

The Personalist

A Publication of the St. Martin de Porres Catholic Worker, Harrisburg, PA

Get Off Your Tukas

By Renée Roden

In “Unforgiving Places: the Unexpected Origins of American Gun Violence,” author Jens Ludwig, a University of Chicago social economist, cites a famous Princeton Theological Seminary experiment, where 40 divinity students were assigned to preach a sermon on the Good Samaritan at a building on campus. The researchers planted a person in distress at the doorway to each building the students arrived at—coughing, moaning, doubled over, or passed out—someone who clearly needed help.

Would the students tasked with telling the story of the Good Samaritan practice what they were literally about to preach?

It turns out that only 40% did. But the researchers found that the largest factor in whether or not the student would stop was whether or not they were in a hurry. A random sampling of students were told they were running late to deliver their lecture, and only 10% of those students stopped to help the person in distress, compared to 60% of those who thought they had time.

Capitalism keeps us in a hurry. It keeps wages low so that workers are always “on the clock,” forced into multiple jobs to make rent: living paycheck to paycheck is also living minute to minute. “Time is money,” was how Peter Maurin summarized our sad social condition. And when time is money, stopping to give just a few minutes to our neighbor in a person-to-person encounter seems like a luxury we cannot afford.

If we are severed from our neighbor, cut off from that ability to look one another in the eye and encounter one another, to see their pain, bear witness, take it upon ourselves, then we are cut off from our own self, our own ability to flourish. We find ourselves living in an unforgiving place. “When ‘the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered,’” Dorothy Day wrote in 1940.

On a lighter note, I thought this could be the theological reason behind Catholic Workers’ storied lateness. Catholic Workers are not a community of folks widely celebrated for their timeliness. Perhaps our chronic tardiness springs

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What is Personalism?

The Editors

The Catholic Worker believes in “the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism,” as Peter Maurin writes. We’ve decided to name our paper **The Personalist** to reflect the importance of this philosophy in Christian action. But what is personalism? Dorothy Day defined personalism in her 1939 autobiography **House of Hospitality**: “We are trying to work out the doctrine of gentle personalism, to live a life in which people do not do things by compulsion, but of their own free will.”



“I would describe Personalism as a way of pursuing and exercising justice, both as a person and as a community, which understands the human person's infinite dignity and potential for excellence. It places all the tools of economics, politics, and all social systems at the service of this excellence,” said Rev. Aaron Lynch. Rev. Lynch was one of the members of our reading group of Emmanuel Mounier’s **A Personalist Manifesto** (1938) last year. Another member, Rev. Matthew Best, of Christ Lutheran Church in Allison Hill, shared his definition of personalism with us:

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from a communal refusal to see time as a commodity controlled by the markets. Instead of money, time is our shared humanity.

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, **Dilexi Te**, Pope Leo XIV recalls the Good Samaritan as a figure who challenges a prosperous society not to forget that we are a seamless garment of humanity: the suffering and marginalized are part of the common fabric of our lives. He writes: **“While it is true that the rich care for the poor, the opposite is no less true. This is a remarkable fact confirmed by the entire Christian tradition. Lives can actually be turned around by the realization that the poor have much to teach us about the Gospel and its demands. By their silent witness, they make us confront the precariousness of our existence. The elderly, for example, by their physical frailty, remind us of our own fragility, even as we attempt to conceal it behind our apparent prosperity and outward appearance. The poor, too, remind us how baseless is the attitude of aggressive arrogance with which we frequently confront life’s difficulties. They remind us how uncertain and empty our seemingly safe and secure lives may be” (§109).**

This teaching is good. How do we accept it and live it out in our daily lives?

As one of our regular volunteers at the Harrisburg Catholic Worker noted, when Peter Maurin said it was time for the Church to blow the dynamite that the scholars have boxed up in nice phraseology and sat on the lid, he showed us what the first step was.

