Hildegard House Catholic Worker: Where We Stand
By: Michele Naar-Obed

In a column written in 1956 by co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day says, “We need to change the system. We need to overthrow, not the government, as the authorities are always accusing the Communists of conspiring to teach us to do, but the rotten, decadent, putrid, industrial capitalist system which breeds such suffering in the whit-ed sepulcher of New York”:

These words may seem harsh especially for those who have been brought up to speak nicely and politely. They may be especially hard for those who are taught not to challenge authority. Those words are also quite difficult to find a way to put into practice while struggling to live up to one of our most valued principles of nonviolence.

But struggle we must as our very existence depends on it. Since our last newsletter (Fall 2017, vol. 1, no. 8), the Hildegard House has taken an active stand against exploitation by fossil fuel industries for corporate greed and profit. Let me stop here for a moment as I try to address some questions this might be raising.

What does this have to do with Catholic Worker houses of hospitality? Do we still live with the marginalized and the exploited? Yes we do. Our house still functions as a resource for women who have experienced sexual exploitation. The Hildegard House Catholic Worker community members serve the Phoenix Rising group which is run by women who have survived the horrors of sexual exploitation. The 2 live-in volunteers, survivors themselves, keep Phoenix Rising going, and manage peer support groups and activities for the healing and empowerment of the women who attend them. And they do this in a warm, welcoming setting surrounded by a community that strives to provide emotional and spiritual well-being.

What does the fossil fuel industry have to do with Hildegard House hospitality? In our 4 years of listening to those that have experienced human trafficking and sexual exploitation, we have heard over and over again that the oil industry routinely sets up man camps to house cheap, temporary laborers who are almost exclusively men. Many of the laborers have criminal histories involving sexual abuse. Extensive studies have shown that where there are man camps, there is a marked increase in human sex trafficking and drug trafficking. But we have done more than just read about this kind of activity. We have listened to the stories from the women survivors and from their family members. They have names and faces and they are our sisters. We know there has been a disproportionate number of Native women and girls taken from the Minnesota region and sold in the man camps of the Bakken oil fields in N. Dakota.

While providing hospitality to the women of the Phoenix Rising group, Hildegard House commits itself to resist in good faith, a pipeline project right in our own backyard which is a threat to our water, our Mother Earth and is a threat to the Ojibwe Nation. A leak or spill would amount to cultural genocide since the pipeline route goes directly through their wild rice lakes and sources of food and medicine.

We stand with the Ojibwe Nation, environmental groups, lawyers, healthcare workers and water protectors and will continue speaking out at public hearings, city council meetings legislation hearings, and if necessary we will stand in support of and in solidarity with the water protectors on the front lines to defend the dignity of life and the common good.

We hope that our Hildegard House supporters will trust that we act out of prayer, community, faith and nonviolence. We ask you to pray for us and for our fractured world that God may forgive us for the harm we have done and for the Spirit to guide us in ways to make things right.
The following interview is with Rachel Gusman, a survivor of 25 years of human sex-trafficking and exploitation experiences. Rachel is a mom, a professional hair stylist, a volunteer advocate for other survivors of sex-trafficking, and a live-in volunteer at Hildegard House where she manages peer support groups and activities under the Phoenix Rising Program. Rachel currently sits on the advisory board of the MN Safe Harbor For All Act.

Michele: Can you tell us how you got involved with the anti-trafficking support system in Duluth?

Rachel: After leaving prison, I entered the Bethel Halfway House in Duluth MN where I had a 60 day stay. I went to SOAR Career Solutions and spoke with a counselor and set up a list of goals which included finding a trafficking victims support group, finding employment and finding housing. Within the first month, I was active in Celebrate Recovery meetings and found a sponsor. I found employment in a hair salon. An anti-trafficking advocate through the Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault (PAVSA), got me connected to Hildegard House Catholic Worker for housing.

I eventually got my own apartment and was able to regain custody of my youngest daughter. I continued to stay close to Hildegard House and was also a volunteer advocate at PAVSA for survivors of trafficking. In 2015, I was part of an “End Sex-Trafficking Now” panel and I participated in multiple training programs through PAVSA. In 2017, I was nominated to sit on the advisory board for the Safe Harbor For All Act.

I moved back to Hildegard House with 2 of my daughters to run the Phoenix Rising Program at the house.

Michele: Can you tell us a little about the Safe Harbor For All Act.

Rachel: MN is the fifth state to pass the Safe Harbor for Youth Act in which youth under 18 years old who are involved with trading or selling sex cannot be arrested or charged for prostitution. Additionally, a coordinated system of supportive services and housing has been set up for the youth. In 2017, MN received a federal grant to set up an advisory board to expand this to include adults.

