

# LOAVES AND FISHES



DULUTH, MN

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FREE

## From Street to Shelter to...?

By *Angela Flint*

Sitting on a dorm style bed a 37 year old woman pounds the end of a battered bat into the palm of her left hand, over and over. I stay seated on my bed as I read. "You know, I watch you when you sleep," she says. I detect her gazing at me. She keeps pounding the bat into the palm of her hand. "I killed my boyfriend with this bat," she says as she stands up and inches her feet towards me. I have slept in this shelter for homeless women now for two weeks and she has never hurt me. "That's a nice bat," I say, adding, "did you have it custom made?" Stroking the bat gently she says, "As a matter of fact this was a gift. It's a beauty." "Do you play?" I ask. "Nah, I'm not good enough to play really," she says. "I bet you are and you just need the opportunity to play," I add. She walks back to her bed and places the bat under her pillow, goes through her purse, puts on her coat and leaves the room. The Zen of Surviving.

This occurred in Los Angeles at the Sunshine Mission, hosted by the University of Southern California (USC) in March, 2004. Before I ended up at that shelter in March I was living in my van (that broke down completely) while I was working at Anthropology in Santa Monica on the Promenade; earning \$10/hour as a part time seasonal customer service associate. I was let go at the end of that January since I was only hired as holiday help. Since then I have been employed with mostly office temp or seasonal work. One month I have an income, the next I don't due to lack of work.

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## Nonviolent Communication

by *Donna Howard*

In any community, there are times when communication goes awry, feelings are hurt, and conflicts fester. There have certainly been such painful times in the history of Loaves and Fishes. At present we are a community in which working, living and playing together is easy and we are practicing nonviolent communication (NVC) in the hope of keeping it that way.

We are very fortunate to have volunteer trainer/coach Ann Harrington, who spends time with us monthly to help us grow in our ability to express even our most difficult feelings and needs in a way that is easier for the other person to hear.

We humans are often afraid of intimacy. When people think of living in community, one fear that prevents them is that there will be people they can't work with or get along with or a mine field of disagreement. But in community, disagreement and diversity must be seen as opportunities. Imagine if we couldn't disagree! Imagine if every disagreement produced deep wounds in one person or another! Our goal is not only to live and work together, but to love and celebrate each other. The solution is not to avoid intimacy but to learn a compassionate language we can use to express our needs and wants and to listen to one another and to our guests with empathy, supporting them in telling their truths.

## Compassionate Communication

by *Ann Harrington*

On September 7, 2013, The **Loaves and Fishes Community** invited me to present an introductory training session at McCabe Renewal Center. We called it: Communicating With Intention & Compassion: Speaking & Listening From the Heart. My name is Ann Harrington and I was (and am currently) privileged to contribute to the community in this way. Here are some of the questions we asked participants then and continue to ask now as we "practice in community" how to Speak & Listen From the Heart... in any relationship.

Are you someone who would like to:

- Be "real" and authentically honest?
- Lead in relationships by authentic, compassionate example?
- Recognize your 'peace at any price' habits in relationships?
- Learn new skills of Self Compassion, being gentle with yourself?
- Constructively express anger without feeling guilty?

- Constructively listen to their anger without feeling guilty or defensive?
- Change patterns of thinking that lead to gossip, blame and depression?
- Experience the power of "empathy in action"?
- Authentically speak your mind without triggering defensiveness?
- Build relationships based on mutual compassion, understanding and respect?
- Remain calm, centered and compassionate in conflict situations?

We've all experienced breakdowns in communication and the escalating stress of difficult conflicts that can drain our energy, damage relationships and sometimes even our physical health. Conflict is a normal fact of life... and we do know that difficult conversations can lead to crisis or harmony. Even the Chinese word for crisis combines two symbols: danger and opportunity. However, until 2005, challenging conversations

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## \$2,500... this is what we need to raise pronto to pay our property taxes.

We operate on a **shoestring budget**, and our biggest expenses are taxes and utilities. We have been serving a larger than usual number of people off the street for showers and laundry, which has greatly increased our gas and water bill at Dorothy Day House. Now, with our coffers running low it is property tax season.

Loaves and Fishes receives no government money. No-one is paid for their work here — in fact our full-time volunteers tithe their outside income back to the community. We depend almost entirely on small gifts from many people to pay the bills.

**Any contributions are greatly appreciated.** Checks are preferred to "Loaves and Fishes" at 1614 Jefferson Street, Duluth, MN 55812. You can also donate online at [www.gofundme.com/39c4wk](http://www.gofundme.com/39c4wk)

in my life were something to be avoided and felt much more like danger! I grew up in a Christian home and enjoyed many years of Bible study. My favorite verses were these:

*“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:15)

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* (Romans 12:2)

My ongoing questions were: **HOW** do I speak the truth in love when under pressure? How can I be both authentic and respectful? And **HOW** do I not conform to the pattern of this world and be transformed through the renewing of my mind? What was involved in such “mind renewal” in a person with long standing conflict-avoidance habits? And **HOW** could I/we learn to use conflict to connect us into mutually respectful solutions instead of allowing “it to use us”... leaving us disconnected in negativity and mistrust?

**How about you?** Imagine yourself in a tense meeting or conversation. What is your usual pattern? Are you ready to add fuel to the fire, would you prefer to crawl under your chair, or do you have the skills to facilitate an authentic, productive conversation? **How** do we develop skills so that we can embrace challenging conversations rather than avoid them? First, we need an effective process that leads to understanding and productivity. While smoothing things over may look quick and easy, in the long run, compassionate honesty and directness help most to build trust and solve problems.

In 2005, I was introduced to just such an ‘effective process’ that has changed my life in the way I view and deal with conflict. Now I know I can talk to anyone about anything... which is a new freedom for me. This process is known as Nonviolent Compassionate Communication or NVC. According to Marshall B. Rosenberg, author and NVC process founder, Nonviolent Compassionate Communication is a way of giving and receiving love, understanding and trust using a specific set of language skills. At first I didn’t think Rosenberg’s work (or his book) would be relevant to me since I did not consider myself a “violent” communicator. However, it did not take me long to realize that despite my easy-going, trying to be “kind” ways, I had much to learn about communication.

