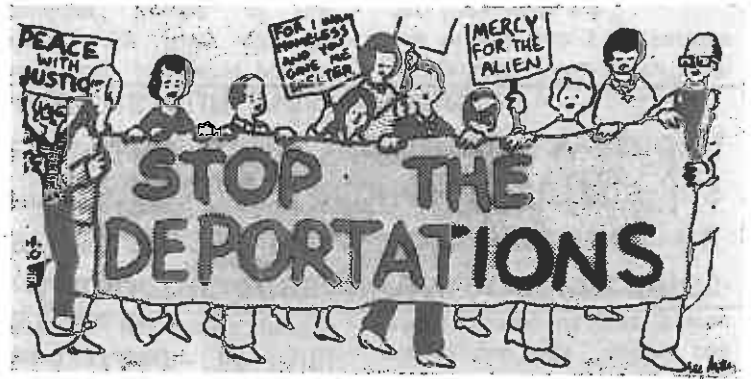
Mark, along with his wife Louise, started the Houston Catholic Worker in 1980. They rented out a ramshackle warehouse, rehabbed it, and started taking in guests. It was their response to the plight of immigrants and refugees coming from Mexico and Central America. Over the course of thirty years, their daily practice of the works of mercy resulted in ten houses of hospitality in and around Houston and in border towns such as Laredo and Brownsville (seven hours to the south); a medical and dental clinic; a hiring hall; and a bi-monthly newspaper that published solid and illuminating accounts of the spiritual and intellectual roots of the Catholic Worker as well as regular reports of the people who came to them in need. What stood out in their writing was its personalism, its lack of sentimentality, and its bluntness. One headline read, simply, "Deportation is a Sin."

In August 2009, Mark and Louise invited me to visit for a few days, to see their work and talk about it with them. I was happy to come, in spite of the oppressive heat and humidity. They prayed every day. They went to Mass regularly. They had young people helping from all over the country. They took in scores of people, some staying on as helpers in the work, most moving on in pursuit of a job and a life free of the violence and injustice that they hoped to leave behind. At the end of my visit, I did not have much to say to them, other than that they were so obviously doing God's will. I left inspired, renewed in the work of the Catholic Worker. I spent a lot of time with Mark. He looked tired, with good reason. He was 81 years old and still worked from early in the morning and all day long.

I think of Mark now in light of the situation of the Catholic Worker in Denver. It's been almost a year since the house burned down, a lot of leads for a new house or houses, some dead ends, more leads, and a lot of prayer, renewal, discernment, and a deepened hunger for doing the works of mercy.

That's what led Mark to the Catholic Worker: deep hunger for doing the works of mercy. And God is there to make it happen. All we have to do is act.

– Mike Baxter



STORYTELLING: AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

As I have said to others within the Denver Catholic Worker community – although there is no longer a Denver Catholic Worker House, due to last year's fire – the Spirit of the Worker has felt especially strong in my life these past several months. I've begun applying to graduate school for fiction writing, which has been – even when I moved into the Catholic Worker – my love of loves (fiction writing, *not* applying to graduate school). In 2012, I'd moved into the Catholic Worker with a romantic sense of wanting to explore, to experience, as a writer – to be able to use these “experiences” in my writing, later on. Ultimately, I was jolted by what I saw at the Worker. I became confused. I could not sentimentalize the stories of trauma I heard. I was used to looking for meaning in every sad story, but after a while I had no energy, no drive with which I could do this searching. I was exhausted. My faith had been tried. After three years I'd seen too much violence – too much pain. Nothing made sense.

It was only after the fire that I realized it was not my role to make sense out of people's struggles. It was certainly not my role to manipulate or try to fix these struggles, which I often tried to do in writing, I found, as the truth – that often things are not simply fixable – seemed unapproachable. And it was only after the fire that I felt I could write about what I'd witnessed there, through the liberating form of fiction. I have since written several short stories inspired by men, women, and children with whom I've lived. Having recently thought so deliberately about why I write fiction, it is impossible for me to imagine my life, my work, without the Worker's influence. I have returned, alas, to that great love of writing, after a period of incredible doubt. Did writing have any real value? What did it do – and for whom? These questions kept me from writing – even kept me from reading. After nearly a year of writing consistently, focusing on short stories – encouraged by the community I have found at Lighthouse Writers in Denver – I am more and more confident that there is, indeed, value in literature. In fact, I am hoping to write short stories which are, in themselves, acts of solidarity – acts of resistance.

