



Charlottesville's Catholic Worker Community  
~ FALL 2016 NEWS and REFLECTIONS ~

"Claims of loving all humankind, of welcoming 'the other' have to be accompanied by the hard work of actually welcoming a human being into a real place."

- Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl

### COMMUNITY SUPPERS

Sunday suppers can bring to mind times of plenty: room at the table, food in abundance, the pleasurable rhythm of stories and laughter interspersed with moments of quiet calm. Beginning this fall, Casa Alma renewed our practice of community suppers; join us on the first Sunday of each month.

Mark your calendar for supper at 6pm on December 4, January 1, and February 5. Our doors are open beginning at 4:00pm on those days for our monthly open house and time for tours and casual conversation.

For supper, we will have vegan options and include food harvested from our gardens. RSVP's are appreciated but not required, so do come even at the last minute when you don't want to cook. If you're available to help with washing dishes, set up or cooking, please let us know. We hope to see you soon!



At Casa Alma, we seek to live into right relationship with God, with others, and with the earth.

We host times of prayer and reflection, provide hospitality for low-income families in need, work for peace and justice in our community, and cultivate an urban homestead.

We're an inter-faith, all volunteer community. All are welcome!

### CHRIST ROOMS AND DEEP WELCOME

At Casa Alma we are blessed to know singles and couples, parents in the midst of raising children, and empty-nesters who have graciously welcomed someone (or many someones) in need into their homes. Frequently, hosts welcome people of a different race, culture, religion, or class into the rhythm of their lives. Those they have welcomed include family members in the final years or days of life, homeless and unemployed adults, single parents with children, international students, trans young adults, and women who need a safe place to heal. In every instance, hosts describe how enriching it is to welcome someone into their home and how challenging but worthy it is to build relationships across differences in the proximity of daily life.

One wise host said, "Hospitality is not a project. It is a relationship. As with all good relationships, everyone has to work on it." For the last six months, we at Casa Alma have been exploring creating a hospitality network based in relationships so that grace, healing, and joy can enter into the lives of hosts and guests in profound ways. We have been studying the excellent book Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl. She reminds us that a key element of welcoming is to recognize that the hospitality we extend to strangers, whether in our community, our congregation, or our household, is merely a reflection of God's welcome to us. Pohl writes, "Our hospitality both reflects and participates in God's hospitality. It depends on a disposition of love because, fundamentally, hospitality is simply love in action. It has much more to do with the resources of a generous heart than with sufficiency of food or space."

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## CHRIST ROOMS, *continued*

In Making Room, Pohl also describes the qualities of being welcomed into a home, “In hospitality the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations.” This is the practice we hope to cultivate through our hospitality network, which we are calling “Christ Rooms.”

In our interpretation, welcoming Christ in another person means to welcome them with deep awareness of their inherent sacredness, giftedness, and potential for love and joy. Encountering Christ in another means to receive someone with sacramental reverence and to seek the good within them just as we do with those we love most dearly. With this understanding, hosts in our hospitality network will welcome someone “as Christ.”

In the early Christian church, St. John Chrysostom urged his parishioners, “Every family should have a room where Christ is welcome in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger.” Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, co-founders of the Catholic Worker movement, also shared the vision that households would set aside a place to welcome someone in need. Drawing from the philosophy of personalism, the idea that we ought to meet the needs of others *personally*, at a personal sacrifice, Dorothy wrote, “And since it all does depend on each one of us, that means that we must each try to have a Christ room in our homes where we can shelter others. Better still if there were an extra floor in our house (Oh those lucky people who live in houses!) that could be turned into a little apartment for a family.”

Dorothy went on to say, “Of course husbands must be considered, and wives must be considered, and children. One must look after one’s own family [and one’s self] it is true. But Fr. Coady said once, ‘We can all do ten times as much as we think we can do.’” Knowing so many families and individuals who face housing instability and homelessness in Charlottesville, we are asking what it is we can do. We are excited to be positioning Casa Alma to support the practice of Christian hospitality through Christ Rooms. *Continued, next page*



*Rini Templeton*



*Ade Bethune*

### SHARE YOUR WEALTH, *An Easy Essay By Peter Maurin*

God wants us to be our brother's keeper.

To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked,  
to shelter the homeless, to instruct the ignorant,  
at a personal sacrifice,  
is what God wants us to do.

What we give to the poor for Christ's sake  
is what we carry with us  
when we die.

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau says:  
"When man dies he carries in his clutched hands  
only that which he has given away."