In order to “blow the dynamite” contained in the Gospel—in Jesus’ words, in Church teaching from John Chrysostom and Gregory the Great to Pope Leo XIV—that powerful message that can blast through the shell of the old society and usher in a new world, you first have to get up off your tukus. †

“But that fundamental principle of personalism, the liberty of Christ, example rather than coercion, love rather than hate, the folly of the Cross, serving rather than being served, taking the least place, will continue to be stressed in these sheets.”

Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, February 1942

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“Personalism is a way of engaging the world that recognizes the full humanity and dignity of self and others,” Rev. Best said, **“emphasizing our moral agency and the ways our lives are bound together within larger social and systemic relationships.”**

The editors of **The Catholic Worker** shared a definition of personalism in the October 1936 edition of **The Catholic Worker** via a sermon of St. John Chrysostom on the Good Samaritan. Chrysostom says: **“The Samaritan did not say, ‘where now are the priests, where are the Pharisees, where are the doctors of the law,’ but as though he had come across a very great bargain, he grasped the opportunity for making profit. Therefore when you see someone in need of care, soul or body, don’t say to yourself, ‘Why didn’t so-and-so take care of him,’ but YOU attend him, and do not go into the reasons for the negligence of others. If you found gold lying on the road, would you say to yourself, ‘why didn’t someone pick this up?’ Wouldn’t you rather hurry to get it before the next person? Likewise then, pay attention to your fallen brother and think that you have found a treasure, the chance of caring for others.”** St. John Chrysostom, Pray for us. †

Easy Essay: What the Catholic Worker Believes

By Peter Maurin

The Catholic Worker believes in the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism.

The Catholic Worker believes in the personal obligation of looking after the needs of our brother.

The Catholic Worker believes in the daily practice of the Works of Mercy.

The Catholic Worker believes in Houses of Hospitality for the immediate relief of those who are in need.

The Catholic Worker believes in the establishment of Farming Communes where each one works according to his ability and gets according to his need.

The Catholic Worker believes in creating a new society within the shell of the old with the philosophy of the new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new.

Mama Mary Community Farm

The Harrisburg Catholic Worker farm (Mama Mary farm) now has twelve raised beds with plans to expand to 16 by the end of 2026. Slowly, we are learning what it takes to grow our own food.

Water

Last summer, we had no water near the garden and had to run 100 feet of hose from the house spigot to reach the garden. It took a lot of work, the hose ran uphill and across the back alley street. A lot of water wasted in the process, and our water bill skyrocketed. This year, Gather the Spirit to Justice donated a 550-gallon water tank that we installed next to the house to catch rainwater from our roof. A pump system pumps the water uphill to two water tanks in the farm that hold 250 gallons each. 97% of our water came from the sky and our bill stayed low. Even when we experienced several weeks with very little rain, our tanks watered our garden for the entire season.

How Much Kale Can a Woodchuck Chuck....

Last year, groundhogs feasted on our crops. They seemed fat and happy, and we thanked God that Mama Mary farm was not our only food source! Renée joked we were running an organic farm for groundhogs. This year, we surrounded most of the garden beds with fencing, with the help of several volunteers. Renée became an expert in the “catch and release” of groundhogs, snagging more than 20 hogs over the season. Rainy the housecat even donated her used organic pine litter to the cause, and James’ hair clippings contributed to warding off groundhogs with the smell of predators.

The Birds and the Bees

Another big change this year was the addition of 10 Rhode Island Red Chickens. The chirping tiny chicks arrived in March and are now big hens laying 8-10 brown eggs daily. We have enough eggs for the house and give out about four dozen eggs per week to our neighbors in Allison Hill. We also added two bee hives to our farm, with the help of a Joshua Group friend! The 2025 season has certainly produced more food for our human, rather than animal, neighbors and for that we give thanks!

Bokashi: Food Scraps to Soil in Weeks

By James Murphy

The Notre Dame Alumni Club of Harrisburg has helped the Catholic Worker buy soil for our garden beds the past two years. Good soil is not cheap, and because we built taller garden beds this year to discourage groundhogs, we need more soil to fill the beds. Crops deplete nutrients from the raised beds, so our soil requires regular nutrient replenishment. Mama Mary Farm strives to be 100% organic, so, without a lot of money, we need to get creative in order to replenish the nutrients in our soil.

