
THE MINNEAPOLIS CATHOLIC WORKER

Spring 2015 | the Rye House | www.theryehouse.org

From top left: Erica, Molly, Katie, Ruth (center), Joe, Zach, Nikki

The MCW is on Twitter!

Find us: @theryehouse

Check out our newly reformatted website with its Twitter feed! So far, Joe's dad has been the most frequent tweeter. Help us out!

House Hunt

We're still looking and discerning. Please keep your ears to the ground and us in your prayers. We will need all the support and wisdom you can offer!

Birdie's Blog

Dear New CW family,

Being a dog is the best way to be a Catholic Worker. All the title and none of the work. My days are spent lounging on the couch and gnawing a two foot beef femur. I'm praying for you, pray for me.

love and peace,

Sr. Bernine, the dog ("Birdie")



Welcome Erica!

By Nikki Fleck

Our last newsletter updated you on most of the chaos at Rye (or rather the Minneapolis Catholic Worker) this past year. We're thankful that our work has remained strong and steady during much of the coming and going. We all know it's hard to say goodbye, but there's also a profound challenge within new beginnings and being open to change.

In late November, our community was lucky enough to welcome Erica into the Rye House. Erica has been a friend of the community for the past two years, traveling with us to the farm and popping in and out of the house from time to time. It came as a bit of a surprise that Erica still wanted to join our community after getting to know us better. It was a great time for Erica to move in, and I know we all appreciate the grounding presence and affectionate energy that she has gifted us with.

Erica is one of those people that you don't really understand how she can be so incredibly kind but then she thankfully surprises you with some witty jokes or innocent pranks. We are blessed to have another permaculture expert in the garden and a warm, experienced helping hand with the children at our meals and the after school program. She's a



Pig Ask!

As many of you know, we have a deep and important relationship with the Lake City Catholic Worker Farm. Not only are these farmers close friends, but they play an integral role in keeping our community healthy and connected to the process of growing some of our food.

Each week during the growing season, a car full of Minneapolis CWers and friends takes a trip down to the farm for a work day. In exchange, the farm provides us with a trunk full of fresh vegetables. Additionally, each Fall we head down to the farm for their annual pig butcher weekend to learn, work, and party. For the past two years one of the pigs we butcher that weekend we purchase for our community.

This year we are asking our friends and supporters to help us pay for our pig! The cost of a whole pig is around \$800 and the pork is used at our Thursday night meals and to feed those of us living at the Minneapolis Catholic Worker.

If you are interested in donating to help us pay for our pig please send us a check and write "for pig", or something of that nature, on the memo line or the envelope. Thanks in advance for your continued support and for keeping our freezer healthily full of healthy pork!

lover of dance, tea ceremonies and getting to know people. She strives to be a reliable ally daily with her activist work and is an incredible listener! We've appreciated her fresh insight and perspective, which gently challenges us daily to recognize the ways we tend to get stuck in our ways as Catholic Workers. She constructively challenges us to be open to change and new ideas, which has been a great lesson that we will continue to put into practice. I personally appreciate her joining me with her love for ferments and kittens! (Which is mandatory for all future applicants.)

Erica has been such a wonderful addition to our Rye House family, and we look forward to learning from her and growing in friendship. Although the tides have settled a bit we still find ourselves doing our best to simply live into the many questions we have as community and as individuals. Please keep us in mind with the many ventures ahead or stop by for a visit!



#BlackLivesMatter

A small fraction of statistics that disprove mainstream attitudes and beliefs relating to colorblindness, police brutality and our current incarceration system.

- Studies show that people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates. If there are significant differences in the surveys to be found, they frequently suggest that white, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of color.

#BlackLivesMatter continued

- White youth have about three times the number of drug-related emergency room visits as their African-American counterparts.
- In 2006, one in every 14 black men was behind bars in 2006 compared to one in 106 white men.
- Today violent crime rates are at historically low levels, yet incarceration rates continue to climb.
- Prisons have only achieved a shocking record of failure. There is overwhelming evidence that these institutions create crime rather than prevent it.
- Approximately a half a million people are in prison or jail for a drug offense today, compared to an estimated 41,000 in 1980, an increase of 1,100 percent.
- State and local law enforcement agencies are offered cash grants and bribes to make drug enforcement a top priority. Law enforcement are also allowed to keep seized assets for their own use.



- Tens of thousands of poor people go to jail every year without talking to a lawyer.
- A typical mandatory sentence for a first-time drug offense in federal court is 5-10 years. In other developed countries a first time drug offense would merit no more than 6 months if any jail time at all.
- It has been changes in our law—particularly the dramatic increases in the length of prison sentences—that have been responsible for the growth of our prison system, not an increase in crime.
- **Every 28 hours a person of color is killed by the police.**
- The rate of police killings of black Americans is nearly the same as the rate of lynchings in the early decades of the 20th century.
- Nearly two times a week in the United States, a white police officer killed a black person during a seven-year period ending in 2012.
- Even though white Americans outnumber black Americans fivefold, black people are three times more likely than white people to be killed when they encounter the police in the US, and black teenagers are far likelier to be killed by police than white teenagers.