Dr. Rosenberg identifies “learned communication” that disconnects us from each other as the very root of violence. He then offers a simple yet powerful 4 step model, used in 3 ways that helps us to exchange information in a way that helps resolve differences peacefully.

- 1) Observations: *past or current event, described without judgment, criticism or interpretation*
- 2) Feelings: *physical sensations, emotional reaction that is a pointer to underlying need*
- 3) Needs/Values: *basic physical, psychological and spiritual desires of all human beings*
- 4) Requests: *the strategy or solution predicted/proposed to meet the need*

When choosing to practice NVC, we use the above 4 components, flowing between these 3 basic modes of communication:

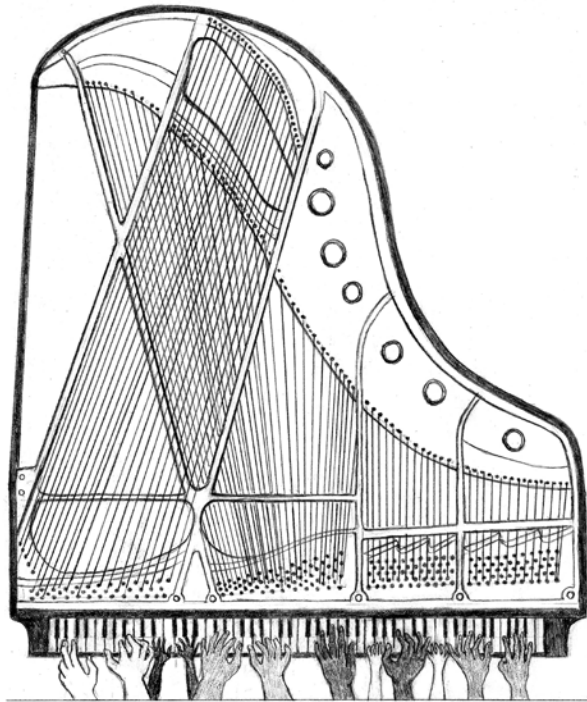


Illustration by Drew Anderson

- a. Self Empathy: *Compassionately connecting to our own feelings and needs*
- b. Giving Empathy: *Compassionately listening to others for their feelings and needs*
- c. Self Expression: *Authentically, compassionately speaking our own truth*

One catch: The model is simple, as you can see... but while it IS simple, it can be challenging to apply when we’re upset. And it is hard to unlearn this behavior. However, practicing the NVC model tends to deepen our awareness and it becomes very clear how destructive our habitual knee-jerk reactions are to both ourselves and others. Just imagine what this kind of consciousness would do, can do, will do and IS doing in the world! (Marshall Rosenberg died February 7th) but the NVC community lives on in the U.S. and in over 65 countries around the globe.

We are learning and practicing NVC at the Loaves and Fishes Community in Duluth.

**Here are 12 things to keep in mind when practicing NVC in our daily lives:**

**1. NVC is both a consciousness and a process of communicating.** It’s not so much the words we use but how we choose to be with ourselves and others. Our intention is to speak and listen from the heart, to connect vs correct others.

**2. When you hear yourself judging, evaluating, analyzing or labeling yourself or others, try to stop and turn it into a pure Observation** of what you actually see or hear. Then ask yourself: “What am I feeling and needing at this moment?”

**3. When you hear yourself say “I should, I must or I have to,” try to change it to:** “I choose to,” “I want to,” “I would like to,” and then connect with your needs and values. (Example: I want to wash the dishes because I value a clean kitchen and order; I choose to go to work because I value the contributions I make there, as well as the financial security it offers me.

**4. Be concrete and specific; Use positive language,** asking for what you DO want vs what you DON’T want. If you make requests of others or yourself, it will be easier to hear a request rather than a demand.

**5. If you hear a “no” from someone, connect with the “yes” behind the “no”** by continuing to connect with your own needs and their needs before going to an action to meet the needs.

**6. Remember, seek first to understand and then to be understood.** If you first “give empathy” to the other person, it is more likely they will then be able to hear your feelings and needs.

**7. Know that understanding others and giving them empathy does NOT mean you agree with their thinking** or strategies for getting needs met. Some people are unwilling to give empathy because they don’t agree with someone. Once the other person has felt understood is a good time to share your authentic feelings and needs.

**8. No matter what someone says or how they say it, it is NOT a statement about you** (so no need for you to take it personally). It is about their feelings and their needs... their world of experience.

**9. All actions are attempts to meet needs.** Every action is motivated by a desire to meet a need or several needs. At each moment people are doing the best they can to meet their needs.

**10. Human needs are universal.** We all have the same needs. We often have different strategies for meeting our needs; it is at the level of strategies, not needs, that conflicts occur. By focusing on NEEDS we can prevent, reduce and resolve conflicts.

**11. Everyone’s needs matter equally.** Neither my needs nor someone else’s needs matter more. We aim to understand and meet all people’s needs.

**12. I will not get my needs met at your expense.** I will learn to be aware of my own feelings and needs and take 100% responsibility for owning them so I don’t end up blaming you for causing them. My feelings come from my own (met or unmet) needs.

The intention of NVC is to develop a quality of connection that allows us to understand and value each other’s needs, and then together explore how to meet both of our needs. We hold this intention to connect... heart to heart... even when we are angry or “don’t feel like connecting”--- by remembering that connection is the value we are choosing to live from in this moment. On the other hand, if we are invested in only in getting certain results, and have no intention to connect human to human (heart to heart) then no matter how strictly our speech adheres to the NVC model, we are not expressing NVC consciousness.

The piano maker Theodore Steinway said, “In one of our concert grand pianos, 243 taut strings exert a pull of 40,000 pounds on an iron frame. It is proof that out of great tension may come great harmony.” I like sharing this fact because it reminds us that practicing a skill like Nonviolent Compassionate Authentic communication can turn tension into creativity and harmony.

