



Happy New Year!

We'd like to begin by wishing you all a Happy New Year, and thanking you for your continued thoughts and support during the holidays and amid this pandemic. We hope everyone is taking this time to understand a new side of themselves and their communities. Because of everyone's support, we have been able to continue to provide showers, rental assistance, medical bill assistance, food, blankets, clothing and hygiene to those experiencing homelessness. Your thoughtfulness has kept us pushing thus far as the structure in our house has been readjusting to new and former staff leaving and coming. We are looking forward to the directions of growth this new year will take us, and you as well!



Our house guest during sunset at Sandy Wool Lake

Here Comes the Sun - An Ode to Safe Sleeping

By Camille Manzana

For many of us housed folks, locking our doors before going to bed is perceived as a precaution more often than it is a luxury. Our homeless population is especially vulnerable to all of the crimes we attempt to keep locked out of our homes at night, when the prevalence of violence increases. Because of this, the sunset -- as beautiful as it may be -- works as an indicator for our homeless community to be on high alert for theft, harassment, and violent threats. According to a study done on individuals experiencing homelessness by [Crisis.org.uk](https://crisis.org.uk),

“34% have had things thrown at them

9% have been urinated on

48% have been intimidated or threatened with violence

59% have been verbally abused or harassed”.

These statistics are based on both housed and unhoused instigators.

Individuals experiencing regular “rough sleeping”, or sleeping in the open-aired public, are most likely to experience these distressing circumstances without a proper barrier or kind of shelter. With this in mind, many attempt to stay awake throughout the night, in order to keep themselves and their belongings safe. This often leads to a plethora of mental and physical health deficits - you can develop irregular sleeping habits (due to having to sleep “safely” in the busy day time), skewed perceptions of humanity (as most time awake is spent cynical or skeptical of passersby), and high stress levels. Having chronic stress can lead to high blood pressure, depression, poor judgement, anxiety, heart disease, self-medicating, etc. Additionally, people who are rough sleeping are exposed to constant cold throughout the night, poor air quality, and a lack of personal hygiene - all of which contribute to poorer health. These comorbidities are often not mitigated as health care for the homeless population is difficult to access and potentially puts them in greater debt. These factors establish a perpetual battle between safety and health, when neither should be compromised, and both should flourish.

I have had multiple instances with an individual experiencing rough sleeping in which he has asked for coffee or sweets late at night in order to keep himself awake out of fear of being harassed or stolen from. I've watched him put stress on his mind and body to fight falling asleep at night, when his body's circadian rhythms tell him to do exactly that - sleep. That being said, it's worth being conscious about the daily struggles someone experiencing homelessness encounters,

without judgement, as we pass someone sleeping at 3pm after having a full day of productivity ourselves. That person may finally feel safe enough to sleep, while depending on the protection of the daylight and us as witnesses.

The ability to dehumanize someone experiencing rough sleeping throughout the streets is putting physical and emotional stress on the people in our community, and placing a demand for more safe living circumstances. Although permanent or temporary housing for rough sleepers would be ideal, not enough empty buildings owners have found the motivation nor the resources to be able to provide these safe, comfortable spaces. For someone without a dependable living space, a tent has been shown to contribute safety, warmth, comfort and privacy. For some rough sleepers in the San Jose community, Casa de Clara has been able to provide tents to create a minimal, but slightly effective barrier between them and potential harassment/violence, as well as some harsh weather conditions. However, because of the rapid onset of cold and the size of the homeless population we serve regularly, we have not had enough supplies to distribute for the demand at hand. Because of this, we are asking for donations of tents, blankets, tarps and sleeping bags as the temperature drops and the night time extends. Tents or monetary donations for tents may be sent directly to the house or through our online donation system.

For more information on rough sleeping and its repercussions:

“Health matters: rough sleeping” by [gov.uk](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-rough-sleeping/health-matters-rough-sleeping>

“Nowhere safe to stay: the dangers of sleeping rough” by St. Mungo’s

https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2017/12/Nowhere_safe_to_stay.pdf

“Rates of violence against the homeless are worse than you think” by Megan Wells

<https://www.gov1.com/public-safety/articles/rates-of-violence-against-the-homeless-are-worse-than-you-think-PZ7QgDNA4F2MXDwf/>



New Catholic Worker, Camille, and her pup, Marley



Our newest live-in member doing his rounds at showers



*Former worker, Calia, during one of her last days working Showers to the People at Columbus Park
The guests threw her a goodbye party on her last day - her impact with Casa has been unforgettable*

