

THE LONDON CATHOLIC WORKER



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summer 2020

issue 65

In this issue, Catholic Worker friends and communities from Brighton, Bradford, Birmingham, Glasgow, Durham, Amsterdam, and London, tell us how they have adjusted to life and work during the pandemic. While the original intention was to be descriptive, emotions, questions and reflections are already bubbling to the surface. Present in many of the pieces, is a real sense of the closing in of the horizon, to a place literally just beyond the garden wall, and much shared experience. In addition, however, as these pieces show, what Catholic Workers and their friends have been up to, under lockdown, varies enormously. Some are madly busy, organising food deliveries, keeping people safe, while others have used the new space to pause and reflect.

This is the ninth week of restrictions; the number of COVID deaths in the UK is heart breaking. We remember, too, the many recovering patients who, after weeks in ICU, now have to struggle back onto their feet. Even though government advisers tell us we can let the cleaner and nanny back in (who knew!) and visit an open market and car showroom, catholic workers will have to think up creative ways of practicing hospitality and resistance



Above: Sarah Fuller. Care for our common home: a spiritual and corporeal work of mercy. Photo: courtesy of the artist. Sarah Fuller is an artist, living at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. Find her work at: sarahfullerart.wordpress.com

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*Donations welcome !
see back page for details*

www.londoncatholicworker.org

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Giuseppe Conlon House update

First of all we want to say an enormous thank-you to everyone who has been supporting us throughout the coronavirus crisis! We are all doing well, although it has been a challenging period. As for most people, life has changed a lot for us.

At the start of the lockdown in April, our community had to reshape quickly, including asking that no external volunteers or visitors come to Giuseppe Conlon House.

But our biggest change is that we have had to move a number of our most vulnerable guests into single-occupancy rooms provided by the Greater London Authority and Haringey Council, and so we are now a much smaller community.

Sadly, Br. Johannes had to return to Belgium, but we have been blessed to have the additional help of Sam and Richard, who both returned to help us out – as well as our newest volunteer, Joseph, who hit the ground running!

In April, Bramble and Roland came down with COVID-19 symptoms, and so we put the house into quarantine for two weeks, isolating them on the top floor. We were completely dependent on the generosity of friends during this time, and were moved by all your support! We are so grateful for all the love, prayers, food pick-ups, meals dropped off, supplies provided, errands run... Thank you! They have both recovered now, and thankfully nobody else in the community has fallen ill. We continue to support our guests remotely, and so far they are all well. Urban Table, our soup kitchen, also continues, but in a different form: we now cook the food in advance in our own kitchen, which is then collected, and a team of volunteers distribute the meals directly to people's homes. While it has been difficult to 'let go' of many of the structures of our life and work, it's been a good challenge – giving us time to reflect and find new ways of doing things.

The Catholic Worker stays indoors

Sam Hickford

Needless to say, I was couch-surfing and teaching non-Peter Maurin GCSE English when an inconvenient spirit had the temerity to *rage within my quaking breast* and duly bade me to return to London Catholic Worker, a place that has inconveniently been a sort of refuge for me in the boyish whirlwind of my adulthood.

I am still wrestling with the same irritating spirit as I write this piece. I can only reflect on the actual facts of the situation, and I will begin upon an inquiry of such facts. I find myself - in the beginning of April - rummaging around an intentional community to ensure guests have everything they need to begin their journeys into emergency accommodation, scattered through London. Many of them are anxious and confused. Some of them vehemently *do not* want to go to hotels, but are 'high risk' and so ought to, for medico-legal-politico-social reasons that make as much sense to them as a confessional filled with baked beans. Some of them *do* want to go to hotels but cannot. This is a situation - of course - that nobody here is truly in control of. As a quasi-familiar face, I receive a lot of animosity, anger and confusion for a decision I am only implementing, having just returned because of an Inconvenient Spirit. Hobbling in the marshlands of this new landscape, I do not have enough time to reflect what is happening to intentional communities or the Catholic Worker movement.

