Ripples and Fluidity
Michele Naar-Obed

Our Hildegard House core community has often commented on how fluid we have been since we opened our doors in 2014. We knew so little about the needs and practical applications of providing hospitality for women who have experienced sexual exploitation. Sure, we could provide a bed and some food. But those are things the local shelter can provide too. What then, makes a catholic worker house different from a city run, or non profit shelter? We could provide encouragement and support as our guests try to find the necessary services and programs for long term healing and stability, but we know they are entering into a very unstable and unfriendly economy and housing market.

Dorothy wrote essay after essay about the works of mercy and the works for justice. All of it is grounded in the firm belief in the God-given dignity of every human person. No matter how they appeared, what they had been through or what they had become, they were an essential, indispensable and sacred member of the human family. They were not and are still not case numbers or clients. Catholic workers are not staff, and catholic worker houses are not sites or agencies. Peter Maurin wrote easy essays about personalism and catholic workers vs social workers. Thinking in these terms makes it difficult to know how to encourage and support our guests in finding long term healing services in a capitalistic society that exploits everything for a profit. We begin to understand better that both guest and worker can be exploited in this society and both guest and worker are on equal footing in creating the beloved community. We are not the first people to live in an empire that exploits life and creation for a profit for the 1%. The original Hildegard House core community consisted of 3 Benedictine Sisters from St. Scholastica Monastery. We now have 3 prayer buddies from the Monastery. They pray for us and help us keep our sights on the teachings in the Rule of Benedict.

Who was St. Benedict? Born in the year 480, Benedict was a privileged man who lived in the heart of the Roman Empire. Disgusted by the moral squalor of his peers, Benedict withdrew and lived in a cave for 3 years. There he listened with the “ear of his heart” for guidance on how to live in right relation with God and each other even under the shadow of the empire. Later Benedictine Monasteries rose up to offer safety and insights to the many pilgrims on their journey. We are grateful for the prophetic insights of the Benedictine Sisters who have studied, lived, and prayed this Benedictine theology which has stood the test of time. We are grateful that they continue to pass that wisdom on to all of us pilgrims on the journey to live right with God and with each other. We strife to ground our community in these teachings. Coincidentally, Dorothy Day was a Benedictine Oblate. And our namesake, Hildegard, was a Benedictine Sister and is saint and Doctor of the Church. The ripple effects of her teachings permeate our very being here at the Hildegard House Catholic Worker. We are grateful to be connected with and to learn from our Anishinaabe relatives who continue to defy genocide. They are alive. They teach, pray and they stand for justice and the common good. Together we stand, and we pray and we work for justice and the common good under the shadow of the empire of our time.

So this brings us back to our day to day life of what it means to live as a catholic worker. We are learning how to be rooted, yet maintain fluidity so that we do not become stagnant. We have no cookie cutter model of how to organize a hospitality house, especially in a society that has forgotten what it means to live for the common good and recognize the sacredness in all creation. We remember that sacredness and know we are all interconnected.
(continued from Ripples)
We listen with the “ear of our hearts” for the ancient wisdom that flows out from all the great faith and spiritual traditions. And then we pray for guidance to act in accordance with the Spirit for the common good. We do not take personal credit when we do the right thing, and we ask for forgiveness when we make mistakes.

On a practical note, we continue to take in guests, sit down at table together, share food, tell our stories and share spiritual guidance. We take risks together to live right with our God and with each other and we support each other when we are persecuted by the empire. We give each other strength and encouragement to resist walking lock-step, to resist being a cog-in-the-wheel of the empire, to resist taking the crumbs which placate us into silence. We help to keep each other awake and to not be afraid. We are working hard to undo the isms that keep us separated, frightened and weaker.

In a way, we are trying to answer the question with which we started. What makes a catholic worker house different from a shelter? Ripples and fluidity and keeping our eyes on the common good help us to find the answers.