Note: Please contact Nikki for references to statistics

To White Men

by Joe Kruse

A new report by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has found that the amount of

lynchings of black men, women, and children in America is far higher than originally thought; 4,000 people killed from 1877 to 1950. In a radio program about the report, EJI's director, Bryan Stevenson details some of the most grotesque and haunting aspects of many of these lynchings, including the often very public, carnival-esque nature of the lynchings, how often torture was coupled with the eventual murder, and how many of the lynchings occurred on courthouse lawns, completely sanctioned by local civil structures.

Since the report came out earlier this week, it's been burned in my mind. Looking through the horrific photo documentation of some of these lynchings, I feel my heart crawl up to my throat, and start to feel heavy and sinking. Many of these photos I've seen before, but as I look through them this time I start to notice something new that I hadn't previously focused on, perhaps out of a subconscious fear or defensiveness.

I have started to see the white faces.

Often standing around the dead black bodies is an assembly of white people staring back at the camera. Some of them look serious, but often it seems most are smiling or laughing, seemingly happy about the "excitement". I have also noticed how in most of these photos those staring back at the camera are white men.

What disturbs me most about these photos, in addition to their graphic, violent content and their vivid representation of white supremacy in America, is that in the faces of the murderers, I see part of my own lineage. I see the appalling violence that comprises the foundation of my modern white and male privilege. I see in these pictures the fact that a system to which I belong and benefit from tied the noose.

I believe that today, we white men have to begin to gaze at these images of violence. We have to begin to see the legacy of white

male supremacy and see it as one of terrorism. We have to begin to mourn and apologize for the vicious system from which we continue to profit.



As we address and acknowledge the sins of the past we must find a way to feel sorrow authentically and admit fault respectfully without the entrapment of perpetual guilt. To avoid this, I suggest we look into our hearts and find the emotional underpinnings of our violent or prejudiced moments, of the times when our racism or sexism flares. I truly feel that behind the violent legacy perpetuated by white men and the generational sins of white supremacy is fear and lack of love of self. I believe that racism and sexism lived out by white men is an attempt to scapegoat our inner fears of inadequacy onto other bodies. Because within our culture we often inherit beliefs of our unloveable-ness as young boys, we are stuck in a violent and panicked crusade to find somebody who is worse, weaker, more despicable than us. Because we are so afraid that we will "lose," or that we won't be loved, or that we are hated, we create systems that perpetuate myths of other genders and races being more unusable and inferior. We adhere to and practice oppression

because it blinds us from our own inner pain. In working to heal our own emotional wounds we can move past a place of guilt and blame, and into a place of compassion and responsibility for the violent sins of the past.



I want to emphasize that the point of this article is not to seek to cultivate compassion or understanding for white men's suffering from those whom we have and continue to oppress. My hope is to challenge white men to be strong enough to find and examine our inner pain. And then ask ourselves how these deep-seated fears and patterns of self-loathing create outward prejudice and violence against others. We must acknowledge that this oppression scars both others and ourselves. Especially now, this work of healing ourselves and taking responsibility for the legacy white supremacy is important. The lynchings continue on the streets of Ferguson, New York, Cleveland, and St. Paul.

Dear white men, we have been weak and afraid for too long. We must begin to heal and love ourselves, and start to make reparations for the legacy of our fear.

Absorbing Contradiction

by Zach Johnson

I've been working in the poverty scene as a Catholic Worker for about five years. The past three years I've also worked in a huge homeless shelter in downtown Minneapolis. In these same five years, I've grown into an adult. In most circles in my life, it feels like a combination of my age (25) and my so called "career" in social service work has brought me fully into adulthood. And like most adults, my identity is largely tied to my "job" these days. Working in poverty fits an easy category for most people: I'm a do-gooder. Many folks in my community and family work in ways that either resist an easy label (an activist organizer/produce grocer, a permaculture farmer/academic, a naturopathic healer/artist, etc.) or their lives are considered self-explanatory (an actress, a teacher, a salesman, a mother). I'm not sure which would be more frustrating for me.

All of us are asked to talk about our work from time to time. As an adult do-gooder I'm sometimes asked to talk about questions of ethics, moral responsibility, religion, or more specific topics of which I have some supposed authority—as a do-gooder.

These discussions often feel rushed, and I'm almost always annoyed with what I hear myself saying for my part of these conversations. I try to stay succinct and address specific thoughts while not ignoring the intentionally confusing, huge, and interweaving

systems of oppression we work all the time to address as Catholic Workers. I stumble around the ways these systems play out in our lives—and often even underpin the assumptions of the conversations in which I find myself speaking!

Most people are not used to thinking outside the circular logic of systems of oppression (and I would not claim that I'm used to doing it either: how can a person see how prisons, the military, health care, non-profits, education, and politics all intersect, all the time, everywhere?). So it's often hard to consider any sort of "system"—especially in a short conversation about each other's "work".