Michele: What effect would decriminalizing adult victims of sexual exploitation have?

Rachel: The most obvious is no longer having a criminal record which is a very big barrier for obtaining housing and employment.

Michele: What are the biggest needs a person has when trying leave the life of sexual exploitation?

Rachel: Supportive housing, mental health care, peer support, recovery program, and employment in that order.

Michele: How would you describe supportive housing?

Rachel: Small, non-institutional housing where maybe 4 or 5 women can have their own small living space, share kitchen and bathroom facilities where they can set up and attain goals that are safe and realistic and are supported by a nurturing community of survivors and friends. It would be modeled after a catholic worker house but not necessarily be under the Catholic Worker Movement umbrella.

Rachel is recognized as a survivor and advocate at the PAVSA dinner. Feb., 2018
Michele: Can you tell us about Phoenix Rising and how it differs from PAVSA?

Rachel: Phoenix Rising is run by, for and with other survivors. Our peer support groups are by and for survivors only. We have no institutionalized interference. We are 100% peer support. Additionally, we have many different activity events which are open to our friends and supporters like the Hildegard House catholic workers. We have had craft events, baking events and we have baked for the youth that have experienced trafficking who live in Sol House. If we had small, transitional-like housing options in the area of Hildegard House, we could stay connected through the Phoenix Rising Program. That would take care of 2 of the 4 major support needs for survivors, ie, housing and peer support.

Michele: Are there any needs that Phoenix Rising has that a supportive community can help with?

Rachel: If there is anyone out there that has knowledge of grant writing, I would greatly appreciate their help. There are grants that I am eligible for as a survivor and I don’t need to to be a registered nonprofit organization. I have no experience with grant writing. We need a once-per-month meal angel that would bring a meal for 10 women who attend the peer support group. We need gift bag donations such as special toiletries like bubble bath, bath soaps, body wash and lotions, journals, special pens, or other small items which are given to new group members (see page 7).

Michele: How important is spirituality or faith and being surrounded by a faith-based community?

Rachel: I have never met anyone that has had to come out and stayed out of the brokenness of experiencing this kind of exploitation without having a deep faith. We need to believe and act with faith that we live for a greater purpose than just ourselves that is part of a Divine plan in which we all have a part. The ultimate goal is to learn how to love each other and work for the common good.

Synopsis:
The Catholic Worker Movement began in 1933 and was founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. There are over 200 catholic worker houses in the US and many have been operating for over 30 years. We have many good, wise elders with lots of wisdom. This piece of wisdom has been handed down over the generations: “Beware believing you can solve all the problems of your guests and the temptation to get big or become an "organization." Dorothy believed in staying small and non incorporated”. Hildegard House continues to take small steps. However we have faith that our work will be amplified by the power of the Spirit. We know we are up against large powers and principalities. We are up against an empire that is fueled by exploitation. We realize that no matter how many housing units, social service programs or creative government policies there are, they will come to nothing unless they are grounded in faith and profound spiritual laws and principles. All spiritual traditions that teach us how to live, not for oneself, but for the common good of all creation are necessary or all our work will be empty.

Cupcakes and bracelets prepared for the youth at Sol House-Valentine's Day, 2018
Backpage.com is Finally Shut Down
By: MaryKay Thornton

The topic of discussion at the October 2017 Clarification of Thought at Hildegard House focused on the national organization, World Without Exploitation, which works to end trafficking and sexual exploitation through legislation. We viewed the trailer of the documentary, “I Am Jane Doe” which showed their role in starting a Senate investigation of Backpage.com. (“I Am Jane Doe” is an intense documentary that follows real cases of American girls sold into the child sex trade through online ads. The documentary can be seen in its entirety on Netflix.)

It was so gratifying to learn that in April 2018 all their efforts along with the relentless demands of survivors, their families, countless lawyers, organizations and the federal government, brought an end to Backpage. The CEO of Backpage, and others, were indicted by a grand jury. The site, along with affiliated websites from all over the world and their assets were seized and Backpage.com was shut down. Backpage.com was a very lucrative worldwide online “brothel” where traffickers frequently advertised and sold underage children into the sex industry.

Horrific things happened to these children. Often they were kept prisoner, brutally abused and sometimes murdered. Backpage.com would assist advertisers in wording their copy, removing terms and pictures indicative of child prostitution so they didn’t overtly declare that sex was for sale. It is said that the company brought in as much as a half-billion dollars since it began in 2004.