Now I am. A little. The Catholic Worker movement *must* have survived similar global situations, like the HIV Crisis in the 1980s, yet it is as if we are encountering something new. Now we have only three guests, and we are much more of an interior community. Specifically, the London Catholic Worker – which is usually a sort

of guerilla scramble (if we are allowed to use military metaphors for something so militaristically anti-war) – is now truly a reserve army. In the boring, spiritualistic platitudes we're all used to, it's like we are a monastery or a retreat centre. This is stultifying yet fascinating.

The Catholic Worker movement normally has little time for interior reflection or careful contemplation. And so I find myself rediscovering my soul; not by intention, yet as if totally by accident. And yet the pandemic, like my own uncertain spirit, rages, and our own spiritual edification is not exactly going to terrify it away. In fact, our own spiritual edification is like the burning embers of the coffee that fuelled the composition of this article: a provocative and tempting by-product of a thoroughly destructive, and ever-continuous, process.

Sam Hickford has worked as a teacher, editor, care-worker, note-taker. He is a live-in volunteer at Giuseppe Conlon House.

Below: Joseph Beakhouse: COVID-GCH, painted while staying at Giuseppe Conlon House during lockdown **photo:** Joseph Beakhouse





Above: Quakers take part in a monthly vigil in Huddersfield town centre. Sadly, one of their number, a local vicar, died of the virus early in the pandemic. **photo: Susan Clarkson**

When lockdown becomes calm down

Susan Clarkson

I was touched and proud when I was asked to contribute to this special London Catholic Worker newsletter. Although I lived in Catholic Worker communities from 2002 to 2016, I am no longer a Catholic Worker nor indeed a Catholic. However, my time as a CW has shaped my present life as a Quaker, active still in the peace movement and in working with people seeking asylum.

The last thing I did before beginning lockdown was to join a vigil outside Huddersfield University with other Quakers, drawing attention to the university's unacceptable connection with Bahrain's police academy.

Since then I have stayed in my little flat in sheltered housing in Bradford, my place of birth. I go out early on most mornings for a gentle stroll, when the paths are deserted and the birds are singing their little hearts out! As time goes on I am enjoying this seclusion more and more, hence my renaming lock-down as calm-down.

However, I can hear Jesus, Dorothy Day and George Fox, founder of Quakerism, calling me out of my complacent tranquility and asking me 'What about those who don't have your privilege?'

When I left Oxford to return to Bradford, I was keen to find some voluntary work with people seeking asylum. I became a McKenzie Friend, accompanying people to tribunal hearings and offering moral support on a regular basis. I work with three other MFs, supporting four people.

We keep in touch by text and phone. Life is much more difficult for our friends seeking asylum, and what I can do is very little, just offer a listening ear until things change and their cases can progress. Happily, sympathetic solicitors and legal advisers are continuing to work with people remotely. This helps to keep hope alive.

As with all of us who care about our brothers and sisters in war-torn countries, I try to keep informed, despite the tragic news stories, about conditions in other countries, especially Afghanistan, where many of us have friends. All I can do is pray and keep in touch using social media.

I am immensely grateful to God for nourishing and sustaining me through this time. I also know that that nourishment is not for me alone but also for those whom I try to help.

Each Sunday I join a Zoom Meeting for Worship set up by Huddersfield Friends. This, with one or two Quaker meditation sessions called Experiment With Light, help keep my spirit nourished in the company of other Friends. Last year local Friends set up a Roots of Resistance group. Since calm-down we have been meeting regularly online. We are still working on our campaign based on Huddersfield University. We have also had workshops on 'our vision for the future' and 'nourishing hope in dark times'. We have a book group where we use Zoom and WhatsApp to talk about our shared reading.

The only things I miss which I cannot do online are – swimming and going on a bus!