Human as Human

By Andrew Kotch

I have been honing in on this thought; “Human as Human”. The idea came to my mind after dropping off our mobile shower trailer down the street from our house and walking home. I usually take this time to reflect on my afternoon at Columbus Park where we host our program. That Wednesday in particular I was thinking about the amount of times the guests try to justify their situation to me. Phrases such as “I used to work so I know how to work hard”, “I live in my car not down in the encampments”, “Im clean and sober I don’t take part in drugs or alcohol” are often used when people talk to me or want to help. I thought to myself: why must people try to prove something or try and explain their situation- why can’t they just be valued for who they are right here right now? So often, society sets standards and expectations of people that are then engrained in those individuals. Shower guests feel as though they have to recite who they are in order to be valued and for me to say “yes you can help”. I would like all who try to exonerate themselves to know: Your past nor your present should affect someone’s outlook on you. You are here to help and give yourself to others and that is just enough. We must break down the barriers, the judgement and misconceptions of those around us. As a whole, it is time to start valuing others for who they are, their core being and not the baggage or credentials they bring to the table. One step at a time we can begin to see human as human.



Flowers at showers! Grown to empower!

From Fighting Eviction to Cancelling the Rent

By Sandy Perry, community organizer and friend of Catholic Worker

Thirty to forty million Americans are at risk of pandemic-related eviction as the various state, and local restrictions expire this fall, according to the Aspen Institute. A last-minute moratorium by the Trump administration on September 1 was supposed to postpone the evictions at least temporarily, but a stampede of corporate landlords are filing for evictions in Georgia, Florida, and elsewhere to get them done before tenants can become aware of the moratorium. Renters are already organizing eviction defense actions, including court or home blockades, in New Orleans, Chicago, New York City, and Prince Georges County, Maryland.

However, the moratorium, in any case, expires on December 31. This, at best, only delays the evictions until after Trump either wins or tries to steal the November election. Like every other Trump promise, the eviction moratorium is a lie. It does nothing to cancel or forgive the back rent, which would be necessary to stop evictions from happening. After the election, tenants’ leverage to win rent cancellation or any relief will be sharply reduced, especially if Trump wins or gets away with overturning the election results.

Causes of the Crisis

The COVID-19 eviction wave is revealing fatal flaws that already existed in America’s housing system before the pandemic began... Before the pandemic, there was already an eviction crisis, which has now thrown an additional forty-seven million people out of their jobs and created the looming “eviction cliff”.

This is not a crisis that will go away when COVID-19 is over, even if that takes several years. University of Chicago economist Steven Davis estimated that up to 40 percent of American jobs lost in April and May are likely to be permanently gone and that the number will only increase the longer the pandemic lasts.

Resistance to the eviction wave has taken the form of a fight for rent forgiveness or cancellation. So far, it has been blocked by a bipartisan united front of politicians protecting corporate property rights. The Democratic-dominated California legislature refused to even consider rent cancellation in the face of opposition by the California Apartment Association and Wall Street banks.

HR 6515

The most sweeping proposal has been the Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act, HR 6515, written in consultation with tenant organizations by Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar in April. Omar’s bill would immediately forgive rents and mortgages without requiring repayment for all renters and all homeowners with a mortgage on their primary residence. Property owners and lenders would have the opportunity to apply for reimbursement from the federal government. In return, they would have to agree to not increase rent for five years, follow just cause eviction guidelines, and not discriminate against tenants based on their source of income, immigration status, conviction or arrest record, sexuality, or gender credit score.

The bill would further require Congress to fully fund the program based on need, to prevent it from running out of money like the federal Section 8 program or the pandemic Paycheck Protection Program. But despite favorable polling, HR 6515, like state and local rent cancellation bills, has also so far been blocked by the banks and corporate landlords.

...

Unity

Tenants are happy to take any rent relief they can get, but they have to be vigilant to resist any plan that leaves out the undocumented or discriminates against any other group of renters. The first step to winning the right to housing is to unite the movement. The Trump moratorium is actually a deliberate maneuver on his part to try to drive a wedge between workers struggling for economic justice, on the one hand, and for racial justice on the other. In fact, the two are inseparable. The summer Black Lives Matter uprising struck a massive blow against the historic ruling class tactic to divide workers by isolating and suppressing African Americans and other people of color. The victory was made possible by leaders who understood the deep interrelationship between racial oppression and economic exploitation. But Trump is desperately trying to strike back.