It's no surprise people often say something like, "I wish I could help, but I just don't know how." This type of response has signaled, on more than one occasion, a sudden end to these sorts of conversations. And I am left holding the weight of systemic oppression in my head; it swirls around, and I'm unable to talk about it in a real way. It's an injustice to ignore the big causes of oppression, but it alienates people as individuals to bring them up. This is a major source of burn out: when an individual is forced to absorb the contradictions of a system.



When someone says something like "I just wish I could help, but I don't know how," it's helpful to remember how close this helpless,

overwhelmed, and confused sentiment is to those who live in poverty. The same overwhelming burden of ignorance, doubt, guilt, impatience, unwillingness, affliction, skepticism and fear fills everyone. And just as these burdens tend too often to drive oppressed people into poverty, so these burdens ought to drive privileged people to the same place; we ought to meet in the margins to instruct, counsel, admonish, forgive, bear, comfort, and pray for ourselves with each other. This will begin the radical shift toward a refreshing revolution of the heart.

Living the Questions

By Erica Sherwood

In early August 2014, the streets of Ferguson, Missouri were brimming with voices calling for justice – of many things – after unarmed, black, 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by white police officer Darren Wilson. The seven months following saw the strong, encouraging, beautiful #blacklivesmatter movement emerge, bringing together folks across the country in gatherings demanding change in national social systems, and raising awareness around racist thought patterns that marginalize and oppress black people.

The demands for change are not new. Black community organizers, scholars, artists, activists, _____, have been planning and working for change since the era of slavery. Even after social movements of the 50's and 60's abolished legal segregation, people have consistently continued to seek ways of ending all forms of racism against black bodies, minds and spirits.

In ideology and theory, #blacklivesmatter is as old as the first Africans to be dehumanized by white colonialism. In

today's political and social state, #blacklivesmatter is just the beginning of what I hope will be lasting liberation.

After the grand jury's non-indictment of officer Darren Wilson in late November 2014, #blacklivesmatter organized in Minneapolis. Highways 55 and 35W were shut down by marches, University Avenue was inaccessible on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Minneapolis City Hall heard the echoing chants of "NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE" and "BLACK LIVES MATTER" during their meetings, and the Mall of America closed its doors during peak Christmas shopping as protesters held vigil and raised awareness in the mall's rotunda.

In short, white people's days were interrupted and inconvenienced, and white people were given a tiny glimpse into the interruption and inconvenience national systems put on black lives every hour of every day.

At the MplsCW, we have been finding ways to be active and supportive of this movement. Dismantling racism in our own minds, hearts, actions and community is a daily engagement for us all – regardless of the years of research, study, conversations, effort and concern we each have around ending racial oppression.

Personally, this movement has transformed me.

These months, I have seen the depth of corruption in our policing systems and mainstream media. I have felt the heaviness of racial tension grip the air through car horns, profanity and police in riot gear at various marches and rallies. After viewing *Selma*, I looked at Minneapolis in frustration and tears as I had greater recognition of how many more

similarities then differences there are in the lives of black people today and the lives of black people during the days of Dr. King.

And overlaying it all, I have seen my privilege as a white woman continually revealed to me, on deeper and deeper levels. The mere fact that the above paragraph was unknown to me or caused me *a moment* of frustration shows how entrenched my whiteness is. If those were my realities, I would know them from a young age and would know them well.

While these reflections are true and somewhat shameful, they do not – they cannot – stop me from moving forward. I will continue to show up to marches, continue to support my black sisters and brothers leading these movements, continue to research, continue to build relationships, continue to have conversations with white friends, continue to think critically about our systems, continue to strive to live a life outside of those systems, continue to

What does it mean to be a white ally? How do we take part in dismantling old racism in our personal lives, our community and this country? What does it look like to take part in creating and living something different, something new? I do not have all the answers. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke writes, I "live the questions now" and hope that someday I will "live [my] way into the answers."

As individuals and community, we are searching for ways to be more whole human beings.

Right now, the #blacklivesmatter movement is a part of that.

We hope you will join us in the questions & the journey.

A note about the artwork:

All of the artwork in this edition of the newsletter was contributed by the dedicated neighbor kids who make the Thursday night meals lively and are frequent attendees of our after school program.

SUPPORT US

Our ongoing financial needs are

We are still looking to buy homes for our expanding community. All gifts of money are deeply appreciated.

Ways to give:

Tax deductible: Make checks out to Spirit of St. Stephen's Catholic Community (SoSSCC) with 'Rye House' in the memo line. These donations will be used to help pay for rent. Send them to: 2201 1st Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

Non-tax deductible: Make checks out to Rye House and mail them to the Rye House. These checks will be used for our projects, utilities, and rent.

Non-money needs

We are looking for help with:

Realtors familiar with community/group home ownership

Making a neighborhood meal on Thursday evening

Alternatives to traditional bank loans

School supplies for after school program

Other needs

- Toilet paper
- Dish soap (preferably eco-friendly)
- Laundry detergent (preferably eco-friendly)

