



## How to Be a Catholic Worker Without a House

- **ABBY RAMPONE**, member of The Fireplace Community (Chicago)

A few years ago, I was volunteering twice a week at Maryhouse Catholic Worker in New York. In a chat with one of the Workers, I referred to myself as an "aspiring Catholic Worker." As a seminarian living in a dorm uptown, I felt that I could hardly dare to call myself a Worker. My conversation partner questioned that phrasing. It's not like a degree you earn or a title you gain, he said. You just start doing it.

Before too long, I moved into Maryhouse for a summer before finishing my degree. A year and a half later, I moved into another Catholic Worker house halfway across the country. And after about eight months, I burnt out. I now live in another intentional community, and while it's not a Catholic Worker house, several of us do have connections to the movement. (My current home is called the Fireplace Community To learn about us, check out [thefireplacecommunity.org](http://thefireplacecommunity.org)). We practice a different type of hospitality at the Fireplace: we offer retreats to artists and activists/organizers and prevent isolation and burnout by cultivating a welcoming community.

The Fireplace has been a wonderful home for me after a year spent struggling with dysfunction in radical spaces and organizations. I feel embraced, and I believe in its mission. At the same time, though, I sometimes feel guilty about not being a "real" Catholic Worker. I feel like I should be using our spare space to house more and more people, or cooking a big pot of soup to bring more people to the table. I wonder if I am dodging my responsibility to Christ among us.

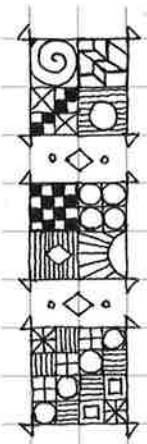
It is easier to live our values in community. We cannot do the work alone; the community must precede the work. Therefore, I think, it is harder to be a Catholic Worker without living in a Catholic Worker house. But I do think it's possible. These are a few thoughts I have about what it means to be a Worker in the world:

- **Not everyone is called to live in houses of hospitality (or stay in them forever!).** Dorothy Day recognized that God doesn't call everyone to the same sort of work. While I think I may have a call to the Catholic Worker movement, I remind myself that many Workers do not spend their whole lives in houses of hospitality. Furthermore, I look around and remind myself that there is no single way to be in this movement. Any movement needs a diversity of talents and strategies to effect change.
- **Any house can be a house of hospitality.** One of the beauties of the anarchist sensibility is the flexibility it affords. You may need to find some donors if you want to quit your job and open a 24/7 "house of hospitality," but you don't need anyone's permission to let someone sleep in your spare bedroom or on your couch. That's personalism, one of the foundations of the Catholic Worker movement.

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How to be a Catholic Worker without a House ... Continued

- **Jesus (and Dorothy!) rested.** Our Gospel obligations are serious. We shouldn't lose sight of that. But we need to reject the conditioning of our capitalistic, individualistic society. God does not want us to work ourselves to the bone. Jesus retreated from the crowds, and while Dorothy Day often overworked and struggled to extricate herself from the movement, she recognized the importance of retreats. Religious retreats were a major part of the early Catholic Worker movement. Contemporary anti-capitalist movements remind us that rest and contemplation can be acts of resistance themselves.
- **Catholic Worker values are relevant in every context.** Catholic Workers aren't a special class of people. It's not a degree or a title, after all. The values of the Catholic Worker movement are *Gospel values*, albeit as the Gospels were interpreted by Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and the writers, friends, and comrades who shaped their thinking. This doesn't mean it's possible to practice the Works of Mercy in every context: wealth and power inhibit our ability to follow Jesus's teachings. At the same time, though, Christ is in the breadlines – and riding the subway, incarcerated in the prisons, studying at colleges, working in factories, and shopping at supermarkets. A house of hospitality is just one place where we may meet Christ.



Because I experience a deep pull toward the Catholic Worker movement, I still question my choice to not live in a Catholic Worker house during this season of my life. I think this is good and healthy. Whether or not we live in houses of hospitality, we ought to regularly examine our habits and motives – but also discard our tendencies to demand “perfection” of ourselves. Our individual capacity to serve each other may fluctuate, but if we build a community (or an ecosystem) of people with diverse skills and callings, we can collectively meet each other's needs. I am a Catholic Worker because I have entered – haltingly, imperfectly – into the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement, and I live my life with reference to that community and its values.

**COMMUNITY NEWS**

- Stephanie Held

We've gone through some big changes at St. Francis House over the last six months. Workers Sam Russo and Elizabeth Duff were married in a beautiful ceremony on June 11 and, as of the printing of this newsletter, are enjoying their honeymoon in Italy! While they will no longer be Workers when they come back, they've only moved across the ally, so we plan to see them regularly both in the house and in the garden.

Additionally, we have welcomed two live-in volunteers into our home – Peggy and Yoli – who have both been a wonderful help to the community. That brings our total as of now to 10 in the house with three Workers, two volunteers, and five guests living together.