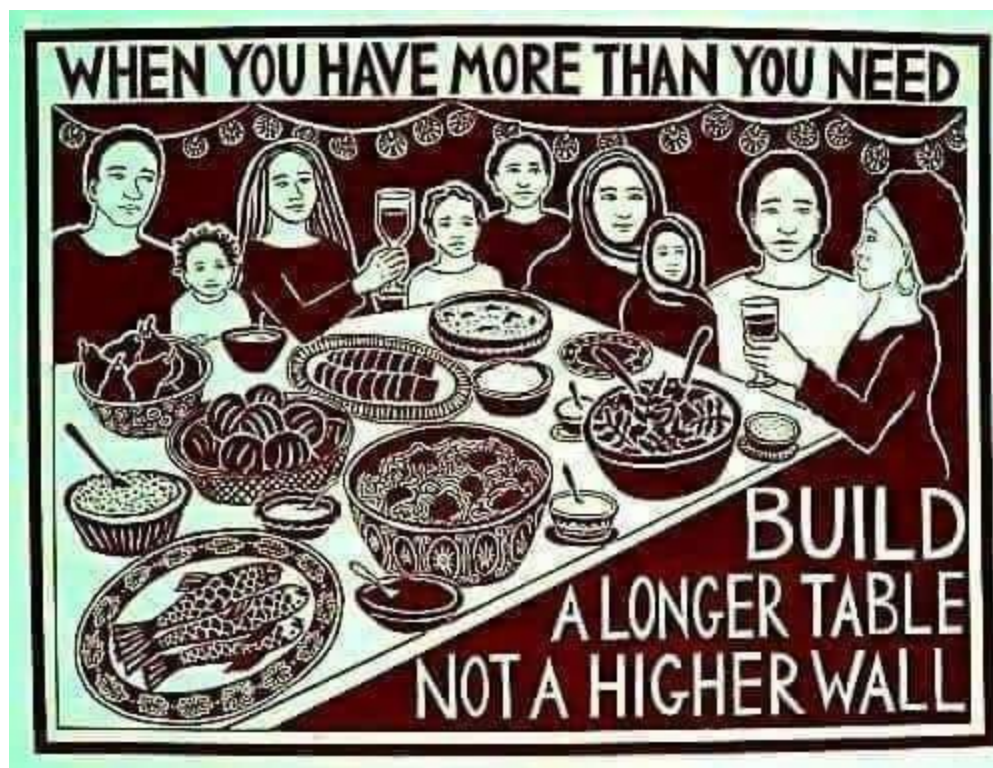
African Americans and Latinos are deeply, disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis generally, and the pandemic eviction wave in particular. Due to historical discrimination, Black and Latino homeownership rates are 44 percent and 49

percent, respectively, while that of whites is 74 percent. This creates a huge wealth gap that makes Blacks and Latinos dramatically more vulnerable to eviction and homelessness than whites. The strategy and tactics of fighting for rent cancellation have to recognize the disparities while at the same time understanding that billionaires exploit all tenants for their benefit. The growth of the new class actually means that more and more white workers are being driven down into an equality of poverty with workers of color.

Significant sections of the renters’ movement actively embraced and participated in the summer’s George Floyd rebellions and fought to unite the two movements. Since the 1960s and before, African American and Latino renters have played a leading role in tenant organizations all across the country, so resisting racial oppression necessarily elevates tenants as well.

“I don’t think we can talk about Black lives mattering without talking about eviction,” said Jenay Manley of KC Tenants in Kansas City, Missouri. “We need to talk about Black lives mattering before the point where we are brutalized or killed by police.”

One of the most important steps toward rent cancellation is to defeat Trump in the 2020 election. We cannot unite, and we cannot move forward unless we clearly repudiate Trump’s overtly racist and divisive tactics. But while we vote against Republicans, we should hold no illusions about Democrats. Defeating Trump will simply take the struggle for housing to the next level. Many Democrats are also allied with banks and corporations and conveniently blame Republican opposition for their own inaction. We can hold Democratic politicians responsible when they betray us and open the door for new leaders and even new parties to represent the battle for the needs of the new class. HR 6515 sponsor Ilhan Omar was not only brutally, racially insulted by Trump, but she was attacked and even “primaried” by a wealthy pro-corporate Democrat while running for re-election. The fact that Omar won, as well as numerous new progressive candidates, is a tribute to the power of voting and the necessity of holding on to what limited democracy we have left in America. Without democracy, neither rent cancellation, nor rent relief, nor any renters rights of any kind will ever happen.



