

# CASA DIE CLARA

prayer ~ hospitality ~ direct service ~ advocacy

## CATHOLIC WORKER

May 2020

FROM "POVERTY AND PRECARITY"

By Calia Kammer and Artie Evans

In 1952, Dorothy Day wrote:

How can we say to these people, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven," when we are living comfortably in a warm house, sitting down to a good table, and are clothed decently.

We must talk about poverty because people lose sight of it, can scarcely believe that it exists. So many decent people come in to visit us and tell us how their families were brought up in poverty and how, through hard work and decent habits and cooperation, they managed to educate all the children and raise up priests and nuns to the Church. They concede that health and good habits, a good family, take them out of the poverty class, no matter how mean the slum they may have been forced to inhabit. No, they don't know about the poor. Their conception of poverty is something neat and well ordered as a nun's cell.

And maybe no one can be told, maybe they will have to experience it. Or maybe it is a grace which they must pray for. We usually get what we pray for, and maybe we are afraid to pray for it. And yet I am convinced that it is the grace we most need in this age of crisis.

We say: it is hard to write about poverty when Joel and Christy ring our doorbell, holding empty plastic bottles and asking for water. Desperation for something so simple has increased because San Jose city officials, in an overabundance of caution, turned off water fountains, lest people transmit the virus while hydrating.

It is hard to write about poverty when Richard, a longtime guest of *Showers to the People!*, suffers in his camp by the creek with symptoms of coronavirus. At showers one Wednesday, we call the county helpline that was specifically in place to help with situations like this. We are told that no doctors will come to Richard's assistance unless he calls first. Like others around him, Richard has no cell phone. He also cannot possibly walk 3 miles to an urgent care. He just has to wait it out and hope his case isn't fatal. Other shower guests inform us of the history of paramedics in San Jose: once, paramedics flatly refused to go into the encampment, forcing others from nearby camps to carry their friend to help. "They don't care about us," one guest sighs.

It is hard to write about poverty when organizations typically offering social services shut down, cutting back the resources vital for people's wellbeing. Four "SafePark" programs call Casa within one week, asking us to start additional mobile shower days at their site. We are already at capacity and must say "no." We meet a man who tells us that he has not eaten in four days. With public libraries closed, people's phones go uncharged, leaving them no way of communicating with loved ones or figuring out which services remain open. Community centers and homeless shelters throughout the city shut their doors. The "shelter in place" order makes laughably little sense for people who have no permanent shelter. As we drive through the now-desolated downtown, we notice that the only people remaining in the streets are the ones who have lived there for months or years.

Emergencies like coronavirus have laid bare the injustice present and reminded us that poverty is necessarily a precarious situation. The oppressed poor are the first to suffer, and they suffer most intensely when an emergency forces us to close libraries, parks, churches, shelters, soup kitchens--essentially, all public spaces. Housing, healthcare, and nutrition are not rights, freely given to all. Instead, many are forced to meet their own needs in creative ways. We need to think about the poor among us who rely on water fountains and library outlets to sustain themselves. We need to understand that, when even one of those simple things disappears, their lives are destabilized.

Perhaps this season of emergency beckons a sacrificial response. Perhaps now Christ calls to us in the Garden of Gethsemane, to stay awake in an hour that seems dark and grim. In looking to the needs of our housed and unhoused neighbors and taking stock of our resources, we prayerfully seek our personal roles. Individual acts of mercy as well as systemic change are crucial to sustain life and improve wellbeing.

~

## HOUSE NOTES

- Andrew Kotch helped lead a weekend Kairos retreat for inmates at Salinas Valley State Prison in March.
- Christina and her two sons, David and Matthew, had been living at Casa de Clara since October. We rejoice that they were able to move to their own apartment in late March.



Left: Christina and her sons, Matthew (L) and David (R), pose before their school dance.

Below: David (R) and Matt (L) on the day they moved into their new apartment.



Above: Coco, the longest-serving member of the Casa community. Right: A shower guest showed us their appreciation by leaving a note on the mirror which reads, "Thanks Y'all"



- Betty, Christine, Ruth, and Calia all celebrated birthdays at Casa de Clara.
- Andrew Kotch moved back to Pennsylvania in mid-March. We really miss him!
- We continue with all our ministries amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This is what we do:
  - **Showers to the People!** provides new shirts, socks, and underwear as well as hot showers and meals three times per week
  - **Door ministry** helps folks at our front door with food, clothes, hygiene items, or to use the phone
  - **Rental assistance**
  - **Hospitality** gives transitional housing and support for women and children experiencing homelessness.
  - **Breakfast** serves people at St. James Park on Friday mornings.
  - **Food distribution** delivers groceries in the downtown San Jose neighborhood (food is delivered to houses between 26<sup>th</sup> St. and 4<sup>th</sup> St. and William St. and Jackson St.).

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318 N 6<sup>th</sup> St

San Jose, CA 95112

408.297.8330 | info@sjcw.org | sjcw.org

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### How can you help?

#### Financial donations:

Checks can be made out to Casa de Clara Catholic Worker; online at [www.sjcw.org](http://www.sjcw.org)

**Cars** for guests. Must pass smog and run well.

**Food** of any type

**Blankets, tents, and sleeping bags**

**Household & Shower supplies:** toilet paper, bleach, bulk castile soap, paper plates & bowls, disposable razors, deodorant, disposable gloves

### Current Catholic Workers

**Artie, Calia** and **Betty** live here and don't plan to leave anytime soon.

**Derick** has been at Casa since March and is staying with us until the end of May, at which time he will move to Indiana to attend pharmacy school. We welcome **Lynn (pictured, right)** from Annapolis, Maryland as a Catholic Worker. She visited at the beginning of April and moved in later that month. Lynn says, "Hello! I look forward to personal growth in all I learn from Catholic Workers and in relational growth with those in our home and those I come into contact with day-to-day. I wish to encourage, to be blessed, and to be a blessing."