Because of the determination and persistence of so many people as shown in the film “I Am Jane Doe,” Backpage.com is finally shut down. “If one case can change the world, it’s this case” said Maggy Kreel, former assistant attorney general for California.

In the meantime, the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA) were signed into law. These laws will weaken online free speech protections and make it easier to prosecute website operators in the future. It also enables victims and states attorneys general to file lawsuits against such sites.

Speaking of Clarification of Thought

Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement envisioned a 3-point program for the movement. One point is Clarification of Thought through roundtable discussions. For the past 2 years, Hildegard House has sponsored monthly roundtable discussion on a wide variety of topics. We posted day and time and topic in our newsletter, on our facebook page and through postcards. We thank everyone who has attended over these 2 years for your contribution of ideas and insights, for the building of the beloved community rests on our relationships with one another.

The Hildegard House community would like some feedback from you, our supporters and readers. Should we continue hosting COT? Are weekend days or weekday evenings better? For our local folks, is it best to send out postcard reminders? Should we continue to post on facebook? Are there topics you would like to have for discussion?

Clarification of Thought for fall 2018 and spring 2019 is an open page right now. We have left day, time and topic open while we await your feedback. Please contact us by phone, email, facebook or snail mail. Your input is important to us.

“We need roundtable discussions to keep trained minds from becoming academic.
We need roundtable discussions to keep untrained minds from becoming superficial.
We need roundtable discussions to learn from scholars how things would be if they were as they should be.
We need roundtable discussions to learn from scholars how a path could be made to things as they are to things as they should be.” (Peter Maurin)
In September, 2016, the Hildegard House community and supporters began the annual Lantern Launch. We set candle-lit lanterns onto Lake Superior Harbor (all bio-degradable) and sent this message to the community: **To all those who are suffering silently in human sex-trafficking, we the people who have been there, would like to tell you that there is life after sex-trafficking. We know how it feels to be stuck in that lifestyle. Despite all the obstacles, we also know it’s possible to leave that life behind. We know it is possible to escape and heal from our addictions and trauma. So let’s start imagining a life without trafficking and negativity because it is possible. If you believe in yourself and your dreams with a motivating passion. We hope one day you will believe in your capabilities and self-worth because once you do, anything is possible.**

Hildegard House and Phoenix Rising invites you to our 3rd annual Lantern Launch. You can participate by sponsoring the lighting of a lantern for $20. Attend the ceremony. If you can’t attend, we will light and float your lantern for you. **Send a check to Hildegard House** and indicate for lantern launch in the memo.

All proceeds go to the Hildegard House Catholic Worker to fund the Phoenix Rising day hospitality and services.

**Saturday, September 8, 2018 7:30PM**

*Harbor Drive and 5th Ave W. At the end of the lakewalk directly behind the Aquarium*

*Call Hildegard House at 218 722-2231 for more details*
The Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat and Beyond
By Greg Boertje-Obed

“A good shepherd lays down one's life for the sheep. Hired workers, who are not shepherds and whose sheep are not their own, see a wolf coming and leave the sheep and run away, and the wolf catches them and scatters them. This is because they work for pay and have no concern for the sheep.” (John 10:11-13)

This quote suggests a critical difference between those who are willing to lay down their lives and those who work for pay. The Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance retreat was a modest example of laying down of lives to oppose the coming of a danger which threatens Mother Earth and Sacred Water.

An estimated 60 catholic workers and friends from 9 different states as far east as Ohio and south as Arizona participated in this year’s faith and resistance retreat held in Duluth MN. Our area is faced with an expanded fossil fuel project by Canadian based, Enbridge Energy Partners which is intent on shipping tar sands oil from Canada into a Wisconsin refinery. The current portion of the Line 3 pipeline is corroded and outdated, so instead of shutting it down and removing the pipe, they want to expand the line with wider pipe along a new route. Their expansion project route goes through ceded territory in which the Ojibwe Nation have treaty rights to hunt, gather, and defend that land. An inevitable leak or oil spill will amount to cultural genocide, and Enbridge has a dismal track record of spills and safety violations.

Over the weekend, retreatants heard from local Ojibwe Spiritual leaders, a Tribal lawyer, Fond-Du-Lac Reservation members, and members of water protector camps. We were led through a beautiful, sacred water ceremony where the living water healed each of us and we, in turn, promised to protect and defend her. We visited one of the sugar bush camps on the Fond-Du-Lac Reservation and helped to begin to construct a lodge for elders.

On Monday, April 9, we traveled to one of the staging areas where Enbridge is storing pipes for their new route illegally. They fraudulently applied for the permits and brought in $300 million worth of pipe. The yards are also located on Treaty land and are therefore trespassing on Ojibwe territory.