We have some nice open-top wooden composting bins in our garden where we have been disposing of our food scraps and other organic material. We also created leaf mulch from last year’s fallen leaves. And, this past year, we have been piloting a composting method that can be done indoors.

The technique is known as the Bokashi method. It has become our main method of composting at the house. While traditional outdoor composting can take several months, the Bokashi,

method can turn food scraps into healthy soil in a matter of weeks. The Bokashi method ferments the scraps (or pickles) the food scraps into a “pre-compost.”

The Bokashi method requires two ingredients: first, a product called “Bokashi bran.” Bokashi bran contains beneficial micro-organisms that ferments food scraps into a pre-compost that can be used as a soil conditioner. Second, the bokashi process requires an oxygen-free (anaerobic) environment in which the fermenting process can take place at room temperature. At the Catholic Worker, we have been using airtight five-gallon buckets and layering our food scraps along with the bokashi bran into the sealed buckets. Like traditional composting methods, we throw in fruits, veggies, coffee grounds, tea bags, and cooked foods like bread and pasta. Additionally, Bokashi bran is even powerful enough to break down cheese, eggs, meat, fish, and small bones. The food scraps are not usually composted in outdoor bins because of the foul odors they create and the pests they attract.

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Olive's Journey in Uncle Sam's "El Dorado"

By Olive Mama Ngah (translated by James and Renée)

I am taking this opportunity to write this article to express my gratitude and share my experience with the friends I have had the privilege of meeting in the United States. I would like to focus on two main moments: the circumstances of my meeting with the Catholic Worker, and my life at the Catholic Worker House.

I- Meeting the Catholic Worker

My meeting with James and Renée happened by chance in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, exactly two months after my arrival in the U.S. To give a little background, I arrived in the U.S. through the Diversity Visa lottery program, which awarded me a Green Card. 22 million people apply each year, and nearly 150,000 applicants are declared winners. Winners await one of 55,000 visas made available to the program each year. I received my visa, bearing official authorization for permanent residence in the U.S. in December 2024. Thanks to this lottery, the doors of the United States have been opened to me. I obtained the right to settle in the United States for 10 years, to study, to work, to explore the country, to travel outside the United States every six months, and, most importantly, to benefit from the opportunities offered to permanent residents, namely, social security and healthcare. In short, I obtained the right to live in the United States, but also the duty to participate in the daily life and economy through my work. Furthermore, after four years, I have the right to apply for U.S. citizenship.

However, before enjoying all these rights, I had to go through the process of cultural integration, a process which, I must admit, is not at all easy. Everything depends on the particularities of your own life and the realities on the ground. These variables include savings—if you have any when you arrive—whether you speak English or not, and, of course, who welcomes you: this is an important key to what comes next when you are completely unfamiliar with the system.

I met James at an English class last winter for new immigrants in the United States. Having recently arrived in the United States from my home country of Cameroon, I had to continue to learn English and to find my bearings in order to realize my American Dream: the project that had inspired my arrival in this El Dorado—to come to Uncle Sam's country to improve my life, to participate in a

country of equal rights, to get an education, to work, in short, to better myself, and, if possible, to better the lives of the people around me, including those in my own country.

When I met James at the English classes that St. Francis Church holds on Sundays, I told him my background as a French teacher with twelve years of experience. I wanted professional guidance on how to find work in the U.S. education system. I had no job, no family in the United States, and no foundation to build on. My first host family was able to accommodate me for one month, so I had to find a more stable base to continue cultural integration. I was invited to live at the Catholic Worker house, and I moved in on June 6, 2025.

