Dear Friends,

News from Maloy
by Betsy Keenan

I wrote for *The Sower* in November about the last of growing season of 2016. Now the spring of 2017 is about to start; seeds are ordered, garden plan made, some spinach wintered over, perennial onions and chives are greening up. I dug some fresh horseradish to grind this week. Onions and leeks and celery are growing under lights inside, but outdoors it feels like winter today.

But most of the winter is past. We had a Christmas caroling party during the octave of Christmas as usual. In January Brian went to Washington D.C. for Witness against Torture's days of fast and witness calling for shutting down the Guantanamo prison.

Then we hosted a Craft retreat (see page 2) and as soon as we finished that, the roof project, completing the reroofing of the house with metal was in progress. With fairly mild weather (for January!) it was completed in 10 days. After talking about it for years this was very startling! Thanks to Leroy for fitting us into his schedule and all who have contributed through the years to make this possible.

This past week it weathered its first severe storm of the season. Great to not spend the next day picking up pieces of shingles!

In February, thanks to Hilary and Colyn Burbank, Brian and I were able to travel together to Platteville Wisconsin, where we gathered with other Catholic Worker Farmers and gardeners to discuss and share and celebrate Peter Maurin's vision while Colyn and Hilary took care of the house, goats and chickens. There were many young people with interest and enthusiasm for this "back to the land" part of Peter Maurin's plan for the Catholic Worker-perhaps climate change and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* have stimulated new attention to ecological conversion. Brian provided a jumping off point (see pages 4-6) for the many round table discussions and conversations about what we need to be doing and how to accomplish it.

Topics offered by folks from various CW Farms included my offering on "Craft, Skill and Cottage industry", "Permaculture De-mystified" by Bob Waldrop of Oscar Romero House in Oklahoma City, "Cows can save the planet" by Mike Miles of Anathoth Farm in Luck WI "Toward Fossil Free Living", by Regina Rust of the White Rose CWF, Seed Saving with Alice McGary of The Mustard

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Craft Retreat 2017

By Betsy Keenan

In January, over the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, we gathered for a craft retreat at Strangers and Guests in Maloy. Staying in Maloy with Brian and myself were Patti McKee from Des Moines, Alice McGary from the Mustard Seed Farm near Ames, Kyla Wargel from Evansville, Indiana and Chrissy Kirschoffer and Jason Eppinger both from St. Louis Missouri. Veronica Mecko, Sophie Ryan and Sandy Maxa joined us on Saturday.

One focus was weaving on our floor looms, since we have that resource here. We went through the stages of preparing/recycling clothing and household textiles (curtains, sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths blankets and remnants from sewing projects) into long rag strips and then using that as weft for throw rugs. We set up my other loom to weave gingham kitchen towels.

Sandy Maxa demonstrated and instructed us in using natural (willow bark and lemongrass) or recycled (plastic bags and newspaper) materials to make our own twine for use in other projects. Patti brought materials and techniques for making our own cards and envelopes, including some 3-D styles with origami. Brian demonstrated and advised in the basement while dozens of dipped candles were produced.

The dance and potluck we had planned was cancelled due to icy road conditions on Sunday, although we were able to take a carload of folks down to Clyde, Missouri for Mass with the Benedictine Sisters there on Sunday morning. Through the whole weekend we were sharing cooking, table fellowship and cleaning to keep the space usable. We cleared out the dining room Saturday night after supper for a bit of dancing, when it was clear the threatened storm would hit us Sunday afternoon.

A big thank you to all who made the event possible. This seemed to me about a perfect size for this kind of event in our space. For the future we will perhaps aim for that, and as it is less draining, have a second weekend, also smaller with different focus. In past retreats we have had soap making, papermaking, wood carving, insulated window coverings, baskets of fabric, newspaper and pine needles and old calendars and gourds. There are still many possibilities! I hope the future holds more Catholic Worker Craft Retreats, and new skill sharing.
Dear Friends,

Betsy’s letter continued from page 1

Seed Farm in Ames Iowa, Coping with Climate Instability by Johanna Hoyt of St. Francis Farm in Lacona, NY and Market Farming by Sara and Paul Freid from the Jager-statter CW Farm in Lake City, MN.