27 people entered the yard and hung banners along the fence, set up a table for all the sacred objects that had been collected over these past months, and placed glass jars filled with water and prayers inside the stacked pipes. Throughout the day, there were reports from the local police that we would be arrested for trespass in groups of 2-4, but that did not materialize. As time went on, some people left in groups, but we were asked by a Native elder to “hold the space” until others could arrive. Then, we were joined by other water protectors. Enbridge security people responded by bringing in a port-a-potty, setting up flood lights and driving trucks around the yard. Since we were not prepared for camping thru the cold night, we left about 9 pm.

The action was not intended to be a long term encampment or occupation. We came to bring our prayers and Spirit into the yard. We were willing to risk arrest in order to do that.

Subsequent to the retreat, two events occurred which relate to the importance of resisting the expansion of Enbridge’s oil pipelines. In Michigan, Enbridge was fined $1.8 million for not carrying out timely and thorough inspections on its pipelines as required under a 2016 agreement. And explosions at the Husky oil refinery in Superior, across a river from Duluth, injured workers and spewed toxic clouds of chemicals which have poisoned the land, water, plants, wildlife, and humans.

Currently we await the decision of the Public Utilities Commission concerning whether or not they will grant a permit for Enbridge’s preferred route. Their decision is expected in June, and there may be a need for further laying down of our lives to defend against threats to the water, land, and life. The Hildegard House community is grateful to be part of this Indigenous-led movement, weaving our prayers, hopes, and dreams together for a better world for all Creation.
Phoenix Rising needs

**One Saturday a month meal angel**—The Phoenix Rising peer-support group meets Saturday evenings and they start by sharing a meal together. The meal and support group are for survivors only. They are requesting the help of a meal angel for one meal each month for 10 women. Coordinate with Judy Johson.

**Gift bag items**—New member attending the Phoenix Rising support groups are greeted with gift bags which consist of a few special toiletries such as body washes, lotions, bubble bath, bath oil beads, etc. and other small items. Also SuperOne gift cards are appreciated.

**Advisor for grant writing**—Anyone out there with grant writing experience that could advise Phoenix Rising coordinator Rachel Gusman? Rachel has access to grant money, she is loaded with ideas but has no experience writing grants. Please contact her if you can help.

To contact Judy Johnson or Rachel Gusman, please call the Hildegard House at 218-722-2231.

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**Hildegard House: Views of Catholic Worker and volunteer Mary Kay Thornton**

By: Treasure Jenkins

After a wonderful career as an elementary school teacher, I was able to retire in 2003. For a while, I searched to find meaningful ways to spend my time and eventually I decided to volunteer weekly at the Olive Branch. Spending time at the house was rewarding and before I knew it, the first year of volunteering had turned into 10 years.

As I became immersed in the activities at Olive Branch, exposure to the values and principles unfolded naturally. Often, I would read the newsletters that came in from Catholic Worker houses around the country. I read a number of books written by and about Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, founders of the movement. So when I was invited to join a group of local women who were considering the possibility of opening another Catholic Worker house, I was eager to work with them.

The discernment process began in 2013 and we opened the house one year later. I was totally engaged in the excitement and work involved in searching for a house, which was quickly followed by the cleaning, painting and preparation for guests. As women arrived, it was my pleasure to be there as a welcoming face.

During these past few years at the Hildegard House, I have sought to expand my understanding about trafficking. I have read books, watched various DVDs, and attended lectures, panel discussions and presentations. Most importantly I have listened to numerous heartbreaking stories of survivors.

I have learned that one crucial part of successful recovery and healing is the love, support and understanding of people that can be trusted. The Hildegard House has provided that and much more through friendships with other women. It has been a place where survivors can come and not be judged. We have always tried to provide hospitality that was welcoming and compassionate. I have come to have a deep respect and admiration for the women as I’ve watched many of them show such tremendous inner strength in their determination to be survivors and not victims.

The Hildegard House is one part of a vital network trying to respond to the needs of women who have been entangled in this horrific world of sex trafficking. In our first years, I volunteered to be a companion in whatever tasks that needed to be completed around the house and for the guests. I “hung out” with them, joined them in watching movies, doing crafts, cooking, spa nights, sometimes driving them to appointments and I was simply there as a good listener. Currently, I am there for various gatherings, such as the monthly baking night and I attend the monthly Clarification of Thought sessions. I can say without hesitation that since I have become a part of this group of amazing women, my life has been absolutely enriched.
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. Telephone: 218 722-2231. 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.

Phoenix Rising live-in volunteers: Rachel Gusman, Judy Johnson