While I write with more urgency than I did several years ago – before I became involved with the Catholic Worker – and with more purpose than ever before, I still do not begin writing a story with a great, clear motivation. Every story I write begins with a simple curiosity, a desire to know *why* a person acts a certain way. I am only interested in the complicatedness, the multi-faceted or surprising aspects of a person's personality; I look for the ways in which a person is unique, which seems to be in opposition to what we seem to be encouraged to do, to stereotype people. While developing a character, not only do I consider a character's personal history but the context within which they live. Often I think of Peter Maurin's saying that we need to create a world in which it is easier to be good. The Catholic Worker belief in the inherent goodness of an individual – an individual set in a harsh reality, a system which too often opposes the success of certain individuals – guides my writing. In writing, in looking closely at that context, at the options or opportunities that my character might have available to him or her, I am better able to empathize with someone whom I, as easily as another, might otherwise limit or assume the worst about.



Through fiction writing I am able to wrestle with the presence of domestic violence in so many people's lives – I am able to wrestle with the fact that so many people stay in abusive relationships. In one of my stories, which I've titled "The Boy with the Blue Eyes," I explore a relationship – both characters, both the man and woman, have been abusive towards each other – in which both individuals have experienced trauma, from which they each carry an enormous amount of shame. It is as if both the man and woman in this story are living in different times and places than when and where the story occurs; both are stuck in the past. In another story, titled "Little Goose," a young woman finally finds her own housing – after having been homeless for three years – and goes on to look for her mother, who'd abandoned her as a child. In these little sad but hopeful stories, I do not hope to justify the actions of my characters; merely I hope to understand them a little bit better and reveal to readers – ah, if only one day I am published! – that people are not only more complex than we might assume, but beautifully complex, wonderfully mysterious, undeniably sacred.

Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin accepted people into their lives with an openness that is rare, an openness I try to embody, which I fail to embody often in my "real" life. Through storytelling, with the illuminating power of language and poetry, I am better able to live through a spirit of openness. It is a gift to be able to redo how I've approached people in the past; this time, in *this* story, I will not close myself off, will not fear this person, will not judge them too harshly, will not limit their value, their intellect, their faith. In fact, I will look for their goodness, their beauty. Through this practice I am not only reminded of the deep, deep faith of others, through my characters – even and especially those who have struggled, who have been tried, again and again and again – but I am reminded of my own. It is in this desire, this longing to be faithful, to be trusting, that we become faithful, that we become trusting. It is only in the seeking to know that we might know – the want to love that we might love.

– Kristen

CAN WE "SOLVE" HOMELESSNESS?

I struggle and struggle with this question. I live in a confusing interface between homelessness and property management. A group of us connected with the Catholic Worker started Emmaus Housing as a low-income housing refuge, especially for folks moving up out of homelessness. Most of our tenants have come to us through the Catholic Worker. All of them would be homeless now if they had to pay market rents. I've been managing this property since 1999. I want to keep it nice for our tenants just as the Catholic Worker has always striven to keep our house a safe refuge for our guests.

So we don't accept everybody. We refuse anyone we know to be using or selling illegal drugs. Our ability to house folks with mental health issues is limited by anti-social behaviors. A huge question for me is whether, where and how those people who make the environment unsafe for others can be housed. And I'm bothered when unhoused folks jeopardize the quality of life of the folks we've managed to house – especially by leaving feces in the sidewalk strip of grass where our children play.

I absolutely affirm the worth and dignity of every human being. We're all children of God, equally precious to God, deserving of love, deserving of equal access with everyone else to the material goods of life. At the same time, we're all more or less selfish, living in the center of our own attention, focused on getting our own needs met, usually first, before attending to the needs of anyone else. Only folks who are unusually mature spiritually are willing to forego their own needs to serve others ahead of themselves.

Our capitalist economic system is founded on this natural selfishness, encourages it, and thrives on it. It urges everyone to be greedy, to pursue their own self-interest in competition with everyone else, because this is a very efficient mechanism for driving economic choices and fueling economic "progress." It's also inherently vicious, giving power to wealth and penalizing poverty. This happens by simple mathematics: If everyone earns a 5% increase, the person with \$300,000 is \$15,000 richer and the one with \$3,000 is \$150 richer. The rich get richer, the poor become increasingly disadvantaged, and the poorest get squeezed out of the system altogether.