Susan Clarkson blogs at [Reflections on a Journey in Faith susanclarksondotcom.wordpress.com](https://susanclarksondotcom.wordpress.com)



The Catholic Worker in the UK

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Giuseppe Conlon House offers hospitality to destitute refugees. For the time being, Urban Table, a joint project of London Catholic Worker and URC Clapton Park, provides a takeaway meal for up to 160 vulnerable people on Sundays. See p 6. We organise acts of nonviolent resistance and produce this newsletter.

The Catholic Worker Farm

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The Farm offers hospitality to destitute women. We grow organic vegetables and have a poustinia and hermitage retreat. Mary House also offers a home to four destitute women with children.

Glasgow Catholic Worker

www.catholicworker.org.uk

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We offer a place of welcome for asylum seekers and destitute refugees in the centre of Glasgow at the Garnethill Multicultural Centre, open Saturday 9:00—1:00pm, and a soup kitchen on Friday nights. We keep a vigil at Faslane Nuclear Base and hold monthly meetings and prayers.

Luckily we did have several places free so we were able to welcome new guests who would stay with us for longer. One, a mother of two sons, lost her rented room after all her black market jobs all fell through. We receive more requests for help as time moves on.

There is so much more to say on this topic: what it does to us emotionally both individually and as a community, what to do with our activism and the ways in which we try to be present in a positive way, especially now, creating a (micro)world where it's easier to be good.

Margriet Bos, of the Amsterdam Catholic Worker community, was recently a live-in volunteer at Giuseppe Conlon House.

A personal and personalist response

Richard Barnard

As some of you may know, I've had some time away from Giuseppe Conlon House. In January, I moved to Glasgow and have been hanging out with the large, inspiring group of Catholic Workers up here. I was intending to be back at GCH by now but got caught in the lockdown and then by symptoms of COVID itself, so I remain in Glasgow whilst writing this and very much miss community life. However, I am hardly alone and the community itself has been greatly changed by the response to the coronavirus pandemic. As lots of my focus has been on the activist side of the Catholic Worker, I will concentrate on how that has changed, or just plain stopped, during this period, what we can do about it and what could be next!

Fortunately I managed to get to both the Ash Wednesday vigil and Saturday at Faslane to protest the nuclear weapons held there with Glasgow Catholic Worker. I also joined the Glasgow Green Anti Capitalist Alliance in a blockade of a Shell garage. But a number of actions, that I had spent months organising, haven't occurred and that has been frustrating. However, like all things, I have found it important to look at the bigger picture. A lot of my activism

has been related to the environment and that's what some of these postponed actions were about. Well, to a degree some of that job has been done for us! No planes flying. Disaster capitalism grinding to a halt. It would be easy to sit back and say, in some tempting, but theologically, improbable and in fact erroneous and dangerous way, 'God's got this!' or 'Look! Nature is hitting back!' or 'The universe says you should all slow down and stop this destruction'.

So I came up with a short list of stuff I can and will continue to do, until the time is right to engage in nonviolent direct action again.

1. Look after each other. Activists burn out a lot. Refraining from activism can be a helpful reminder of what it's for and why you do it. Take time to pray, to be in silence with just God and listen for the spirit's prompting of what is needed next.

2. Maintain contacts and build networks. Lots of folks have more time on their hands, so strengthening contacts is key to keeping ready to act when the time is right.

3. Read. Research inspiring actions from the past. Research exciting and creative new possibilities for the future.

4. Like the Old Testament prophets, be attuned to the signs of the times, when things need to happen and what can be done.

5. In the words of Noam Chomsky, 'The coronavirus is serious enough, but there are two immense threats that we're facing. One is the growing threat of nuclear war... the other, of course, is the growing threat of global warming.'

6. Smash capitalism!! Rent strikes, fuel strikes, non-payment of bills generally, taking out loans and never paying them back will continue to put pressure on the system which as we know is the cause of this and further problems coming down the line.

7. Show love in action. Build a new society in the shell of the old.

This should keep me going until we meet in person. See you on the streets!