I have been blessed with the answers to all my **HOW** questions mentioned earlier in this article! If you are interested in learning more about NVC, you might enjoy reading Marshall Rosenberg’s book or speaking with one of the members of the Duluth Loaves and Fishes Community! (Text: [Nonviolent Communication: The Language of Life](#); Website: [cnvc.org](#)).

Angela Flint, Continued from Page 1

Sometimes the work gigs are for at least three consecutive months. The on-again, off-again work usually disqualifies me from receiving any benefits. So, when I haven't been working I have used my credit card to live on. (Shelters in Los Angeles are very limited and allow only up to a three month stay; as with most in Minnesota if you can get in one).

When I became too physically exhausted from living on the street I used my credit card to stay in a hotel; that's at least \$200.00/night in L.A. (at Days Inn or Motel 6 for examples). By the time I get more temp or seasonal work I use that income to pay my credit card debt. I even got a loan to pay my credit card debt and still have debt on the credit card for hotel, food, transportation and gym membership... yes, gym membership because I need a place to clean up for work. So \$10/hour (what I was mostly earning in L.A. last year for full time office temp work) doesn't pay for rent there or even a room to rent if you can find one; which are typically \$800/month plus deposit. Monthly rent for an old efficiency unit starts around \$1,800/month. Of course there are past bills to keep up with while paying rent.

Fast forward to March 20, 2015 in Duluth, At 53 years old with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD) in 1984, I'm working full time hours as an office temp in Duluth; earning a little more than minimum wage (at least \$10/hour). The fact that I am working disqualifies me from being subsidized by HRA. I'm blessed with staying at the Olive Branch since September. I have my own room where I can lock the door when I go to sleep. I have had the luxury of a temp job for the past four consecutive months and a part time seasonal job that ended in March. So, I have saved money for rent and deposit. My dilemma (one I share with many in the part-time, temp economy) is that I don't want to sign a year lease because experience has shown me I won't have enough money for 12 consecutive months. I have sought an opportunity in Duluth where you can rent by the month for an old but decent hotel room (\$600/month); however, it's six miles from the last bus stop and the landlord doesn't like the idea of me riding a bike even if I use the bus to the last stop. I've called on apartment listings for efficiencies and studios that are affordable (between \$500 and \$600) per month only to find they aren't on a bus line or are taken.

So this is my brief homeless report. And I must tell you how GRATEFUL I am to the Olive Branch volunteers and its community members for allowing me to stay there over these past six months. That's a whole other story of complete gratitude! Cheers!

# The Road Ahead

by Will Hunter

*"You chart the road ahead of me, and tell me where to stop and rest."* (Psalm 139:3a)

Loaves and Fishes may not be thought of primarily as a place of rest. After all, there is always something that needs to be done: a meal that needs cooked, a phone that needs answered, a guest who needs water; a toilet that needs plunged. There is a funeral that needs planned, a stove that needs replaced, a ceiling that needs danced, a sidewalk that needs shoveled, dishes that need washed, a toilet that needs plunged (again), a system that needs turned upside down . . . Yet everything that needs to be done is ultimately for the sake of rest: rest from hunger, rest from cold, rest from isolation. What is a house of hospitality in the Catholic Worker tradition if not a place that offers rest to those weary of the social ills of the age (guests and volunteers alike)?

So when I left a Benedictine monastery in New Mexico and could not see the road ahead of me, I followed my instinct to seek out a Catholic Worker house. It was something besides instinct, however, that brought this southern boy all the way from Atlanta, Georgia, to Duluth, Minnesota. And it is something else that is leading me on to my next stop on the road.

A monk outside of his monastery is like a fish out of water, and even though I'm not officially a monk, I know something of the sensation. That is not to say that I'm gasping for oxygen at Loaves and Fishes. On the contrary, the Catholic Worker is a fairly natural place for a runaway Benedictine monk. Dorothy Day herself was a Benedictine oblate, and she and Peter Maurin often wrote about the inspiration that Benedictine monasticism was for the early Catholic Worker movement. But I'm still a runaway monk, and I need to get back in a monastery. As I'm writing this, I have applied to St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, but I have not yet gone for interviews. By the time this is in your hands, I may have already moved in at St. John's. Or



Will enjoys a taste of northern cooking at our 2014 Christmas party. Photo: Chelsea Froemke

maybe it will turn out that I'm not a runaway monk, but a reluctant Catholic Worker attempting to flee his prophetic mission like Jonah, patron saint of those who don't know how to be satisfied with a good thing and have to put in their place by strange whales.

Either way, I'm grateful for the time I have spent at Loaves and Fishes. Although I may (or may not) have some idea about my next steps, I don't know much of anything about the road ahead of me. But I do know that cooking meals, answering phones, and plunging toilets has been a kind of rest for me, and I hope that it has provided rest for those fellow travelers I have met during my stop in Duluth.

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." -Thomas Merton



## Housing For All Community Summit

May 27, 2015, 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM

First United Methodist Church ("The Coppertop"), 230 E Skyline Parkway, Duluth

**Please join us in coming together as a community to put an end to homelessness in St. Louis County.**

For more info visit: [Facebook.com/SLC10YearPlan](https://www.facebook.com/SLC10YearPlan)

The summit focuses on two overall goals: To come up with concrete solutions to prevent and decrease homelessness and to create a community report back to share with decision makers and the community at large.

## The old make way for the young

by Joel Kilgour

As a child, I loved trips to Woolworth's with my mother and great-grandmother. They shopped while I coveted the soft pretzels. Little did I know that these were the last of downtown's good old days. As years passed, business after business closed its doors, leaving sad relics of storefronts. Duluth continued its career into economic depression, of which our shuttered downtown was a visceral symbol.