End The Demand
Mary Kay Thornton

There was definitely a feeling of excitement as some of us from the Hildegard House arrived at the Two Harbors Law Enforcement Center in mid-September. We had come to join an event which was celebrating placement of the “End the Demand” billboard recently erected on Highway 61 just south of Two Harbors by the Two Harbors Sex Trafficking Task Force. Members of the task force were relentless in their desire to erect a billboard addressing this issue, and when the opportunity to obtain a sign in a very visible area came up in March 2017, they immediately started to search for sponsors. Funds from Castle Danger Brewery, Cliff Mining, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Community and Shopko made their dream a reality.

Ten speakers had been invited to share their thoughts on the topic of exploitation. Various positions were represented: MN legislator, MN Dept. of Health, MN Human Trafficking Task Force, Safe Harbor Regional Navigator, PAVSA, Men As Peacemakers, a Lake County judge, the Chair of the Lake County Commissioners and letters from congress people who were unable to attend. Speaker after speaker addressed the issue from their perspective and some shared personal stories which truly revealed compassionate hearts. It was reassuring to hear just how deeply concerned and totally committed thousands of Minnesotans are to end sexual exploitation.

Equally reassuring was learning of the amount of networking, collaboration and coordinated efforts that take place every day in our state between agencies, organizations and individuals. Browsing through all the leaflets and booklets on the information table definitely affirmed this.

The Two Harbors Sex Trafficking Facebook page has received an incredible amount of positive responses from all over the United States. A photograph of the billboard, in addition to an article about it in the local newspaper, has been read by hundreds and “shared” by over 200. All of us who attended were encouraged to do everything we can to work toward a Minnesota that does not accept commercial sexual exploitation. We need to be relentless in our efforts to end the demand and to protect our children and men and women from this horrendous criminal activity that destroys so many lives.
Storytelling
Bozena Scheidel

“To walk attentively through a forest, even a damaged one, is to be caught by the abundance of life: ancient and new; underfoot and reaching into the light. But how does one tell the life of the forest? We might begin by looking for drama and adventure beyond the activities of humans. Yet we are not used to reading stories without human heroes. Can I show landscape as the protagonist of an adventure in which humans are only one kind of participant?” This is an excerpt from The Mushroom at the End of the World by Anna L. Tsing. I like her challenge, and I am compelled to think about human and non-human histories of the places I know. I want to pass along the histories that I have been taught—and I want to honor the life that flows through them, human and not. Mankato, MN is the site of the largest mass hanging to occur in the United States. This was December 26, 1862, and 300 Dakota men were sentenced to death. Called the Dakota Conflict, an eruption of violence between the settlers and the Dakota ravaged the Minnesota River Valley. Amidst settlers swindling Dakota in trade, Christian missionary abuse, and cultural genocide was the suspicion of a termination of federal checks to the reservation. After months of tension during the summer of 1862 due largely in part to withheld rations to the Dakota, a peaceful intervention by Dakota men to the leaders among the settlers left Little Crow, chief of the Nation, hopeful about reconciliation. The following day, a contest of ego between four Dakota men resulted in the shooting of a settler store owner. The fears of the white settlers materialized, and the Dakota Conflict raged. Of the 300 Dakota men sentenced to death, all but 38 were pardoned. The site of the hanging is marked by a limestone bison right along the riverbank, a ten minute walk from the house where I grew up. Only in recent years have bison been “re-introduced” to the land they are native to after being hunted and killed to near extinction—the settlers’ logic was that killing a great number of bison would starve out a great number of Dakota people. Twenty bison now live at a state park, a fifteen minute drive along the river. The nearest Dakota reservation is 70 miles from here. The Minnesota DNR recorded 11,842 lakes in Minnesota in 2013, and that’s excluding lakes with a surface area below 10 acres. A billion years ago, glaciers covered much of the northern hemisphere. Sheets of ice oozed across land, sharp icy blades cutting into mineral rich soil in what we now call Minnesota. Near the Canadian border, lakes grow together in amoeba-shaped pools. For as long as immigrants from Poland, Germany (my ancestors), Czechoslovakia, & Ireland, mainly, have settled/colonized MN, an ethical question regarding the land’s progress persists. While generations of families subsist from mining iron, nickel, taconite, or copper, generations of families resisted: “this land was made for you and me, we cannot abuse it like this, let us enjoy our beautiful lakes.” We fight about this today. Each of these histories has a story about accumulation and value, about human centricity and progress. Who is included, when we say this land was made for us? What about the Dakota, displaced from their home? What about the non-human agents in the stories? The river, the bison, the copper in the rock. Does profit and progress matter against generations of displacement and trauma? Can we re-think these stories outside the goal for human progress? Will we act in ways that follow? And can we, then, tell stories to honor every being?