II- My Life at the Catholic Worker

Through the Catholic Worker, I have met many diverse people, learned about American culture, visited the cinema, attended roundtable discussions, learned about Harrisburg, and even visited New York City this summer. Through the Catholic Worker, I found a second English class, and, most importantly, my first U.S. job: working as an after-school tutor at Joshua Group in Allison Hill. Living at the Catholic Worker, we pray, we discuss my goals and plans; we eat together; we go out into the streets to share food and help.

When my father passed away in August, the Catholic Worker mobilized friends who assisted me and helped fund my plane ticket to my country to attend my father's funeral. At the Catholic Worker, I have experienced God's miracles, as the community responds to God's call in Matthew 25:31-46: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me." The help I have received at the Worker is the same help I see others who visit the house benefit from. With the Catholic Worker, immigrant life is less burdensome and promises a better future. May God help continue this work here at the Catholic Worker and, of course, in all of us. ✝

Olive Mama Ngah is a French teacher who studied at the École Normale Supérieure in Yaoundé, Cameroon. After emigrating to the U.S. in January 2025, Olive has lived in the Harrisburg area since February 2025.

My Summer with the Catholic Worker

By Marquice Jones

I'm a junior at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a graduate of McDevitt High School and the Joshua Group. I came back to Harrisburg this summer for an internship at Penn National Insurance. Jeanetta Politis, Executive Director of the Joshua Group, reached out to me after hearing that I did not have a place to stay back in Harrisburg and offered me a room to stay in the Joshua Group House.

I lived with several people in the house over the course of two and a half months, but the roommate who was there the entirety of the summer was James. James works at the Joshua Group and is also a part of the Catholic Worker, located right next door to the Joshua Group house.

James, being the friendly guy he is, invited me to go to dinner with him, Renee, and Olivia (who both live at the Catholic Worker) on my first Wednesday in the house. I accepted, and this would later become our weekly Wednesday dinners where we would connect the most.

Later, Hunter, a seminarian, moved into the Joshua Group house, and he also worked at the Catholic Worker. Though slow at first, Hunter and I would have conversations whenever we ran into each other. The conversations would be about numerous things: from physical well-being and faith to how to dice onions. These conversations, as well as praying compline (night prayer) with the Catholic Worker, nearly every night, caused me to reflect on my faith. I haven't engaged much with my faith for the past couple of years, but my sophomore year at college last year began to change that.

Hearing everyone's stories, praying together, eating together, and the Catholic Worker's openness to having me brought me closer to my faith. Though I don't know where I am in my faith now, I am walking the path, and I must thank everyone in the Catholic Worker for that.

From helping me practice my driving to chasing chickens in the backyard, from music discussions to shared dinners, the Catholic Worker gave me a summer to remember.

During a time in my life where I feel like I'm drowning in everyday nothings, the Catholic Worker pulled me up, and for that I will forever be thankful. ✝



Easy Essay: Feeding the Poor at a Sacrifice

by Peter Maurin

In the first centuries
of Christianity
the hungry were fed
at a personal sacrifice,
the naked were clothed
at a personal sacrifice,
the homeless were sheltered
at personal sacrifice.
And because the poor
were fed, clothed and sheltered
at a personal sacrifice,
the pagans used to say
about the Christians
“See how they love each other.”

In our own day
the poor are no longer
fed, clothed and sheltered
at a personal sacrifice,
but at the expense
of the taxpayers.
And because the poor
are no longer
fed, clothed and sheltered
the pagans say about the Christians
“See how they pass the buck.”



“bokashi” from page 3

The only scraps we exclude from the Bokashi bins are liquids like spoiled milk, oil or cooking grease. We love using the Bokashi method for a variety of reasons. First, we can compost inside. The anaerobic environment in the buckets keeps the process odorless as the food scraps ferment. We also love Bokashi, because the composting process is faster and more efficient than taking food out to the composting bins outside. Once we have filled a bucket with layers of food scraps and bran, we close the bucket and let the mix ferment for two weeks. Once the fermentation process is complete, we bury the pre-compost in soil in our raised beds. After 4-6 weeks, the soil is ready for planting. From food scraps on our table to planting, the whole Bokashi process of composting takes under two months.