Before and after the trip to Platteville, we've dealt with more car troubles and expenses. On our wish list (along with a peaceful, border-free world, flourishing the way God intended) include volunteers/interns and a dependable car. We have been able to maintain this Catholic Worker outpost in "far-off" Maloy with help and co-operation from many folks near and far through our 30 years here, but right now we have room for several more workers as soon as it starts warming up.

Mark Kinney is a friend from Omaha who shows up on short notice, when he is able, to breathe fresh country air, always ready to lend a hand with some project. Recently he spent a day and a half, while between jobs. Several times he has helped out with transportation here and there, but also with gardening needs and always contributing some goodies, and stories. Besides helping diagnose the car's ailment and getting Brian back home after taking it to the mechanic, on his last trip Mark tinkered around to get my plant starting light working. Mark likes to join us for Bible studies on Tuesday morning, when his schedule allows.

Would you or someone you know be ready for a "rural plunge" this summer? Gardening, dairy goats, weaving, a wide ranging Catholic Worker library, prayer and Scripture study, herb craft, household cleaning and maintenance, cooking and food preservation: there are multitudes of things to learn and practice here. We need help.

Last Fall in The Sower, Hilary Burbank wrote, "I feel as though my time at the farm and the inspiration I have gathered from the ecologically focused spirit of Catholic Worker farms has changed the way I walk." Hilary took the time out of her busy life to come to Maloy a long weekend of every month and did a great deal of helpful work here. She didn't work on weaving, but did learn new skills in gardening, milking the goats, cheese making and canning pickles. She also felt she had time for quiet reading, meditation and good conversations.

Guests are welcome, but it is co-workers we are most seeking. If you can come-for a week, a month, a season-special work day or weekend with a group of friends with a project in mind, if you would like to help out at Strangers and Guests and share a slice or a soup pot full of this experience, let us know and we can plan it.

As I sit at the keyboard today, our neighbor Don Ray and old friend Chas Abarr are busy with chainsaw and truck "weeding" some black walnut trees that have been adversely impacting our vegetable gardens. This is a job I could see needed doing, but too big for me! Brian is on his way home from a visit to our Afghan Peace volunteer friends in Kabul.

Our thanks as always to those who support us spiritually, socially and materially. With your help we were able to pay cash for our new roof and car repairs, even if these expenses drained our reserves.

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's Handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

Pope Francis Laudati Si' #217
Peter Maurin’s Vision for the Catholic Worker
an Idea Whose Time has Come

Keynote Address, Fourth Biennial National Catholic Worker Farm Gathering
Platteville, Wisconsin, February 18, 2017

by Brian Terrell

When I met Dorothy Day after arriving in New York City in 1975, I was 19 years old and she was 78 and the only thing that impressed her about me was that I had read Bread and Wine, a novel by Ignazio Silone published in 1936, that she cherished and often cited. The book’s protagonist is a leader in the Italian Communist party who secretly returns from exile to the village where he was born with the intention of organizing the rural masses to revolt against Fascism. He barely makes it home before falling ill and his fevered musings grasp part of the dilemma of the modern person:

“If only I could wake up tomorrow morning at dawn, put a stick to my donkey, and go the vineyard, Don Paolo said to himself. If I could go to sleep, and wake up, not only with healthy lungs, but with a normal brain, free of all intellectual abstractions. If I could only go back to a real, ordinary life. If I could dig, plow, sow, reap, earn my living, talk to the other men on Sundays, read and study; fulfill the law that says, ‘In the sweat of thy face thou shalt earn thy bread.’ On further reflection Don Paolo decided that the root of his trouble lay in his infraction of that law—in the irregular life he had been living, in cafes, libraries, and hotels, in having rudely broken the chain that for centuries had bound his ancestors to the soil. He was an outlaw, not because he contravened the arbitrary laws of the party in power, but because of his infringement of that more ancient law, ‘In the sweat of thy face thou shalt earn thy bread.’ He had ceased to be a peasant, and he had not become a townsman. It would never be possible for him to return to the soil. Still less would it be possible for him ever to forget it.”