Fortunately, we learned this long ago and have built some valuable, mitigating socialism into the system, starting with the graduated income tax. But it isn't nearly enough. Our planet could house, feed and care for everybody if all the resources were spread out to give each person an equal share. When I was working, 40 years ago, in a Quaker program to raise consciousness about simple living and international resource sharing, the global per capita income was about \$2,000 a year. I set myself the goal of living at that level, which turned out to be possible – because I was living in community, because I was young and healthy and could walk for miles, because I already had only very simple personal needs. The global income per person now is about \$10,000 a year – a reachable goal, it seems to me, if we wanted to reach it.

But we don't. Almost everyone wants more than they have, including the very rich. Rich nations don't want equality with poor nations. Who wants to take responsibility for homelessness in Calcutta? Our own rich nation could probably house its own homeless if we reallocated some portion of our "defense" budget to human needs, but such a proposal is so unpopular it doesn't even get a hearing. If the state of Colorado or the city of Denver tried to house all those in its jurisdiction, the taxpayers would refuse to foot the bill. Even in principle, the right to housing has been rejected by Denver voters. I've become convinced there is no solution to the problem of homelessness as long as human beings are caught in the immaturity of selfishness and capitalism drives our economic choices.



If this is true, then – much as we hate to see people living outside – we have to acknowledge that homeless folks will be part of our city's population for the foreseeable future. We must affirm their dignity and worth, and we must provide for them. It seems reasonable to me that the city take responsibility for, at least, the two most urgent needs: easily accessible public bathrooms and safe places to sleep, whether sheltered or not. It already has available public space owned by the Denver Housing Authority in various vacant parcels. This would relieve the huge pressure on unhoused folks to find a place to be when no place is considered legitimate by the housed folks.

But if the city doesn't act to meet these needs, what do i do? I can continue loving and supporting individuals through the Catholic Worker and Emmaus Housing. I stretch to keep housed someone downstairs from me whose mental health issues have become extremely challenging. I could presumably invite strangers into my apartment to use my bathroom, but i don't want to. There's my selfishness. The need would quickly consume all my space and time, and i cherish my privacy, my solitude, *my* refuge. I'm happy to live at the economic level of the global average, but i don't want to live at the level of the poorest. I stand in my position of privilege and choose how far i feel able to stretch. So i can't judge others who stand in their places of privilege and are doing as much as *they* feel able to do. It isn't enough. But maybe we can start where we are and, together, somehow, do more.

– Jennifer

IN PROTEST OF SWEEPS

(Excerpted, with permission, from an article by Erica Meltzer in *Denverite* (<http://www.denverite.com/newsletter/>). See the photos at <http://www.denverite.com/protest-sweeps-homeless-activists-camp-outside-denver-city-county-building-23781/>.)

Time and again, Denver police have moved people off the sidewalks at Park Avenue West and Broadway in the Ballpark neighborhood, and people have moved right back in. On Monday night [11/28/16], roughly a dozen homeless activists instead planted themselves before the seat of power, camping in front of the Denver City and County Building.

“For months we’ve been saying ... we’re bringing it to the mayor’s front steps,” said Terese Howard, an activist with Denver Homeless Out Loud.

Howard said activists had considered taking this step before. When they were yet again pushed out of the Triangle area Monday afternoon, multiple people decided it was time to go to city hall.

Two people were issued tickets under the camping ban at the Triangle, an unusual step for Denver police who usually tell homeless people to “move along.” The tickets carry penalties of up to 364 days in jail and fines up to \$999. They also give activists another opportunity to fight the camping ban – in court. ...

“This has gotta stop,” said Jerry Burton, who received one of the citations. “We’re humans too. God didn’t make no scrap.”

Denver police issued warnings to the protestors a little before midnight for violating the camping ban and handed out flyers for services.

Denver police Officer Jason Rivera, a member of the District 6 neighborhood impact team, told the protestors he was sympathetic to their situation, but the encampments in the Triangle had also attracted drug dealers – not necessarily homeless themselves – and created safety problems for nearby residents. ...

Denver Homeless Out Loud was live on Facebook to share their experience.