The Catholic Worker has also been providing a Bokashi composting system to the St. Francis of Assisi Soup Kitchen since July. We have been hauling away about 40 gallons of pre-compost from the soup kitchen each month since. The soup kitchen is not only feeding the hungry in the neighborhood, but also feeding our garden and replenishing the soil.

The Bokashi method has reduced the Catholic Worker’s and soup kitchen’s food waste to nearly zero, while producing nutrient-rich, organic soil for the garden. Which brings us to another reason we like using Bokashi: Food waste in landfills is the third largest man-made producer of methane gas after the oil and gas industries and industrial agriculture. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that significantly contributes to climate change by trapping heat in the atmosphere and warming up the earth. Even traditional outdoor composting produces methane. Bokashi, on the other hand, produces almost no greenhouse gas emissions during the process, making it a more environmentally-friendly method. We are delighted to find a composting system that puts our food waste back into the soil in just a few weeks. The Bokashi process uses our food waste to nourish the earth, making growing food easier, rather than contributing gases that warm the earth, making food production increasingly difficult and more precarious.

Bokashi bran and indoor composting systems can be purchased online and found with a quick digital search. You can also easily make your own bokashi bran and indoor systems with a little bit of elbow grease!

We make our own Bokashi bran and also our bucket systems. If you want to learn more to make or purchase your own system, the Harrisburg Catholic Worker will be hosting a basic introduction to the Bokashi composting method on **Thursday, January 15th** at the St. Martin de Porres House at 7:00 p.m. (1440 Market St.). Please join us and learn how you can introduce this to your home, parish, school or work place! ✝

BACK TO CHRIST!—BACK TO THE LAND!

The Catholic Worker, November 1935

By Peter Maurin

Regard for the Soil

Andrew Nelson Lytle says:

1. The escape from industrialism is not in socialism or in Sovietism.
2. The answer lies in a return to a society where agriculture is practiced by most of the people.
3. It is in fact impossible for any culture to be sound and healthy without a proper respect and proper regard for the soil, no matter how many urban dwellers think that their food comes from groceries and delicatessens or their milk from tin cans.
4. This ignorance does not release them from a final dependence upon the farm.



The Catholic Worker, July/August 1943

Arthur Sheehan: The other night I gave a talk on Catholic books, and the connection between reading poor books and soil conservation struck me vividly. The trees are torn down to make the cheap books. The land becomes eroded because the trees aren’t replaced. The patriot would be then the person who read only the fewer good books, not the person who reads the trash.

Peter Maurin: We begin to see all the connections when we think in this organic way. A good farmer plants trees along the edges of his fields. That keeps the wind from eroding the soil.



House Needs

- Prayers!
- Toilet Paper
- Long Underwear
- Blankets & bed sheets (twin and full)
- Winter Boots & Coats
- Canned goods
- Coffee
- Underwear (men's boxer briefs & women's)
- Socks (men's and women's)
- Bus passes (daily and weekly passes)
- Laundry detergent

Our community car broke down and we are looking for a new-to-us vehicle!



Monetary donations: Checks can be addressed to "Harrisburg Catholic Worker." Online donations are via Zelle to harrisburgew@gmail.com or scan the QR Code!



Letters to the Editors

We are grateful to hear from readers! Letters may be edited for length

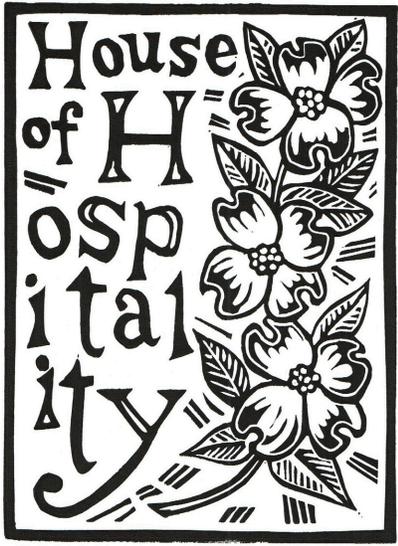
Dear Renée and James,
Peace! Thank you for **The Personalist**. I love the name. [...] Thank you for writing about Haitians in your neighborhood. Trump's denial of protected status for most of them is deplorable. [...] We just sent our latest issue of **The Catholic Radical** to the printer. We try to make each one our best. You have set the bar very high with your first issue. Bravo! Blessings!