House Spring Cleaning Day  
May 28, 2022

# Hungry for Climate Justice

• PAUL CAMPION, CW @ Emmaus  
Catholic Worker & Sunrise organizer

They say it's often easier to envision the end of the world than it is to dream of the end of racial capitalism. But, I have so many dreams. I dream of living a full, beautiful life. I want to be a dad someday and play with my kids in Douglass Park, without fear of heat waves, tornados, floods, and societal collapse.

Coal, oil, and gas burn. A few billionaires prop up a few broken human institutions to suck the world dry for their ungodly profits, leaving the rest of us to muster our courage as we face the consequences.

But, there are way more of us than them. I know that we have so much to win. We deserve clean air, good jobs, clean water, and a livable world. Everything and everyone we know and love rests on our ability to know this and act. Human institutions are more malleable than silly putty.

On October 20th, I did not eat breakfast. On a warm, early fall day, I walked up to the White House, unfolded a red camping chair, and sat down. Kidus, Abby, Julie, and Ema sat beside me. We held up our signs, which read "Hunger Striking For"... "My community," "My future," "A good job," "My future children," "Para vivir" (to live).



In just 10 days, President Joe Biden was set to jet off to Glasgow, Scotland for what current U.S. special envoy for climate John Kerry called "the last, best hope for the world" – a United Nations meeting to ratchet up climate commitments originally laid out in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Just six days before that, *The New York Times* reported that Biden had abandoned the centerpiece of his climate plan – Clean Electricity Performance Program – which would have made all our electricity renewable and/or carbon-free by 2035, created 8 million good jobs, and brought clean air to our communities.

Seeing the metaphorical lifeline yanked before our eyes, I was furious and knew we had to act. At Sunrise we had organized, protested, and rallied since 2017 to open this political window of opportunity to pass significant federal climate legislation. My friend and fellow organizer, Nikayla,



gathered us on Zoom to ask the question "what more can we do?"



We recalled that Suffragettes, Cesar Chavez, Gandhi, Dreamers, and many more had used hunger strikes in their liberation struggles. I contemplated the courageous actions of Catholic Workers to stop the war in Vietnam, stave off nuclear collapse, and protect the water and our communities from dirty new oil pipelines.

Drawing on the courage and wisdom of past movements, we decided to go for it. We quickly made plans and prepared. We consulted movement leaders who had gone on hunger strike before, read the history of hunger strikes, called our loved ones, recruited a doctor to support us, and booked travel to Washington D.C.

Before leaving Chicago, I sat in the Troy Street community garden, broke bread, sipped wine, sang, and prayed with our extended community of Catholic Workers and friends in Chicago for courage and strength.

With full hearts, clear minds, and empty bellies we began our hunger strike to demand that President Joe Biden and the Democrats in Congress deliver on their climate justice campaign promises and turn their words into action.

While on hunger strike, we confronted top White House officials – John Kerry and Gina McCarthy. Members of Congress came to meet with us. Hundreds participated in 24-hour solidarity fasts across the country. We received news coverage and the White House was forced to respond publicly to our action in a press conference. Each night, we went to bed hungrier. It felt like we might just be turning the tides – that we just might win.



Nonetheless, President Biden left for Glasgow empty-handed – failing to pass his top legislative priority – the Build Back Better Act and its insufficient, though desperately needed \$550 billion for climate measures. With little credibility to back up his promises, the conference largely failed to meet the moment. Incredibly infuriating, although not unsurprising, especially in retrospect.

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Hungry for Climate Justice ... Continued

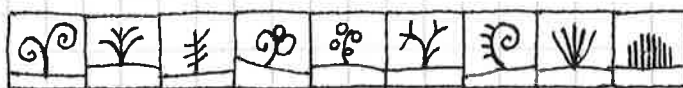
After 10 days with no food, my pulse dropped dangerously low, putting me at risk of heart arrhythmias or even cardiac arrest. At that point, I made the tough decision to break my hunger strike. Others continued without food for three more days.

Today at Emmaus House, I continue to participate in our community of hospitality and intentionality. Thankfully, I have faced no lasting health impacts from the strike. At Sunrise, we continue to build people and political power to build a livable world where everyone who wants one has a good-paying job and our communities thrive. The fight goes on.

In Sunrise we say, "There are hard and sad days, to be sure. This isn't easy work. But we strive to

bring a spirit of positivity and hope to everything we do. Changing the world is a fulfilling and joyful process, and we let that show." Each day at Emmaus, on my organizing calls, and in the streets as I canvass, the beautiful struggle of building a more loving and just world continues.

While it may often seem and feel as if we are "doomed," the fossil fuel billionaires and their friends wake up each day stopping at nothing to maintain and deepen the life-threatening status quo. We, the people who want a livable world, have far more power than we know. Keep going. Join us. Let's do this! 



## Contemplating Christ's Baptism • STEPHANIE HELD

This is a personal contemplation of Matthew's account of the baptism of Christ and is based on an active imagination prayer I journaled while undergoing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

**Matthew 3: 13,16:** <sup>13</sup>Then Jesus appeared: he came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. [...] <sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, he at once came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him.



