



THE SIMPLE WAY/POTTER STREET COMMUNITY

F A L L 2 0 0 7 N E W S L E T T E R

S I M P L E B L U R B A G E :

THE RECOVERY FROM THE FIRE

Since the fire in June, there has been such an outpouring of support and care from all over the country; people offering their time and resources to the families who have been hardest hit by this devastating blaze. The Potter Street community has been thankful... and a little overwhelmed with the task of organizing funds and repairs, as well as working with the city officials to make sure the land that remains is turned into positive space for the community and the neighbors. It is a huge job. So TSW founding partners Brooke Sexton and Michelle Brix have re-entered the scene to help. They are the simple way's first paid staff (ironic, isn't it?), and are working part time in the office, calling, filing, organizing, allocating, advocating, emailing, deciding, contracting and directing. They will be around through December. (If you've contacted us about volunteering or visiting to help out, know that Michelle and Brooke will contact you when the need arises. Thanks!)

A CATALOG OF SIMPLE WAYS

Thanks to the miracles of scanning technology and the world wide web, we invite you to thumb through our recently expanded online (fireproof) newsletter archives. These well-worn pages document the many incarnations of this here Potter Street community beginning in the summer of 1999. Might I, Tim, recommend to you what I consider a few fascinating entry points to this backlog?

Hallie's note (Winter 2000); Michelle's eulogy for Sonny Jenkins (Winter 2002); Jamie's intense only newsletter piece ever (Winter 2001); the issue where almost everybody leaves (Fall 2004); the issue where all our readers receive a dollar (Summer 2002); the issue where all our readers receive a little upside-down donkey insert (Fall 2000); the best-illustrated issue ever; props to Zach (Fall 2006; the previous web pdf was text-only).

Unfortunately our collection of old newsletters is not entirely complete. If you happen to find a copy of one of the 4 or 5 simple way newsletters that are missing from the archive, please sent it to us at the P.O. Box, attn: Tim and you will win some kind of really great prize.

CHRISTMAS TOYS

Our annual giant toy giveaway will happen again in December. So at this point it's time to initiate our annual giant toy drive. Send us toys to the P.O. Box by Dec. 10th. Or, we're happy to do the shopping if you send us a check with "Toys toys toys" in the memo line. (It won't work unless you write that exact invocation in the memo line.)

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

In the Philadelphia area? On the prowl for some Christmas cheer? Join us for our Christmas open house on Sunday, December 16th from about 4-7pm.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES!

It was another successful year for the school supplies drive. In fact, we have the video that Jamie made to prove it:

<http://schoolsupplies.awip.us/>

Thanks MCC for 50 boxes of stuff and thanks to all who came out with helping hands!

NEEDS: Toys, love, local farm land

A PRAYER FOR KENSINGTON (RIPPED OFF FROM OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CAMDEN AND APPROPRIATED FOR OUR OWN CONTEXT)

Almighty God, we praise you for all you have done.

Help us with all that you want us to do!

Come, Holy Creator, and rebuild Kensington
so that we do not labor in vain without you.

Come, Holy Savior, and heal all that is broken
in our lives and in our streets.

Come, Holy Spirit, and inspire us with energy and willingness
to rebuild Kensington to your honor and glory.

ANTI-HEROES UNITE!

Word on the street is that Black Friday celebrations will erupt the Gallery Mall in Philly on November 23rd. Get psyched up at: <http://www.usantiheroes.com/files/2006BND/index.html>



E V O L U T I O N O F A R E V O L U T I O N , B Y S H A N E R

We are now making a distinction between the intentional community on Potter Street and the nonprofit organization here at The Simple Way. Both the in-house community and the Board of Directors of the nonprofit have found it important to distinguish these in order to free us up to do the beautiful work we all believe in. The Potter Street Community will continue to do the critical grassroots work of living and working in the neighborhood and living together in intentional community, the heart of The Simple Way. The Simple Way nonprofit will continue to spread the work of loving God and neighbor around the world and oversee the local efforts of restoring the ruins of the empire.

...