About the author: After a summer internship with the Des Moines Catholic Worker, Bozena spent 2 weeks at the Hildegard House exploring the Catholic Worker and the Duluth community. It was a joy having her with us.
Hildegard House News

The Hildegard House is rocking these days. We start with giving thanks for Rachel Gusman’s year and half of service to Phoenix Rising, a peer support group operated out of the Hildegard House run by and for survivors of human trafficking. Rachel and her daughters have landed in their new house and Rachel is engaged and soon to be married. We wish them the best.

We are currently preparing for the return of a previous guest and her 3 year old son. We anticipate their arrival in early December. It has been a long journey filled with many obstacles and miracles for this family since they left here in 2015 to testify against a major sex-trafficking ring. We are over-joyed that they will be joining us again and we are grateful that Hildegard House can welcome them with hospitality and love.

Judy Johnson who joined us last April to help coordinate activities in Phoenix Rising will remain with us. She continues to organize the Hildegard House community members in baking and making gifts for the youth at Sol House, a community house for sexually exploited and abused youth. Judy can also be found volunteering at the CHUM food shelf. Judy and her daughter Jodel, also a previous guest here at Hildegard House, were featured in an in-depth investigative report on sex-trafficking which aired on Minneapolis Kare 11-news on October 25, 2018 (https://www.kare11.com/article/news/investigations/kare-11-investigates-sex-trafficking-and-a-failure-to-fine/89607713443).

The Hildegard House community, with the help of good friends, maintained 4 gardens in Duluth this summer. The Damiano Center gave us the use of their raised beds and trellised hill so that we could grow food with and for the women at Alicia’s Place, a permanent supportive housing program for single vulnerable women located next door to the Damiano Center. We also grew food at the Benedictine Monastery garden, a Duluth Community Garden site, and at the Hildegard House garden. Much of the food grown in these locations was shared with the water protectors from Fond du Lac. We are very aware that without water, we would not have this food to eat. Water is life.

Hildegard House has also been graced with being able to provide short term hospitality to visitors and guests who travel through this area working on a variety of social justice issues. Hildegard House continues to stand with, pray with, protect with, and be in solidarity with all our Anishinaabe friends along with allies and accomplices who have committed themselves to protecting our sacred water and environment. As our immediate region faces exploitation and danger by the oil and mining industries, we strengthen our resolve to resist and protect through prayer and deepening of community for the common good.
Catholic Worker Manifesto

In solidarity with the water protectors

Hildegard House Schedule of Events

Book Study—1st Sunday of the month, 2-3:30PM
Baking and Crafts—2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8PM
Potluck Dinner—4th Monday of the month, 6-8PM
Morning Prayer—Monday through Friday, 7AM

If there is interest in any of these events, please call Hildegard House at 218 722-2231 for details and locations
Taysha Martineau, a water protector and single mom, born and raised and currently living on Fond du Lac Reservation fought with Carlton County social services for 17 months and 2 days to get her 3 children back into her custody. Now she believes they are at risk of being kidnapped, trafficked, disappeared, or worse yet, murdered.

4 months ago the MN Public Utilities Commission granted a certificate of need and route permit to Enbridge Energy, a Canadian company that ships toxic tarsands oil through No. America, for their expanded Line 3 oil pipeline project. This pipeline will go through miles of Ojibwe treaty territory, wild rice lakes, wetlands, and a short portion will go through Fond du Lac Reservation. If line 3 is built, man camps will house many temporary male laborers in trailer camps or at local hotels. Many of these laborers will not be from the area and more still will have shady backgrounds and criminal records.