I am the Holy Spirit – the Lord, the giver of life, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I am incorporeal, bodiless, ethereal. I alternate between forms and shapes. In the vastness of heaven, I rest in my throne at the left hand of the Father. Sometimes I am a whirling vortex of wind, sometimes a globe of fire, sometimes a beam of pure light. Even the angels find it hard to look upon me.

Time behaves differently here, but at last, the moment arrives. I know deep within that I may finally reunite with the Son who has been absent from our side during his incarnation. I wonder if the Father is sad. Unlike me, He will not lay eyes on the Son again for some time and not until after much violence has happened.

With one last glance at the Son's empty throne, I turn my essence inward and vanish from the room. While I am naturally quiet, my departure causes a terrific disturbance. A mighty wind cuts through heaven emanating from where I had just been. It blows out candles, rustles hair and robes, and knocks flying angels off course. It is like a shock wave, with my throne at the epicenter, stretching out to fill the entirety of heaven. I spare this little thought as I let myself be led towards the Son.

I erupt into the earthly realm in the sky above the Jordan just as Jesus' head breaks the surface of that sacred water. My arrival sends out another powerful force in all directions – wind and light bombarding and dazzling the crowd gathered on the bank. Jesus blinks water from His eyes and sees me. A wide smile of recognition and delight stretches across His face. On instinct, I descend transforming into a dove along the way. He lifts His wet hands and I land gently into the cupped palms. He then tenderly cradles me to His cheek absorbing my warmth. I feel the coolness of the wet hair plastered to His face.

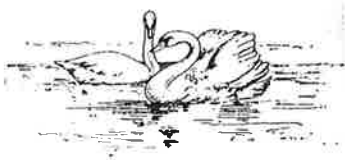
In a whisper meant only for us, He voices the feeling in both our hearts. "I missed you."



# WHO WE ARE



St. Francis House is a house of hospitality in the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement which values communal living with people experiencing poverty and homelessness, as well as nonviolent resistance to war, injustice, and materialism. St. Francis House is located in Uptown, Chicago. Our community has been practicing hospitality since 1974 by taking in single adults who need a place to stay. The House is supported entirely by personal donations and earnings – we receive no government, Church, or corporate funding. Decisions are made by a group of people called Workers who share the responsibilities of managing the house and are committed to the Catholic Worker movement's ideals. All are welcome here!



If you'd like to support the House with funds, you can mail us a check payable to "St. Francis House" or contribute via our website [francishousechicago.com](http://francishousechicago.com).

As always, much gratitude to our supporters.



Scan this QR code to donate via our Paypal

by Peter Maurin →

## VII Farming Commune

1. Laborers do not work for wages on a Farming Commune; they leave that to the Farming Commune.
2. Laborers do not look for a bank account on a Farming Commune; they leave that to the Farming Commune.
3. Laborers do not look for an insurance policy on a Farming Commune; they leave that to the Farming Commune.
4. Laborers do not look for an insurance policy on a Farming Commune; they leave that to the Farming Commune.
5. Laborers do not look for an old age pension on a Farming Commune; they leave that to the Farming Commune.

→ An Easy Essay

## HOUSE NEEDS

- NEW OR GENTLY USED PILLOWS
- TWIN SIZE SHEETS
- BATH TOWELS
- LAUNDRY SOAP
- DISH SOAP
- BLEACH
- MURPHY'S OIL SOAP
- LIQUID SHOWER SOAP
- SHAMPOO
- DISPOSABLE RAZORS
- DEODERANT
- ANTIBACTERIAL HAND SOAP
- FIRST AID SUPPLIES
- OLIVE OIL
- CANNED GOODS
- NON PERISHABLES
- COFFEE



St. Francis Catholic Worker  
 4652 N Kenmore Ave.  
 Chicago, IL 60640  
 francishousechicago.com  
 SFH.ChicagoCW@gmail.com



Join us for our SUMMER  
 BENEFIT on Saturday,  
 July 23<sup>rd</sup> from 1-4pm!

- Come relax in our garden and enjoy homemade icecream!
- Contributions in any amount are appreciated. ♥

Thank You—

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| vida Burkhard                           | 2nd Presbyterian Church           |
| St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church   | Ellen Kogstad                     |
| Bethany United Church of Christ         | David Austin                      |
| Bill Held                               | Jack Drumke Ruth Woodring         |
| Julie + Kevin Duff                      | Grayle Catnella                   |
| Cindy + Antonio                         | St. Giles Family Mass Community   |
| Star + Tim Wood                         | Lee Ann Russo + Kevin Miller      |
| Joanne Porrock in memory of Chuck Fiori |                                   |
| Doug Lui                                | Mark Barry + Anne Buckley Barry   |
| Joan Rossi                              | Paul Buckley + Jacqueline Buckley |
| Donna                                   | Thomas Heuser                     |
| Leeann Kowar                            | Ancilla Domini Sisters            |