TEN YEARS AGO, A GROUP OF COLLEGE FRIENDS DECIDED TO TRY TO DO life a little differently. With dreams of loving God and neighbors like the early Christians, and with a fresh fire of revolution from living among homeless families in North Philadelphia, members of the student movement known as the YACHT Club (Youth Against Complacency and Homelessness Today – still rockin, by the way) formed a little group of 6 who called ourselves “Seid”, a Gaelic word that means “peace after the storm”. Surrounded by some close friends and wise elders, we officially launched The Simple Way as a non-profit organization in the fall of 1996 – united under a simple, common vision (that, like the name itself, took an embarrassingly long time to settle upon). That vision is still the heartbeat of everything we do: “Loving God, Loving People, and Following Jesus”.

One of the first things we did was buy a double-decker bus to start a mobile hospitality service for folks on the street (uhhh, one of our first mistakes... as we later found Philly is not architecturally equipped to handle double-decker buses). In January of 1997 we bought a rowhouse on Potter Street to start an intentional community and house of hospitality (on Jamie’s credit card). Over the years, from many struggles, triumphs, and mistakes we began to articulate how that vision of love gets fleshed out, and the things that hold us together. A statement of faith (“our commitments”) and a statement of practice (“Foundation”) and a list of house rules (“Functionality”) were created to put words to the things we share in common, and to make room to celebrate the things we don’t. These documents are sort of the DNA or charism of the community. Community structures such as “the Onion”, defining the various layers of commitment and responsibility within the community life, were created to help people grow into the intentional community and reproduce the spirit of its founders.

One of the most significant triumphs of The Simple Way is that there has always been a commitment not just to a

common vision or values, but to love and cherish one another. So as some of the founders moved out of the intentional community on Potter Street, we continued to support each others gifts and vocations and families, and all sorts of projects were born (and some children!), such as Another World Is Possible and Yes! And... With increasing ripples of influence and resources these projects continue to flourish and new ones are born. As for life in the community on Potter Street, the question became, is The Simple Way larger than its founders?

In the midst of this ongoing discernment, a few things happened. New folks have grown into the community on Potter Street and the intentional community seems to be functioning quite well. And the activities and resources of TSW have continued to grow. Then came the fire on June 20, 2007. Resources poured in from around the world in amounts hereto unheard of, and this tragedy created a need that required us to rethink our structure as a nonprofit with no paid staff and a shoe-string budget—it was the tipping point of sorts.

So here’s where we find ourselves. We went on a retreat this summer where the TSW Board and the in-house community had some hearty and healthy discussion, prayer, and discernment. From this time together, we recognized the importance of distinguishing between the Potter Street Community and The Simple Way (nonprofit). It is not a divorce or even a separation, but rather a distinction that we are convinced will allow both entities to flourish in their gifts and vocations. The Potter Street community will continue the work of living and loving in the Kensington neighborhood, true to the spirit of doing small things with great love, living lives of simplicity and smallness... a critical organ of the the larger body within TSW, in fact sort of the heart of the whole thing. And the larger nonprofit of The Simple Way will continue to spread the vision of Loving God and People nationally and internationally through collaborations and partnerships. With projects started by TSW founders and new projects of TSW friends, The Simple Way will continue to collaborate and conspire with resources like the Jubilee Fund, Relational Tithe, and Schools for Conversion. We will also be creating an entire arm of the nonprofit to help oversee relief funds and recovery from the fire along with other community development efforts in the neighborhood.

We are excited about this distinction between TSW and PSC and trust that it will free up both of them to fulfill the mission we are called to, and to do that with integrity and celebration of the micro and macro things the Spirit is up to. Keep us in your prayers. May we keep dancin’ the revolution for another 10 years. ■

O F O R G A N I Z A T I O N , B Y R O B B

THE HOUSE OF GRACE CATHOLIC WORKER SITS IN THE MIDDLE OF AN INCLINE about a mile away from us, down the elevated train corridor of Kensington Avenue with its screeching screams of steel on steel. If you go on foot, you are guaranteed human interaction. And what humans! You pass one corner after another of lively folks—some sell, some stare, some smell, some scream, and some simply sit. On Wednesdays, I skip all that and ride my bike to the Federal building downtown for a weekly anti-war vigil with the Worker.

It's a whole different set of people down there: anarchist bicycle messengers, digital camera-toting Liberty Bell pilgrims, businessmen and businesswomen, and police with weapon-laden belts (I guess it's not a whole different set). But it's the Catholic Workers themselves who I've gotten to know a bit better. They've lent me books on the Catholic Worker movement and its founders, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

One of Peter Maurin's principles of the movement was "clarification of thought", a regularly-scheduled time of roundtable discussions on specific topics. In that spirit, we invited some guests to dinner to talk with us about the perils and payoffs of the non-profit world.