Today it seems obvious that a return to the land, to a proper relationship with creation and to meaningful, productive work is integral to the aims of the Catholic Worker movement. For much of its history, however, since its beginning in 1933, this aspect of its founder’s original intentions was relegated to the margins of an already marginal movement.

For the next eleven years after meeting Dorothy, I lived in Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality in New York and then Davenport, Iowa, sharing meals and giving shelter to those in need. Peter Maurin’s visions of “agronomic universities” and return to a village based craft economy were not taken too seriously in those days and most of us, I think, would have been just as happy to dump these as slightly embarrassing and quaint anachronisms.

Peter’s “Easy Essays” about Irish monks establishing salons de culture across medieval Europe did not seem relevant to our demanding work of offering hospitality, nor did his suggestion that in following these monks’ example was the answer to global hunger and the threat of nuclear annihilation. We took Dorothy Day at her word that Peter Maurin was her mentor and co-founder of the movement but there was at the time little evidence of his influence in our life and work.

Mel Piehl in his fine historical review of the Catholic Worker movement, Breaking Bread, 1982, even quotes some Catholic Workers of an earlier era who suggested that Peter’s “intellectual genius was clearly exaggerated” and that Peter was uncomfortable in his “feigned role of leadership.” Piehl estimates that Dorothy Day had exaggerated Peter’s role as “co-founder” and that she “promoted the fiction that the Catholic Worker was simply an attempt to realize Peter Maurin’s ‘Idea.’” It was, Piehl said, “strategically useful to her as a woman leading a social movement in the sexually conservative Catholic Church, to be able to point to a male co-founder of the movement.”

For generations of young Americans attracted to Catholic Worker communities, the European peasant Peter Maurin might have appeared as obscure and incomprehensible as the very American radical Dorothy Day was accessible. Daniel Berrigan, in his introduction to Dorothy’s memoir, The Long Loneliness, published in 1981, a year after her death, reflected a common if less than generous perception of Peter and his vision: “They started a newspaper and the rest is history. They started houses of hospitality; that too is history. Peter was forever talking about something he called ‘agronomic universities.’ They started one, on the land; and that is something less than history.”

Dorothy’s announcement in The Catholic Worker in January 1936, “we are going to move out on a farm… and start there a true farming commune,” however, was clearly proclaimed with the expectation that history was being made: “We believe that our words will have more weight, our writings will have more conviction, if we ourselves are engaged in making a better life on the land.” While she assured her readers that “we are not going to abandon the
city,” it is clear that Dorothy’s historic expectation was that the Catholic Worker was going to realize its original vision, that of a rural based “back to the land” movement keeping some presence in the city, “sending out apostles of labor from the farm, to scenes of industrial conflict, to factories and to lodging houses, to live and work with the poor.”

If this and other early experimental farming communes came and went as “something less than history,” as Dan offers, or as the abject failures that others have named them, the concept did continue to limp along somehow for the next decades. Rather than the cutting edge of a revolution as Peter envisioned the agronomic university, however, most Catholic Worker farms were planned and grew, if they did, as dependent branches of urban Catholic Worker houses of hospitality. Most of these few farms were seen even by those who lived and worked at them in an urban context, as auxiliaries, existing to provide cheap food for soup lines, hospitality for the urban poor and places for retreat and recreation for Catholic Workers from the city. Most were rural responses to urban poverty and homelessness with little regard to the poverty of their neighbors. By and by, the “true farming communes” originally proposed gave way to “retreat centers.”