Fast forward to 2015. Downtown is home to art galleries, microbreweries and indie movie theaters. Again it is a symbol, this time of a city on the rebound. But is it? While Duluth is thriving in many ways, not all of us share the benefits. Twenty-four percent of us live in poverty, including half of Black and Native Duluthians. Rental housing is the least affordable in the state, while wages are among the lowest. In other words, Duluth is going as the

rest of our nation: into growing economic disparity.

I have watched with sadness as a city that once stood solidly for the common good came to embrace trickle-down economics. This is reflected in the housing market, where the official City position has been to fund "market rate" housing with the stated belief that it will open low-end rentals to the working poor. (Nevermind that a recent study by the Minnesota Housing Partnership suggests this approach actually increases homelessness. Or that market rate housing, by definition, should fund itself).

You can also see this theory in action in the changing face of downtown. Sure, it looks nicer... but at what cost? The creation of an entertainment district to satisfy the needs of young professionals -- businesses that often pay lower than living wages to many of the servers and artists -- has ongoing, unintended consequences, ranging from the loss of affordable food stores to the forced displacement of every homeless camp downtown.

Is gentrification bad? Not necessarily. Neighborhoods and cities change. But the change should not leave a trail of victims. Change from the top is always ignorant of the needs of the rest of us, unless policy makers make a point to include poor voices -- or we insist on it.

In the middle of Duluth's change sit two towering buildings, side-by-side. They are owned by the same company, one that is at the tip of the gentrification spear and has benefitted from tax breaks and housing subsidies. The windows of the Sheraton hotel and condos are always gleaming. The windows in the HUD-subsidized Greysolon Plaza have in some cases not been washed for years. There could be no more stark image of who matters in the new Duluth. Here is one voice from a friend at the Greysolon, where gentrification looks more like a threat than an opportunity, but where people have also organized to find their collective voice.

## Gentrification of East Superior Street

by Gary Fuerstenberg

Gentrification is defined in the dictionary as: the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.

East Superior Street was once the seedier side of town, with such attractions as the Red Lion and Kozy bars and Carlson's eclectic bookstore, but also home to many good businesses and low-income people. As time

units of subsidized housing, and until recently offered 24/7 care. For residents, each month can be a struggle to survive. Like many of my fellow tenants I do not have the luxury of enjoying all the new businesses that are making up the renewed Superior Street. Disposable income is hard to come by. The long reach of gentrification has touched us personally.

If you look up the Greysolon's owner's name, you will

Other changes were in the works. The Chinese restaurant was taken out and a classy martini bar went in. The deli closed. Shopping carts that were stored on the main floor were moved to not be unsightly for weddings and receptions. The carts were taken to the mezzanine level and stored behind a heavy door, which many of our residents had a problem opening. We felt our concerns of how these changes were affecting us as elderly and disabled residents were not being heard or taken into consideration. So we organized and formed the Resident Council to address our concerns as an organized grassroots unit. We had a lot of help from the outside to form our union, concerned individuals and organizations who were involved with social justice.

We are now a year old as a council and we have had many successes. We managed to get our shopping carts and additional new shopping carts moved back to the main floor. The owner, after our request, got us new washers and dryers. But in keeping in the spirit of gentrification the new appliances don't take quarters, they take smart cards which we load with cash from debit cards. This has caused some concern in that our elderly residents most do not have debit cards and are not tech savvy enough to use the debit/smart card loading unit by the managers office. We found a solution to that problem and all is well.

The owner also upgraded our community room we now have a library room, a game room, an exercise room, a TV area with basic cable and soon two computers with internet access. All of which would go well with a younger crowd of condominium residents (after the Greysolon's contract with HUD for low-income housing expires).

Change is inevitable, a city must change and grow, the gentrification of Superior St is still evolving. The skywalk extension between the Greysolon and Essentia First Street Clinic is complete and with the addition of an elevator in Greysolon will be handicap accessible. Fond du Luth casino has announced a planned multi million dollar facelift of the casino and the reclamation of the Norshor theater is moving along.

And so the old and poor must give way to the young and affluent. That's progress in the US of A and gentrification is the engine that drives change.



"Unsightly" residents of the Greysolon Plaza enjoy a sunny day without their trusty benches. Photo: Scot Bol

went on subtle changes began to happen in the neighborhood. The bars closed down, leaving empty storefronts and empty lots. The Electric Fetus underwent a face-lift from a quaint 60's look to a modern hip looking storefront, while across the street the tech center was built and became home to an upscale pizza restaurant. The Sheraton Inn was built, replacing a vacant lot. Teatro Zuccone and Zinema2 opened kitty-corner, catering to a more upscale crowd with indie movies and an expensive cafe. Old standbys like Coney Island underwent facelifts. Yes, slowly but surely East Superior Street was becoming a mecca for young professionals.

I am disabled and on a fixed income. I live at the Greysolon Plaza, an apartment complex for people with disabilities and over age 62. Greysolon has 150

discover that the first two things that show up is that he has a degree in biochemistry and he makes his money by turning low income housing into condominiums. Soon after his company took over management of the Greysolon, many changes happened that affected our quality of life. We used to have wooden benches outside where tenants would sit in the spring, summer and fall and catch up on all the goings on with neighbors and grand-kids. One day in May the benches were gone, no explanation. After numerous repeated requests to bring back the benches the real reason for their disappearance came to light. It seems the owner or management felt the benches attracted riff-raff and our large group of tenants did not fit in with the upscale image that they wanted portrayed in front of the building.

# Finding My Voice

by Floyd Wear

Well, I guess I should start by saying my name is Floyd. I was asked to write an article about myself. I am going to take you on an abbreviated journey of my life, from young football champion to full-blown drug addict to prison and then to prison again, then to homelessness, then to rent-paying, working taxpayer.

I started smoking reefer at age twelve. After that I was trying anything I could get my hands on. I wanted to try it all and I did. This was my life: me at home, me at school, me getting high, oh yeah, and playing football which I was good at. My team was great my senior year, 15-0 undefeated state champions. I never played games high, well once. Big mistake.