Exhaustive studies have shown that where there are man camps, there is a massive increase in sex and drug trafficking. Statistics show that 1 in 3 children living on reservations that has a man camp in close proximity will go missing. “I didn't fight the county for custody for 17 months to lose one of them to a sex trafficker. Which one of my 3 children should I be prepared to lose?”, asks Martineau.

Laws aren't made to protect the Indigenous people who are victimized by these traffickers. There is a big gap in the ability of tribal law enforcement to investigate or charge non-Indigenous perpetrators. Similarly, state law enforcement is restricted on their ability to investigate Indigenous tribal members. So victim and perpetrator are lost in this gaping legal hole. Last month, Hildegard House Catholic Worker page posted, Mic Dispatch: Episode 10: Missing Indigenous Women and Christian Cowan, Facebook Watch. This 15 minute segment gives an excellent breakdown of the crisis that Indigenous women face across No. America and if you, our reader, are interested in understanding this legal gap better, this video explains it well.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA was founded in July 2015. Their mission statement from their website mmiwusa.org reads as follows;

“MMIWUSA works every single day to get our missing native women home to their families. Over time we have more developed ways to help the families of these women navigate the multiple jurisdiction of law enforcement in Indian Country. We help them help them find resources to help with their day to day needs that are impacted by their missing or murdered loved one. We give them hands on support and guidance and if we don't have the answers, we get the answers so that these families do not feel abandoned and alone in this struggle like so many have before them. We also have events and speak at functions to create awareness outside the native community and create allies that fight with us as they are horrified to hear what has been going on. It is our dream to have Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA outreaches on every federal reservation across this country to help all those who have been abandoned by other institutions. If you threaten our existence, then expect our resistance. We fight until we gain justice for all of these sisters. We fight like Hatchet Women. We are MMIWUSA”.

Hildegard House attends an annual May Day Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) commemoration in Duluth MN. This Indigenous-led event remembers, honors and offers prayers to all of the Indigenous women, known and unknown, who have gone missing. And we offer our prayers and flowers to Lake Superior because we know she has absorbed the pain and horror of women who were sex-trafficked and killed on the international tankers that enter and leave from our Twin Ports towns.

Rene Ann Goodrich, Ojibwe Elder from Bad River Reservation is an educator, advocate, activist and organizer in the Twin Ports area. She is the founder of Native Lives Matter Coalition and spearheads the annual women's memorial march in MN for MMIW.
(cont’d from We Stand)
Rene Ann has been speaking throughout the area and implores us to, “Rise and envision a broader justice movement for protecting our sacred waters to include social and environmental injustice issues, climate, protecting lands, preserving lives, addressing historical and systematic racism, inequalities and justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women.” Rene Ann says, “We are working to build a broader movement that is inclusive of multiple diverse organizations and groups with common issues of social and environmental injustice and protecting our sacred waters”. She further asks, “Please include Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in your prayers, in the work you do, in your organizations mission and support grassroots activist work to help continue building MMIW movement and annual marches.”
WE CAN’T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

In keeping with the Catholic Worker tradition of opening up ways in which many people can participate in the life of Hildegard House, we asked for 50 people to pledge $10 per month for one year. Thanks to a great response, we have made it through 4 years with ample electricity, heat, water, phone communication, house insurance and property taxes. That’s where the money goes and that’s why those pledges play a vital role in the life of Hildegard House. We are not a tax exempt organization because we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience, without need for governmental approval, regulation or reward. Your investment is leading to a much greater return, which is the breathing of life back into the spirit of all who walk through our doors. Please can we do it another year? Thank you to all those who have consistently made good on your pledges and if you haven’t made a pledge yet, we’d love to have you join in. Pledges can be made in monthly, quarterly, bi-annual or a one time payment.

Contact: hildegardhouseduluthcw@gmail.com. Follow us on Facebook: Hildegard House Catholic Worker. If you would like to be on our mailing list to receive our newsletters or notification of events, please email or send us your postal address

Who are we: The Catholic Worker community, Laura Hoelter, Treasure Jenkins, Greg and Michele Obed, Judy Sausen, Mary Kay Thornton, Sr. Linda Wiggins.

Hildegard House
617 N. 8th Ave. E.
Duluth MN 55805