Some few here and there in the most obscure and remote places have always remembered and stood by Peter’s vision. These were often marginalized and misunderstood by the larger Catholic Worker movement as much as by their neighbors and the culture at large. When in 1986, Betsy Keenan and I moved with our children from the Catholic Worker hospitality house in Davenport, Iowa, to Maloy, a town of less than 30 souls just north of Iowa’s border with Missouri, many friends assumed that we had left the Catholic Worker movement. Some challenged us, what need is there for a soup line in so small a town? No soup line? What kind of Catholic Worker house are you? Whose farm are we, we were challenged, meaning what city house owns and controls our farm, assuming that the legitimate existence of any rural entity is bound to its tie to an urban one. About that time our good friend Chuck Trapkus included in his iconic “Catholic Worker Primer” a cartoon of a man in overalls holding a chicken and saying, “We’re Catholic Workers, too, don’t you forget it!”

Over the past 30 years there has been a great shift in understanding and respect for Peter’s vision and what it means. At one of the sporadically convened national Catholic Worker gatherings, I think that this was in 1987, a “round table” discussion of Peter’s agronomic university was attended by a few of us farmers and the most pressing question that surfaced from the few mildly curious others who wandered in was “why bother with a garden when we have more donated old vegetables from the market than we can ever sort out?” Since that time, there has been a resurgence in Peter’s dreams of farming communes in the movement. At more recent gatherings, roundtables on rural issues and Peter Maurin are among the liveliest and best attended and this, the fourth biannual national Catholic Worker gathering is the largest ever.

This resurgence is evidenced not only in the unprecedented plethora of Catholic Worker farms around the country and abroad. It is also shown in the level of discussion given Peter and his ideas in the newspapers of the various houses. Peter’s influence is seen in the growth of urban gardens in the yards and vacant lots around our city houses. Catholic Worker cottage industries, such as carving spoons, repairing bicycles, making soap, all are examples of a growing movement.

In Maloy each winter we host a craft retreat, when up to a dozen Catholic Workers from around the Midwest crowd into our farmhouse to join us and some neighbors to weave, make cheese, carve wood, dip candles, knit, make baskets, cook, eat, pray, dance and sing. We have fun but these sessions were not recreational in the conventional sense nor are we really “on retreat.” These gatherings are the Catholic Worker movement going about some of its most serious business. As it happens, the craft retreat often
gets scheduled just before or after the annual Witness Against Torture event in Washington, DC, an intense time of fasting and action to demand the closing of the prison at Guantanamo and the abolition of torture that I usually attend. In my mind, these two yearly events have melded into one continuum.

This shift of paradigm has come in part, I think, as people who come to Catholic Worker houses are staying longer. While many still come to Worker houses to donate a “gap year” or two of their lives in service to the poor between college and “real life,” from the 1970s on, more and more came and stayed. It has been suggested that some of these moved out to farms looking for a better place to raise kids than an inner city house of hospitality. There may be something to that, but I offer that for many of us, living and working for years with the urban poor made us look deeper into the roots of the world’s problems and see that serving soup, good work that it is, is not enough. Speaking for myself, I needed to live in urban hospitality houses for many years before I could make any sense of Peter’s talk about revolution on the land.

For many of us, too, solidarity work and travel to places exploited by economic and other kinds of colonialism brought us to see that Peter was right when he pointedly insisted that issues of war and peace always are, at the heart, issues of the land and its use. In New York City or Los Angeles as in Jerusalem or Mexico City or San Salvador, the peace and good order of society requires justice on the land. It strikes us, finally, that even the food that we serve on our soup lines that is donated or gleaned from dumpsters depends on slave labor and is grown in ways that cannot be sustained. When the peace for which we yearn and struggle finally comes and our global neighbors will no longer be forced by debt and oppression to clothe and feed us but will use their own labor, land and water to care for themselves, how then will we live?

The crisis of climate change on our threshold, too, makes Peter’s dream of agrarian revolution look less like a medieval utopian fantasy and more like an urgent and rational plan for a new and sustainable social order of the future.