My drug use ran rampant. My violence became more frequent. I sold drugs so I could afford my habit. Yeah if I had a few big scores I was able to buy something nice. As I said my violence was a problem. It got out of control. I done things I never thought I would do. I hurt my friends, family and whoever was in my way. This violent, drug using behavior landed me in the big house for 60 months the first time.

In prison, I learned a lot about myself and a lot about human behavior. I learned how to play cards and how to make chips, pizza, burritos, stir fry and many other prison entrees out of noodles using a microwave. Seen violent acts. Participated in violent acts.

I got out to a halfway house and did good for a couple years. Then back in I go.

Getting out this time was more challenging. I was going to sleep outside since it was the summer. Well, that was against the rules. Parole made a stink about it. And I said if I had to stay at the CHUM (the shelter downtown) I would. Within an hour I seen some old prison beef so I left. I didn't feel like going back.

I slept on the steps of the parole building so that they knew where I was. That morning they told me I had until 2 o'clock to find somewhere to live or I go back.

I went and talked to Emily at the Community Offender Reentry Program (CORP). She told me about Loaves and Fishes and we went to parole to ask for a 4 hour extension which they granted. I went and had dinner and talked to Joel. He let me stay. Pretty soon I got a restaurant job that I still have. I started looking for housing but it took 6 months. This was due to my felony background, landlords seem to not want to rent to people who have made mistakes. Also my credit suffered due to my incarceration I could not make payments while I was not making any money. During this time I got involved in the homeless community. Getting to know people and hearing all the stories of hardships helped me put my life in perspective. It made me want to do something to help.

I helped in various ways, cooking at the Dorothy Day House and Project Homeless Connect. I also met Courtney at Loaves and Fishes. She works at CHUM and volunteers her time to help in countless ways.



Floyd (third from right, back row) and the Duluth delegation to Homeless Day on the Hill. Photo: Daniel Badhwa

Emily, Joel and Courtney have helped me focus my energy on positive changes in my life. Thank you guys! I was invited to go to a rally at the capitol for the Second Chance Coalition, which is a group of people fighting for felons to get a second chance at life, including the right to vote after they complete their sentence. Currently we have to wait until we get off of parole. But if parole is about fully integrating people back into society, how can a person do that without fulfilling his duty to vote or choose how his tax money is spent?

Halfway to St Paul, Emily and Courtney asked me if I would like to talk to a couple of the senators. Of course I would and so I did. This really excited me because being a felon my voice isn't heard by the government. My opinion ceased to matter. So here is my chance to be heard. I actually got to say a little of what was on my mind and on the mind of many others like myself. Being labeled a felon is a scarlett letter in effect making you a second class citizen -- no rights, no say in public matters, and open to ridicule from those who think they are better than a lowly ol' felon. But we all make mistakes and I am a person, too, and so I made it a point to be heard. I was heard, I can say that for sure. Some liked what I had to say, some didn't. But I got to say it. It felt great like I was actually helping others like me.

I have since gone back to the Capitol twice. I will continue to go as long as they will let me. I have met some really good people.

Through this journey I've been blessed to have been able to go through all that I have.

I really don't know if I make a difference in the grand

scheme of things, but I do know when I'm around people they smile. And that makes me feel great. I know I will have many ups and downs in life. I will continue to ride the roller coaster of life, feeling fear laughing, getting thrills and helping others buckle their belts so none of us fall off.

## THE PROBLEM

from [restorethevotermn.org](http://restorethevotermn.org)

Minnesotans lose the right to vote until they have been released from supervision... of the 63,000 Minnesotans who were unable to vote due to a past criminal conviction, only about 16,000 were behind bars in prison or jail. In other words, 75% of those who have been denied the right to vote under Minnesota law are living in the community, working to earn a wage and support their families, and paying taxes. The number of people disenfranchised has greatly increased in recent years because felony convictions and sentence lengths, especially for drug offenses, have exploded. Since 1974, the percentage of voting age Minnesotans disenfranchised as a result of a criminal conviction has increased over 400%.

This has long-lasting repercussions for the community: research has shown that children are more likely to vote as adults if they are raised by parents who engage in the voting process. By disenfranchising people who are not behind bars, we lose not only the voice of those directly impacted by disenfranchisement; we also discourage participation by future generations.

# Leaves from the Olive Branch

by Drew Anderson

The kids at Olive Branch sometimes play a drawing game called Exquisite Corpse. The goal is for you and your friends to draw a figure together without seeing each other's work. One person draws the head while another the body, and the other the legs. It's completely unpredictable if you do it right. Drawing styles usually clash but they must always connect revealing a Frankenstein figure that's sometimes funny, strange, or just compelling. This isn't an adequate metaphor for daily living at Olive Branch but it touches on something vital here: This place, as a refuge for people without shelter, as a calm and safe environment for children, as a house of hospitality without state funding or paid staff, requires the committed work of many hands, guests, neighbors, and volunteers alike. It too, is unpredictable.

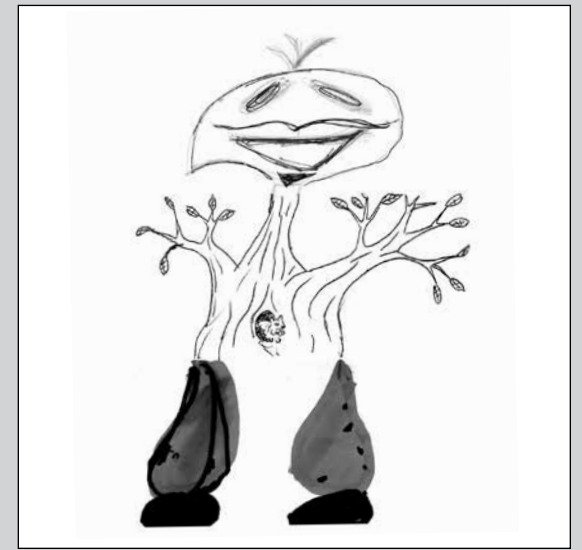
The house must be able to harbor a lot of pain, anxiety, and frustration. The barriers to housing guests face cannot be simply categorized into poverty, or mental illness, or discrimination, or addiction, or abuse, or debt... There is no one-size-fits-all program for a way out of here. This stress can be heightened by living in a shared space with people of different origins and privileges, or by the power dynamics that can emerge between "guest" and "volunteer" if we're not honest with each other. At best, we can learn how to navigate an inadequate human services system and try to make our shared home a dependable place of love and respect.