CITY HALL: Reflections by Anna

It was so wonderful to spend a couple of hours with the folks involved in the action on Monday night. It showed me how much I miss being with the folks of the Catholic Worker house! Just plain folk doing the best they can to survive. At the same time I found them quite courageous in that they were taking the opportunity to say something to “City Hall.” Trudging down there from the Rescue Mission and bringing gear to sleep out. I remembered the time in 1986 when a group of us (about the same size but no wheelchairs) attempted to sleep on the grounds of the City and County Building and were arrested. Dianna DeGette was our attorney, and she actually won our case.



Tom Lewis

WE NEED SOLUTIONS – ASAP

The reasons why people are homeless are as varied as the number of people who are homeless – over 5,000 in Denver and 3.5 million across the U.S. every year. Policy experts are clear, however, that the predominant reasons are the lack of available affordable housing, and the lack of available living-wage jobs to pay for expensive housing.

Unhoused people living with disabilities, women, people with service animals, and transgender people have terribly few options. For instance, since the Catholic Worker House fire, there has not been a single room in the city for a couple to stay together. Many people choose to sleep outside in groups, feeling it is safer than splitting up to go into a shelter. As our friend Jerry says, “You get tired of checking your dignity at the door.”

On March 8th and 9th, and on July 13th, the City of Denver ordered prison work groups to come and clean up the sidewalks and trails around the city where people had made temporary dwellings. The city was heavily criticized for these sweeps as news leaked that donated funds meant to assist homeless people were used to throw people’s personal belongings and I.D.’s in the trash. Denver Homeless Out Loud worked with a civil rights attorney to file a class action lawsuit against the City of Denver on behalf of homeless people, claiming violations of 4th, 8th and 14th amendment protections. That case is still ongoing.

After \$60,000 was spent in March to move homeless people along, those people still didn’t have a good place to go to, and hundreds returned to the sidewalk near Park Avenue and Lawrence. Ignoring criticisms, the City of Denver increased its sweep operations beginning on November 15th. On November 28th, the city put its foot down and began arresting people who refused to leave the public sidewalk for good. Camping Ban tickets were issued, breaking the promises Councilman Albus Brooks, Mayor Hancock and the police had made to not issue citations or arrest people for sleeping outdoors.

The reason that the sweeps continue, despite a federal lawsuit challenging their constitutionality, is because there is a complete lack of accountability within the city’s homeless planning process. Thankfully, some faith leaders and service providers are trying to change that. Pressured by business groups, the mayor’s office ordered the sweeps and the city’s Homeless Commission was simply informed of the plans.

After the sweeps, however, some of Denver’s Homeless Commission members took a brave step and began speaking out against the sweeps and the ongoing criminalization of homelessness. One resigned. The Interfaith Alliance helped organize a group of service providers and faith leaders under the banner of “Alternative Solutions Advocacy Project” or ASAP, whose goal is to find dignified alternatives to criminalization, demanding that the city immediately stop enforcement of the Camping Ban, stop the unnecessary sweeps, and adopt an aggressive policy to ensure that all of Denver’s residents have adequate housing.

Thanks to ASAP’s campaign, several churches are discussing opening their property to unhoused folks this winter and a growing list of service providers, businesses and faith leaders have

signed on to the campaign to demand that we respond to homelessness with compassionate responses instead of these foolish, short-sighted and cruel sweeps.

If you'd like to find out more contact Nathan Hunt: nathan@interfaithallianceco.org

We can't sweep away poverty. We need solutions – ASAP.



– Marcus

HOUSE NEWS

Our community and the individual hospitality situations that have sprung up among us and are still vibrant, but we don't have a large house yet. We've looked at one promising possibility after another, only to be disappointed. We're in conversation with the First Mennonite Church about a possible collaboration with them, and with Regis University and the Loretto Community about a possible collaboration with them, both of which involve relatively long-range planning. We continue to hope and pray, trusting we'll recognize God's intention for us when we see it. Thanks so much for all your prayers and support. Our address, until further notice, is 1023 26th Street, Denver, CO 80205. Our website is www.denvercatholicworkerhouse.org

* * * * *

If you would like to receive this newsletter by e-mail, please let Jennifer know at denvercatholicworker@gmail.com

Catholic Worker House
1023 26th Street
Denver, Colorado 80205
(303)296-6390