Richard Barnard is a member of the London Catholic Worker

Easter in corona times

Irene Roding Pemberton

all on hold
it feels like
silence
never heard before

slate clean and muddy
in the lush spring green
grass bees birds
singing sowing growing, dying
of the son
broken and betrayed
'Father!'

a mother's tears, real tears
salting cheeks lips and a
wiping hand
given life was taken
with a kiss

the quiet morning
death sinking hope
behind a stone
heavy with a woman's weeping
yet empty stillness founding life
'speak' He says
and peace
returning

all is alive more than
ever heard before
fewer engines rumbling
through
the floating skylark's song
above

Irene writes: We've had a good but funny few months in the North East really. After a quiet period in 2019, the first couple of months of 2020 saw us reigniting some of the things we had been thinking about before. Adam, Flo, Charles and I (and our little boy Patrick) have been looking for a place to live together - loosely based on CW and still developing our vision. But just as that was starting to gain momentum, the virus arrived in Europe and looking for houses/land, writing to funders etc. has paused.

Deliveries and door-step chats

Urban Table is a joint project between London Catholic Worker and Clapton Park United Reform Church, based at the Round Chapel, Hackney. Ghazal Tipu interviewed project lead, Joel Pullin.

How has the project adapted to the crisis? Urban Table has moved to a delivery-only service. For about a month, we were changing our service every week. For the first week, we didn't allow people in, and handed out food outside the church, and provided delivery for those shielding. By the fourth week, we closed the doors and only provided deliveries. We considered stopping altogether, and had a lot of conversations with the Round Chapel's management: Was it irresponsible to run the service? Or was it too dangerous to do nothing? We were told that as long as we adhered to certain rules, it was safe to continue.

What challenges have you faced? We always said the project should have an open door policy, and that we would always give guests a meal. We have now doubled capacity, and we do have to have a physically closed door! It's worrying because the list can grow and the need can grow. But we can still keep the ethos alive, even if we can't keep the physical door open.

What demand has there been for the service? We were just providing hot meals before. Now there is a rise in befriending. We have volunteers developing reciprocal relationships with guests on the phone. When we turned it into a delivery service, everyone wanted to be on our list. We've given mobile phones to local rough sleepers so

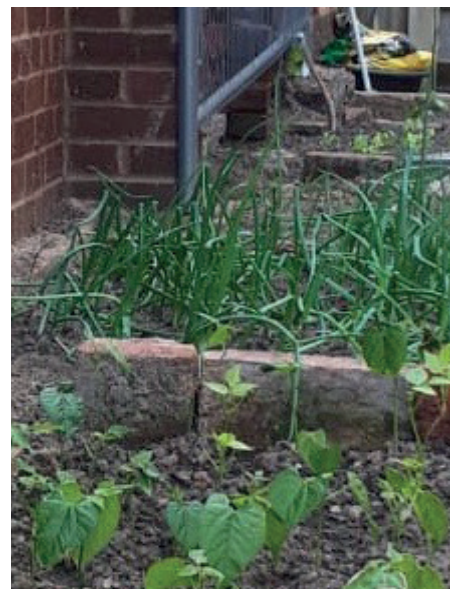
we can arrange delivery to a place comfortable to them. The present challenge is to build a relationship of trust, within which a rough sleeper will be where they say they will be, so we can deliver the meal.

How many guests does the project support? We delivered 135 meals yesterday, which is the highest number we've ever delivered. When you ask people: 'Would you like a meal?' they sometimes respond, 'Doesn't somebody else need it?' or 'I'm OK at the moment'. They often check that someone else isn't going without, which has been eye-opening.

What feedback are you getting from guests? Some people miss Urban Table. There are some people who will never give me their phone number and who will come knocking on the church door! There are regulars who are really grateful. You see different sides of people, and you have to respect that they're letting you into their space. Just to give you their address is a huge level of trust. To then welcome you into their home is a giant thing. Some are living in a chaotic situation, for example without electricity, and you want to be respectful. Urban Table is about walking into a space respectfully.