Solutions

Rent forgiveness is not only an immediate, practical solution. It is an example, a precursor of the kind of housing system that modern technology makes possible. If digital printing can lower construction costs to practically nothing, it is time for humanity to find a way to create a system where housing is free. It is time to “decommodify” it, to separate housing and the land it rests on from the speculative corporate market.

“Decommodification” at scale will require more than regulation. It will require a fully cooperative economy. Building a cooperative economy requires a political revolution – one where the working class becomes the government, strips corporations of their private property (including land), and turns it over to the public for public benefit. The banks and corporations rest their case on the Fifth Amendment private property provisions, but when those provisions make it impossible for human beings to live, it is time for the people to throw them off and make new ones.

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House Updates

Since our last newsletter, we have had four catholic workers move out of the house and two move in! Chad, Artie, Calia and Lynn are transitioning into new stages of their lives, taking care of themselves and planning for their futures. One of the newly moved-in workers is Andrew Kotch, who had been with us during 2019-2020 and has come back to Casa- his return has been wonderful during this transition and we’re lucky to have him back. Our other new worker is Camille Manzana, here with us during her year off from Occupational Therapy school in Saint Louis, MO, and with her little pup, Marley!



We are continuing to do weekly showers, alternating between the Tully Library and Columbus Park locations. Food distribution has continued on a smaller scale than before, and door ministry is continuing as usual- providing food, hygiene, clothes, tents, blankets, sleeping bags, and whatever else we may have available.

Our Christmas was spent at the house, eating meals together, watching A Christmas Story, and opening presents by our Christmas tree! Our house guest was incredibly grateful for the thoughtfulness of our donors, and as were the workers.

Our sweet Coco has recently gone to heaven after 17 love-filled years with us at Casa. We love you, Coco- we hope those new heaven hips do you well!

Some Good Stories

Dog Days are Never Over

I have been bringing my little shih-tzu/poodle mix dog, Marley, to showers at Tully library. He has been known to resemble a stuffed animal in appearance and mannerisms (if stuffed animals could move). Our shower guests have taken note of his irresistibility, as well. Every shower day, I watch Marley make his rounds from one guest to the next, making no effort to beg, but never failing to get some sort of goodie- be it food, water, pets, or play. He often gets dressed up in the small clothes the guests find in donations, too. One guest in particular makes a point to bring him a bag of treats every week! Fast forward to Christmas, Marley received bags and bags of treats and squeaky toys from guests and volunteers. Now, at the house, he can never decide which toy to play with! He wishes you all a happy New Year and hopes your New Year’s resolution is to shower him with more love.

---Camille on the endless love at Showers to the People

I was with everybody here and I had presents - they were all fantastic, every single one - things I really needed - and I haven’t had presents in a long time, so that was nice to have some this year. That was really nice. Dinner was really really nice-the company of everybody was really good. It was great to have her (Betty) with me - somebody who I love a lot, who I get love back from. That was Christmas, here in the house. I’m really comfortable around everybody. They’re all thoughtful and caring - I really appreciate what everybody’s done to make my stay here more comfortable and fun.

I’m really grateful to be here- since the first day here- I felt that the people really care. Everybody cares about everybody and tries to help as much as they can, with whatever problem there is, whatever problem I have, so I don’t feel so alone or like nobody cares. I’m really grateful for the friends and family I have in this house - it’s a blessing that I thank God for putting me here, feeling what it’s like to have family and friends for the first time- so I’m grateful to God for that. At my age, I’m more at the end of my life, so I think this is the reason that God brought me here - to feel what it’s like to have family and friends - to feel the love and kindness and help - what a blessing.

---Mary Lou on Christmas, and staying at Casa de Clara



How Can You Help?

Our address:
318 N 6th Street
San Jose, California
95112

Call us at:
(408) 297-8330

Email us:
info@sjcw.org



We are currently in need of:

Sleeping bags
Tents
Tarps
Razors
Shaving Cream
Deodorant
Latex gloves
Toothbrushes
Cash donations
Cars

If you're interested in volunteering, we would appreciate help with:

Showers to the People

Thursdays

- Sanitizing the shower stalls after each use
- Distributing hygiene, clothing and food

Food distribution

- Delivering food items to those who are food insecure in San Jose

General House Maintenance

- Harvesting our winter fruits!
- Landscaping work

Donations can be made on our website: www.sjcw.org