Some criticize such changes in the movement as if they are evidence that we are losing our way. My perspective is that, with some growing pains, the Catholic Worker is rather finding its way now after so many years. “Our houses of hospitality are scarcely the kind of houses that Peter Maurin has envisioned in his plan for a new social order,” Dorothy Day wrote in her column in September 1942. “He recognizes that himself, and thinks in terms of the future to accomplish true centers of Catholic Action and rural centers such as he speaks of.” Perhaps it is true that Peter Maurin’s role as “co-founder” of the Catholic Worker was exaggerated in the past. If so, it might also be true that he is now posthumously growing into that role as the movement matures into the dynamic revolutionary social force it was meant to be.

While I am gratified to see this revival, I must confess that, along with Silone’s Don Paolo, I am still a townsman and after three decades of rural living I am far more at home in the city, “in cafes, libraries, and hotels,” than I am on the farm and in the small town where I live. In recent years as a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, I am spending about half my time on the farm, half on the road, often in cities in America and abroad, sometimes in war zones and in jails and prisons. Some friends assume that my time on the farm is a respite from the stresses of activism, but the opposite is true. I love my home but often do not feel at rest there- the farm is the place where I feel most challenged and humbled and the city is where I go to escape.

Betsy has become an accomplished weaver, goatherd and gardener, but the skills and attitudes needed to be a farmer continue to elude and frustrate me. Going to jail comes easier for me than fixing a fence or attending a church pot luck. I can make many varieties of cheeses from the milk of our goats, but find more satisfaction writing a press release or organizing a protest. A shopping trip to the county seat can be more daunting to me than traveling alone to Seoul or Kabul. By education, aptitude and temperament, I am not able to return to the soil but neither can I forget it.

We are gathered here, Catholic Worker farmers and friends, at a time of extraordinary uncertainty and peril. It is unclear if the damage our wars and industrialized lifestyles are inflicting on the planet can be reversed at this late date. Never have so many people been displaced and the danger of nuclear war is more imminent now than ever before in the lifetimes of most of us here. If previous generations of Catholic Worker farms have measured in the end as “somewhat less than history,” our efforts today must be of historic proportions, God help us, if we are to contribute to the continuation of life on earth.
Summer Solstice, Feast of St John the Baptist, June 24

Celebrate the longest day of the year with us and resist the darkness of the times we live in.

Come celebrate our 23nd annual summer solstice and feast of St John Baptist celebration in the remote and bucolic town of Maloy, Iowa, on Saturday, June 24.

Festivities begin about 4 pm in the Maloy City Park at the center of town. At about 6 we will have a pot luck supper in the park, featuring the first harvests from our gardens and fields. After supper there will be folk dancing in the park until dusk, followed by a bonfire in our orchard, more food and drink and music. Bring friends, bring some food or drink to share if you wish (there is always enough) musical instruments, lawn chairs. We have limited refrigeration so remember coolers and ice. We have room to tent if you want to stay the night, room to sleep on our floor and we can try to arrange for a bed for anyone who needs one. Children welcome, of course.

Please let us know if you're coming, especially if you are planning on staying the night. Come early and we will put you to work!

Fifty Years Ago:
From “Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam”
Riverside Church, New York City, April 4, 1967

“As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men (in the ghettos of the North over the last three years) I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked, and rightly so, ‘What about Vietnam?’ They asked if our own nation wasn’t using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
from the Catholic Worker's Aims and Means:

We advocate:

A "green revolution," so that it is possible to rediscover the proper meaning of our labor and/or true bonds with the land; a distributist communitarianism, self-sufficient through farming, crafting and appropriate technology; a radically new society where people will rely on the fruits of their own toil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts.

Manual Labor, in a society that rejects it as undignified and inferior. "Besides inducing cooperation, besides overcoming barriers and establishing the spirit of sister and brotherhood (besides just getting things done), manual labor enables us to use our bodies as well as our hands, our minds." (Dorothy Day) The Benedictine motto Ora et Labora reminds us that the work of human hands is a gift for the edification of the world and the glory of God.

Voluntary poverty. "The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." (Dorothy Day) By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's "preferential option for the poor."