The house itself must be able to withstand the constant wear of being lived in, a lot. Recently, the ceiling of the playroom began to rain because of the leaky claw-

foot bathtub upstairs. Our missing storm door finally got replaced. By mid-afternoon there's likely a trail of dirt, food scraps and craft paper trimmings across the dining room floor. By dinner our entryway will clog with shoes. There's always dish piles. Laundry piles. Trash. Recycling. Compost...

There is also encouragement in the community. With the opening of the Steve O'Neil apartments this year, two families living at Olive Branch were able to move on and into stable housing. This made room for a single woman, and mother and child who have since found housing. There are our community dinners every night that can bring the whole house together along with neighborhood children and visitors. Conversation at the table will likely begin with a game called Happsies and Sadsies where you tell something about your day that made you happy and something that made you sad, then pick the next person.

It requires many hands to do this work and we would like to give our friends of the community a special mention: Kurt, Kate, Jason, Anne, Liese, Blake, Ali, Nancy, Paula, Rebecca, Rachael, Melissa, and Mike. Kate Mensing, Will Hunter and Terri Mitchell have been here as volunteers and have moved on. Thank you all. We also thank the community at large for paying attention to the work of Olive Branch of Loaves and Fishes. Donations are important, more still is the person's consideration of our work and the decision to support it. It reminds us that however our home may look to eyes on the inside, we are still visible to the outside world. May that curiosity grow while our effort continues.



## The Exquisite Corpse Drawing Game

Note: the game works best with 3 or more people.

- Each person take a piece of paper and folds it in thirds.
- Tuck away the bottom two thirds leaving only the top panel.
- On this panel draw a head of a figure however you like (be sure your friends can't see)
- When finished, extend the lines of the neck across the fold and onto the next panel.
- Tuck away the top panel so that it can't be seen and exchange papers.
- Using the connecting lines as your starting point, draw a torso.
- Repeat steps 4-5, then use the new connecting lines to draw legs.
- When finished, open the paper to reveal the exquisite corpse.

## Olive Branch Kiddos

by Chelsea Froemke & Donna Howard

It was a quiet afternoon at Olive Branch, until now. We can see them approaching the house from our seats at the dining room table. With a flash of colorful coats they run past the front window. We know that in a few seconds we will hear them race up the front steps and will feel a blast of cold air as they enter the house. The neighborhood kids are here.

What happens next depends, as far as we can tell, on the position of the stars. Sometimes they pull a game out of the toy room and all enjoy playing it together. Sometimes disagreements take place right away and we have to intervene. Sometimes they make a fort in the living room and disappear into it. But always they are hungry. Hungry for hot chocolate, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, fruit, toast, eggs, friendship... just hungry. And everything else that was going on in the house is altered by their raucous presence.

Our primary focus and goal as a community is to provide hospitality. The recipients of that hospitality are ever changing but the mission stays the same. We want every person who walks through our front doors to feel loved, welcome and at home. Lately, the volunteers at Olive Branch have put great energy into



Chalk art with the kids. Photo: Donna Howard

expressing hospitality to the neighborhood kids. Most days with the kids are fun: we play games, make dinner together, do crafts, and draw with chalk. The kids bring lots of energy to the house, which requires lots of effort from everybody else in the house to direct their energy in a positive way. Sometimes we are not successful. Kids break rules and adults lose patience. It's difficult to balance our very real love of the kids with our need to turn them away when they don't treat coming to the house as a privilege.

Normally, when a person is not showing respect in language or behavior at one of our community houses, we ask him/her to leave. But in the case of neighborhood children, that is not always possible because their parents are not home and have told them to come here until a certain time. This puts us in a tricky situation. It is not fun being the disciplinarian and we daily grapple with the healthiest way to communicate to these kids

that their behavior is not always acceptable.

The needs of hospitality for kids and hospitality for our guests who are homeless sometimes clash. For example, a guest cannot sit in the living room to read or talk to a friend during times when the kids are here being active and noisy. A serious conversation cannot happen at the dinner table when five kids are jumping up and down and grabbing more food. We might not have time to check in with a guest when we're supervising kids. Frankly, we struggle with these conflicting needs every day but remain committed to both.

There are lots of kids in our neighborhood, many more than those we know well. The kids who choose to spend time with us at Olive Branch appreciate that it is a place where they are kept safe, where there will not be violence in language or action, where their own behavior and that of others will be kept to a respectful standard.

We love these neighborhood kids. Their presence at our house is yet another reminder of why we do hospitality. It is not an interruption of what we are doing that day, it is part of what we are meant to do that day. They are our opportunity to love, to safeguard, to teach, to play. The fact that parents are not home occurs too much of the time, and we have the chance and the imperative to offer ourselves as additional adults who parent, who care. It's a sobering role to play, a responsibility we take very seriously.

# Dorothy Day House Notes

by Joel Kilgour

"I am the Lord your God, I don't have to follow your rules. If you don't like it you will suffer for eternity."

At that our check-in came to an abrupt halt.

"Whoa" said Bill.

"Dude," said Josh.

Our house meetings usually run smoothly, everyone sharing about his week, talking chores and who didn't wash his dishes, complaining about classist indignities suffered that day, and sharing tips on sober events, housing and jobs.

We do well for a diverse group of anywhere between 12 and 16 unrelated guys. Conflict is not unheard of, and we have our share of difficult conversations about bad behavior, sobriety, racism and respect for women.

To my knowledge, however, this was the first time someone announced in all seriousness that he is exempt from house rules and chores because he is, in fact, the Risen Lord.