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Editor, The Catholic Radical Saint Francis & Thérèse Catholic Worker Worcester, MA



Dear Renée + James,
I am second generation from Eastern European grandparents who escaped beautiful farmlands wrecked by World War I to work in the dirt and grime of the Pittsburgh steel industry. I support immigrants and the poor, like Pope Bob from Chicago said we should do. Keep up the good work.

**Robert Kambic
Baltimore, MD**



By Sarah Fuller

Thank You

Robert Kambic, Pete Tucker; Carolyn Holencik and Andy Gassaway; David Smith; Dean Lackey; Paul & Gloria Kisner; Tom & Emily Owad; Dan Cassidy, Bill Hayes & The University of Notre Dame Club of Harrisburg; Tony Ginocchio; Michael Doyle; Mark & Lauren Franzen; Heather Funk; Brenda Parker; Revs. Peter Rettig & Anthony Dill, Carol Fagan & St. Francis of Assisi Church; Laura Ramirez & St. Francis Soup Kitchen; Michelle Foley; Bishop Timothy Senior; Heather, John, & Sara Kelly; Lecia Jordan; Emily Hand, Jeannetta Politis and the Joshua Group; Bob Mentzer & Knights of Columbus Council #13100; Rev. Matthew Best; Carmen Finestra; Susan Kelly-Dreiss; Nancy Fitzgerald; Jane Popko; Gregory Baird & Edward Wolfe; Mr. & Mrs. William Christ; Lisa & Greg Neuhauser; Liam Branigan; St. Joan of Arc Parish; St. Catherine Laboure Parish; Geniene Ronald; Chris Purcell; Mary Ellen; Darrel & Kirsten Reinford; Art Williams & Gather the Spirit for Justice; Ben Perez, Rev. Allison Smith and Market Square Presbyterian Church; Deacon Francis and Ann Skoriija; Charles Coey; Linda Brindle; Dorothy Grimm; Rick & Irene Woodard; Ann Marie Judson & Pax Christi Harrisburg.

We're so grateful for the many gifts we have received: clothing, food, time, talent, friendship, and the financial, physical, and spiritual support of so many in our community. We have certainly unintentionally omitted many generous names, but please know you are remembered in our prayers. ✝



The Personalist

Tuesday Food Delivery

Every second and fourth Tuesday, Paul Kisner leads a food distribution to neighbors in Allison Hill who are homebound, elderly, or unable to leave their houses for other reasons. "Jesus leads it," Paul says, "I just help." If you would like to join Paul in assisting Jesus in this important work of mercy, please write to us at: harrisburgcw@gmail.com. Jesus gives the blessings, and we are blessed to distribute them, as Paul reminds us! †

House Schedule

Mondays

7 p.m. – Bible Study for English learners. Ends on **November 17.**
Spring Session Starts January 5.

Tuesdays

8 a.m. Morning Prayer
9: 30 a.m. - Neighborhood Food Run
5:30 p.m. - Outdoor Dinner at Market Square between Dauphin County Courthouse and Chase Bank

Wednesdays

11 am - 2 p.m. Hospitality Hours: open house, coffee, fellowship, laundry and showers available – all are welcome!
5: 30 p.m. – Evening Prayer
6: 00 p.m. – Community Potluck Dinner
8p.m. – Compline (Night Prayer)

Upcoming House Events!

- November 16** - Dilexi Te Roundtable with Dr. Sally Scholz of Villanova University at **3 p.m.**
- December 13** - Christmas Party! at **3 p.m. - 9 p.m.**
- January 15** - Bokashi Training at **7 p.m.**



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