One guest spoke to us of his involvement as an activist in the West Philly anarchist scene for a number of years. From there, he moved on to working at a radical non-profit before founding his own consulting business for non-profits and other groups. In the first two roles, he found himself both alienated by and alienating of the activist groups. He was alienated by their unwitting replication of the dominant sexism, racism, and classism to be found elsewhere in our/all culture/s. We at the Potter Street Community are continually confronted by these ugly tendencies, obligated to call them what they are and recognize that they're to be found within us, just as the kingdom of God is within us, too.

And hear me when I say that this guest was fully tuned in to the kingdom of God within everyone. He had the courage to mine himself and see that in his work, he was alienating himself from "those guys". He saw that "with much wisdom comes much sorrow", and that his sorrow was taking the form of elitism. His circle of friends and confidants was shrinking as his ideologies grew in strength and quantity. He had developed a mental checklist of lifestyle choices that limited his capacity to know people as they were. Ultimately, through a long, painful, and ongoing process, he saw that his ideological comrades didn't automatically overlap with those who were acting most ethically. He saw that there were solid activists who were pointing at others to keep from searching within, and he saw that there were corporate managers and politically un-informed students who were capable of surprising him with their integrity.

What resulted was a re-opening of himself and a re-ordering of his priorities. He made the conscious choice to look within himself to see the injustices that we see "out there" as

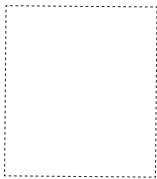
being just one manifestation of the same capacities that we all have. As with Ammon Hennacy, Catholic Worker anarchist, he seeks an internal revolution before and while seeking a broader one. And the internal revolution isn't one that you achieve, then move on the larger one. It's an ongoing process and when it's enacted honestly, there's an accompanying humility. You can't teach that, to use a coaching metaphor. You have to live it, to use a cliché. The humility of our guest was encouraging at the same time that it was condemning of us and our frequent slide toward hubris.

We got together again for coffee. Maybe it was fairly-traded from a socially-conscious shop, or maybe it was the daily blood-of-the-workers special from a proletariat diner. Either way, it's the content of the conversation that I want to share. He told me about his perception of how people of color are used within progressive social movements. He sees two primary functions: 1. agents for producing White guilt; stirring Caucasians to action 2. sanctified symbols of nobility; e.g. see how those poor people live—what character, what suffering. Both, he observed rightly, are far from the Jesus of the gospels. Both take away the humanity of those we wish to be in solidarity with. Both use a means to achieve an end. He cautioned against separating our means from our ends in any aspect of our lives, our work, our psychology. This is the philosophical base of the Catholic Worker movement—a personalism that counts the cost of treating people as means to an end and finds it too great. And this is an important aspect of where we find ourselves as a house and a non-profit organization.

As for the non-profit, we must remind ourselves to walk gently, humbly, and, more than anything, slowly. We need to remind ourselves and those who know of us that our calling is to faithfulness, a calling often at odds with effectiveness. We need to remain vigilant to the reality that the path of least resistance is a pre-packaged route toward institutionalization and all the attendant anti-personalist trappings. As for the house, we must remind ourselves to love fully, to act in response to our relationships and not out of our cultivated identities as the vanguard of alternative. As we continue through a particularly transitional time of our often-transitional existence, we ask prayers for a unifying love and a loosening of our holds on our egos, both individually and collectively.

Peter Maurin taught Dorothy Day that "it is foolish and sinful to accept the reality of a particular society by sitting back and railing against its great power and awesome resources, thereby abdicating one's responsibility to use one's own God-given capacity for independent initiatives."

That is, may we not become a community that exists primarily in dialogue, and may we not be comfortable in a role as armchair critics. We're rich—absurdly, lavishly rich in people around here. And it's our prayer that we meet each other where we are and allow our passions and talents to intersect in ways that point to the Beloved. Amen. ■



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K R I S T E N & J E A N ' S I N T R O . K O R N E R

KRISTEN'S HELLO
BLURB LIMERICK

My name is kristen and i am new
Back in august i joined the crew
My last name is ailing
And in this mailing
I'm introducing myself to you!



JEAN'S HELLO
BLURB WEB
DIAGRAM