Rob has lived on and off the streets in Duluth and Superior for five years. When he showed up on our doorstep he was in a surprisingly good mental state and wanting to get care. We were overfull, as usual, but when God presents you an opportunity to help someone, it's hard to say no.

Mental health crises require immediate attention. There is often a narrow window of willingness on the part of someone with serious and persistent mental illness to accept help. Unfortunately, the mental health system is built around the needs of providers and not the needs of patients. Applying for medical assistance requires literacy and mental clarity, and weeks or months of waiting for papers to be processed. Psychiatrists are booked three months out. This is exactly what Rob faced, and the window slowly closed. Over a few weeks, his health deteriorated to yelling at imaginary people, refusing to bathe, and an odd spiritual mix-up of Christianity and New Age-ism, at which he was the center.

Things only got worse after that meeting, with threats to burn down the house and bring us all to hell.

To their credit, the rest of the guys here were compassionate and understanding, if unnerved. They could see that the real hell was what he was experiencing in his mind. But night after night of staying up with him to make sure he didn't harm himself or others was more than we could bear. We told him he either needed to agree to hospitalization or leave. Friendly police were on call to help if needed for an escort to the ER. Instead, he told us he was fine, packed up, and walked out on a cold night. He's banned from all of the shelters in town, so he joins the legion of men and some women walking our streets. Who knows how long it will be before another window opens for him.

We do our best to offer a safe haven -- albeit sometimes temporary, as in Rob's case. There is nothing scary or drudging about the daily grind at the house: just people doing their best to get along and make positive changes in their lives. Most of our guys get into permanent housing and find success in overcoming whatever barriers are holding them down. There are sublime moments of sharing and personal resilience.

Mostly, though, there is an overriding sense of relief to not have to struggle for survival, or lie, or look over your shoulder. But mental illness is something almost everyone here lives with, whether it is voices in his head or depression rooted in poverty. And it is getting worse.

We don't know how to account for the rise in cases of mental illness, except that it seems to correlate with growing social disparities. What we do know is that care for people with mental illness has always been lacking, and we are now in the midst of a full blown social crisis. If the measure of a society is how we treat our most vulnerable, then our community, our state, and our nation have failed.

A few months ago a man came to the house with a bipolar illness. He was misdiagnosed as schizophrenic and untreated after failed attempts for help. After three weeks of brutal depression, he entered a frightening manic episode, unable to control his spending or interactions with others. We brought him to the hospital where he was admitted for suicidal ideation and mania. Less than a day later he was released with nothing but sleeping meds.

In the coming days we barely rested as our guest moved frenetically through the house collecting knives and other people's belongings. At 3am on the second night, he quieted down and we thought he had finally gone to sleep. In the morning we woke to him cleaning a fresh whitefish. Since we had locked up all the sharp objects in the house, he was using a butter knife that he had sharpened on the grinder in the Bike Cave. When

asked where he got the fish, he said "I caught it," nonchalant. It was -30 that night. He also painted a mural on his bedroom wall.

The following day, with help from some of Duluth's most compassionate police officers, we were able to get him admitted to another hospital. There he stayed for several days, but was again released without being stabilized and without a treatment plan.

Today he is in jail for sexual assault.

Who is responsible? A person with mania who is medically incapable of making rational choices? A hospital that discharges him because they don't have enough "mental health beds?" (Imagine being turned away from a hospital because they don't have enough "broken arm beds"). Or the second hospital to discharge him even after we warned them of his potential for violence when he is sick? What about a society that allows this to happen, again and again?

Sadly, we know from experience that the people suffering mental illness are usually the only ones held accountable for our collective failure to create a functional system of care.

We have been accused of being impolite. We need to be friendlier and more patient when working for change, some people say. But from our vantage point it is hard not to think that what the world needs is less propriety and more outrage. We have lost two former guests to suicide already in the first quarter of 2015. The unpleasant reality is that our people are suffering, even dying, and the world is turning its back.

In the meantime, we do what we can, little by little, to comfort our friends and advocate for change. We are grateful for all of you who help us maintain an oasis of community in a world that doesn't welcome the poor.

## Hannah House News

*God raises the poor from the dust,  
God lifts the needy from the ash heap  
To make them sit with nobles,  
And inherit a seat of honor;  
For the pillars of the earth are God's,  
And God set the world on them.*

*Hannah's Song  
1 Samuel 2:8*

Hannah's vision of the upside-down kingdom of God — where the poor and suffering are raised up and the powerful face the truth of their greed — is the heart of our hospitality and politics. In recent years, however, we have struggled with how best to live out this vision in the house we named for her in 1991. It is the smallest of our houses with only three bedrooms, and even then we lacked the people power to operate it as a hospitality house or keep up with repairs.

Since our last newsletter, angels have come to Hannah's rescue. For two months steady, Karla Miller and Shar Prudhomme organized weekend crews from Holy Cross Lutheran Church and the Seeds of Abraham bike club to paint and furnish all of the bedrooms and bathroom. Pat Farrell and Mark Brown each took a hand at minor but much-needed repairs. Youth from St Paul's Episcopal Church and



Shar and Karla give Hannah House fresh hope and a fresh coat of paint. Photo: Chelsea Froemke

the Boys and Girls Club painted the fence and cleaned the yard. Our own Doris and Drew have been working overtime to get the kitchen in safe and cooking order. And the wonderful staff at Johnson Carpet One on Grand Avenue generously donated flooring for the kitchen project at no cost.

Hannah House is now providing longer-term hospitality to men with felony convictions and other high barriers to rental housing. The men live there for up to a year in exchange for greater expectations than we have at Dorothy Day House, including 20 hours a month of community service. The once moldy basement is now storage space for the Duluth Street Outreach Team supplies, and the gardens continue to produce bounty for the community and neighbors. It is a blessing to offer Hannah House as a community resource once again, and with your support, for years to come.