## CHRIST ROOMS, *continued*

We envision a network of Christ Rooms which includes the following elements:

- **Hosts** (singles, couples, and families) who open a room in their homes to welcome someone in need for a determined period of time.
- **Support households** who will provide essential encouragement and assistance to the hosts. Not everyone is in the position to open their homes to someone in need, and no one can host alone. Supports will ensure that hosts provide welcome as part of a community.
- **Guests** who are in need of temporary housing will be screened by and referred to Casa Alma by partner groups. Guests may be experiencing separation or divorce, domestic violence, aging out of foster care, discharge from the hospital or from prison, or displacement from job or community.
- **Advocates**, selected by guests from their own networks, will support them during their time of being hosted, and help with problem solving.
- **Covenants** between the hosts and guests will explain the nature of the relationship they hope to enter into.

In the Christ Room network, Casa Alma will serve as a “threshold” space—a place for hosts and guests to encounter one another. We will also serve as a convener and developer of resources for preparation, support, and ongoing accompaniment. We aim to start small, and hope to remain attentive to and grounded within the movement of the Holy Spirit in this experiment in holy welcome.

We are in the midst of creating resources to help potential hosts and support households prepare for and sustain a Christ Room. Please see [casa-alma.org/christ-rooms](http://casa-alma.org/christ-rooms) to explore our ideas in more depth. Feel free to weigh in with your own reflections and suggestions, and let us know if you’d like to participate in any way. *Thank you for your prayers in this endeavor.*

## GOATS AND GARDENS

At this time of year, visitors to Casa Alma are greeted by rows and rows of greens in our gardens. Swiss chard, tat soi, mustard greens, kale and collards, spinach and lettuces are thriving. We credit the careful planning and attentiveness of Sarah Frazer, our garden manager, who started the plants from seed and led us in the installation of a new rainwater-fed drip irrigation system for the annual garden beds. Tidiness has returned to the gardens, thanks to our enthusiastic UVa student volunteers. One student said, “It doesn’t feel like I’m back at UVa until I come back to Casa Alma.” Their efforts in the garden make for an abundant harvest and advance the process of making our little urban homestead more sustainable.



Our Nigerian Dwarf goats have taken on a new role: ambassadors to the city elementary schools. In coordination with City Schoolyard Gardens, Laura and Ella brought Alice the goat to visit Jackson-Via, Venable, and Burnley-Moran Elementary Schools. It was so enjoyable to experience the children’s excitement as they asked questions, told us their own goat stories, and watched Alice as she ate some sweetened grain and then capered about. Some of the children, never having been so close to a farm animal, were intimidated at first. One girl touched Alice tentatively then dug her little fingers into Alice’s fur, brought her in for a hug and said, “I want to take her home.”



*Photos courtesy of  
City Schoolyard Gardens*

## THANKS AND PRAISE

Over these last seven years, thanks to the grace of God and the generosity of many, Casa Alma has been established! Where there were once neglected houses, guest families are welcomed into homes that are safe and warm, and community gathers to sing, pray, and share meals. What were once three overgrown city lawns are now thriving annual and perennial gardens, fruit and nut trees, a berry patch, and home to chickens, goats, and honeybees.

We thank the Church of the Incarnation, Virginia Organizing, our board members and wise advisors, our long-time financial supporters, all who contributed to our mortgage retirement campaign, and all those whose prayers, material donations, and time created this special place! Special thanks to Cville Foodscapes for consultations and assistance, to Open Gate Farm, to Van Yahres Tree Company for ongoing donations of wood mulch, and to Doug the Electrician for his skillful work on the houses. Thanks to the Building Goodness Foundation, Charlottesville Catholic, Tandem Friends, and the Blue Ridge Schools, the Notre Dame Club, UVA Catholic Student Ministry, local youth groups and service days, the United Way Day of Caring, APO Service Fraternity, and our weekly student volunteers through Madison House.

Deeply grateful for this superb foundation, we look ahead with great hope to the next seven years of deepening and broadening our sense of what it means to be Charlottesville's Catholic Worker community. *Join us in the journey!*

### WISH LIST

- **Prayers**, that we would be open to grace.
- **People** to help research resources for our Christ Room effort—this can be done online, from wherever you live.
- **Stories** of hospitality—whatever the outcome. Have you hosted someone in your home: a friend, a family member, a stranger in need? Have you been hosted? Tell us about your experience via phone or email.
- **Metal leaf rakes (4) and wheelbarrows (2)** to replace those that have broken.



*Steve watches as Ben of Cville Foodscapes demonstrates proper tree pruning. Photo courtesy of Cville Foodscapes.*

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