## Who we are

Loaves and Fishes is a community of people inspired by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement to build "a new society within the shell of the old." We believe in a world that is abundant with resources and love, and that there is enough for everyone if we share. As a community we offer family-style hospitality to people experiencing homelessness; operate a no-cost neighborhood bicycle shop and promote shared economics; organize with our neighbors to protect everyone's right to housing; and study and practice nonviolence in our interpersonal relationships and in our politics. Loaves and Fishes is entirely volunteer-run and receives no government funding.

Current live-in members of Loaves and Fishes Community are: Drew Anderson, Chelsea Froemke, Donna Howard, Joel Kilgour, Joel Kocial, Doris Malkmus, Terri Mitchell and Kelly Wallin. Many other people are part of our community as volunteers, donors, meal providers and advocates. We invite you to join us in whatever ways you can.

### Dorothy Day House and the Bike Cave

1712 Jefferson St.  
Duluth, MN 55812  
218-724-2054

### Olive Branch

1614 Jefferson St.  
Duluth, MN 55812  
218-728-0629

### Hannah House

1705 Jefferson St.  
Duluth, MN 55812  
218-728-3771

## Current needs to keep us going:

Donations are accepted every day 8am-9pm at 1712 Jefferson St, Duluth. If you have any questions, please call 218-724-2054.

Thank you!

**Food:** Coffee; creamer; sugar; vegetable oil; salad dressing; healthy breakfast cereal; oatmeal; canned tomatoes (whole or diced, large cans preferred); canned tuna (large cans preferred); pasta sauce; ketchup; peanut butter; butter or margarine; gift cards to Whole Foods Co-op and SuperOne.

**Household:** Dish soap; hand towels; laundry detergent; toilet paper.

**Personal:** New socks; earplugs; new men's underwear (medium and large); shampoo; razors.

**Street outreach:** Tarps (camo preferred); rope; backpacks; bottled water; gas cards; bus cards; rain gear.

**Bike Cave:** Bike locks and cables; chain breaker; 3-in-1 oil; WD40; cable cutter; derailleur and brake cables; cable housing; cone wrenches; crank puller with socket; patch kits; degreaser; fine steel wool; kid size bike helmets; tubes (700 cc tubes 1 1/4 to 1 3/4, 27" tubes 1 1/4 to 1 3/4, 20" tubes 1 3/4 to 2 1/4).

**Special requests:** 8x10 picture frames; house slippers (all sizes, especially men's 9-13); large colander.

# Bike Cave 2015

by Kelly Wallin

Amazing things are happening at the Bike Cave. We've seen success build on success for the past seven years. Last season was no exception. With the participation of many selfless volunteer mechanics, we helped at least 150 people build, maintain and own their very own two-wheeled, human powered, fitness promoting, non-polluting transportation. Those same selfless people helped us expand our useable space. All work on our modest ten foot by twenty foot shed was accomplished through volunteer work and generous donations from the community. The Bike Cave proper has also seen some major improvements. No longer do we need sonar to find anything, we have lights! The work table is a welcome addition, and a beauty to behold. We've acquired three new bike stands. We also took over a closet for use as a tool room. We promoted community and encouraged recycling. We are truly proud of the confidence-building that takes place when anyone, be they small child or single parent or worker needing to get to their job, becomes proficient with a wrench. The Bike Cave can change your life for the better.

Two years ago I walked into the Bike Cave and it changed my life for the better. It was early May and the sun had melted all the snow that had been dumped in April. I had taken a hard look at my life and realized I needed to make a change. I asked myself what made me happy? As I did I took note that all my truly happy times had involved a bike.

As a youngster I spent most of my youth perched on a 20-inch BMX bike, riding with my friends and exploring the world. We pushed our limits on jumps and to see who could do the biggest bunny hop. As a teenager it was a road bike that took me the twenty miles to the neighboring town so I could sit on the porch and talk to a girl I had a crush on. I can't remember her name but remember the bike was a purple Fuji. Ah, puppy love. Later as an adult it was a mountain bike and night rides with a group of friends who all worked long day jobs. The satisfaction of fixing my own bike, then the satisfaction of fixing someone else's, made me very happy.

Two years ago with the resolve to make my life better -- and the realization that it was the bike that could accomplish that -- I went online and came across the Bike Cave. I read that they were looking for volunteers with mechanic skills. I found the address and headed there. They weren't open. I was told to come back on Tuesday. Came back on Tuesday. Introduced myself and was given the tour. Offered to help. That first day to say I was underutilized would be a fair statement. I was given the task of checking tubes for holes



St Paul's Episcopal Church youth help Kelly build the new bike shed. Photo: Chelsea Froemke

and patching them. There had to be fifty of them. I pumped and patched for the whole three hours I was there. I also watched. And what I saw was no sterile high-end bike shop. What I saw was grease, nuts and bolts, rust, bent parts, people helping people and ENERGY. I loved it.

I came back the following Saturday and as luck would have it they were short on volunteers, so I jumped in. Help one person, turn around help the next. Jump here, run there. Answer a question, answer another. Time flew by and I loved it. Been coming ever since.

In the past two years I've met so many fine people. I've met travelers, bicycle vagabonds, college students, college professors, military vets, children young and old, disabled people, elderly young and old, hipsters, blue collar workers, white collar workers, no collar unemployed. We've helped a 70 year old get on a bike after more years than she was willing to admit. We've taught a few adults to ride. We've provided Christmas presents to whole families.

We've changed some lives. And we couldn't do it without support. So come on down and get in on some of the fun. And if you're not able to come, donating is a good way to help and support a great cause. We accept new to used bicycles and equipment (please call Dorothy Day House first). Monetary donations are always welcome to purchase needed tools and parts.

Support the  
**HOUSING  
ACCESS  
CENTER**

We are very close to opening HAC in 2015, all we need is to secure the City's portion of funding. **Please contact Mayor Ness and your city councilors and politely urge them to fund the Housing Access Center.**

For contact information and talking points, visit Duluth Housing Access Center on Facebook or the Loaves and Fishes blog [loavesandfishesduluth.blogspot.com](http://loavesandfishesduluth.blogspot.com)