How will the project adapt to the ongoing 'new normal'? The new normal seems to change every week! I don't think I've ever been interested in normal. I feel the community we've had is still there, and it is still surviving. What I love is that we did change and adapt our service, and it will change and adapt again. That's all we can do.

Ghazal Tipu is a communications professional, writer and activist, who volunteers at Giuseppe Conlon House and Urban Table.



Above: Vegetables growing in the yard at Fatima House, Birmingham. **Photo:** Mauricio Silva

Fatima House in Lockdown

Mauricio Silva

Fatima House offers accommodation to nine destitute, female asylum seekers in Birmingham.

Over the past seven weeks the women at Fatima House have been trying to make sense of the crisis. The fact that they had not been granted asylum status before the start of lockdown meant that they could not access any accommodation and support elsewhere and so have had to stay in the house.

Despite the initial sense of despair and confusion, it was inspiring to witness an increasing sense of solidarity amongst them. 'We have no-one else but each other' one of the women said to the rest of the group, insisting that in the face of the crisis, they should become like a family that care for each other by respecting the lockdown restrictions. Even in the middle of the initial confusion, the 'Fatima family' were able to organise themselves by preparing and freezing food to be used in case one of them caught the virus. They created a system to check on each other regularly, particularly the most vulnerable amongst them.

Left: When all the takeaway meals have been packed, volunteers gather, at a safe distance, for prayer. **Photo:** Henrietta Cullinan



Over the weeks, there have been tensions, particularly regarding the need to keep the house safe by not meeting people from outside. The support networks that the women rely on are fragile, making these restrictions particularly difficult. In addition to stress about the crisis here in Britain, they are also constantly worried about their countries of origin, where they have relatives and friends. Nevertheless, even with their limited English, they try hard to give each other updates and news.

With all the extra time, the women decided to work together, clearing and cleaning the gardens around the church next door. When Easter came, although the church was closed and empty, the gardens outside looked more beautiful than usual thanks to their hard work. One of the women told me that, despite being from different faith backgrounds, they had participated in this gardening work 'to say thank you to the church' for offering them hospitality at Fatima House.

Just before the lockdown began, the gardening project had already started at Fatima House. Every Monday afternoon, volunteers and residents would gather to clean and improve a small area at the back of the house. Following the restrictions the volunteers could no longer visit, but the women have continued this work, and now the place has been transformed, and beautiful flowers await the growth of tomatoes, lettuces, peppers and onions.

Despite the companionship, solidarity and resilience shown by the residents, this has been a very difficult time for them. The vulnerability they experience due to their immigration status has a detrimental effect on their mental health. Covid-19 exacerbates their sense of uncertainty about the future. May the support received by so many during this crisis be a true sign of solidarity with those seeking sanctuary amongst us.

Mauricio Silva is the project coordinator and organises the day-to-day management of the project. First published by Columban Missionaries Britain

columbans.co.uk/fatima-house-in-lockdown-blog



The Catholic Worker Farm LIVE Stream Open Day

June 27th

Well folks, it's that corona virus! So unfortunately we won't be able to hold an in-person Open Day on June 2nd. Instead we will hold a **Live Stream Open Day** on June 27th. Scott, a volunteer, and one of our sisters will be

Kings Bay Plowshares 7

Dates have now been given for sentencing: June 8, 29 and 30. Liz McAlister will be sentenced by video conference on June 8 at 9:00 am. The other defendants are expecting to be sentenced in court in Brunswick, Georgia at the end of June.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Liz McAlister, 78, Stephen Kelly S.J., 70, Martha Hennessy, 62, Clare Grady, 58, Patrick O'Neill, 62, Mark Colville,

sharing some thoughts about the work of the farm. We will be giving a tour of the farm - lifestyles of the poor and infamous! There will be a question and answer session. Our documentary will be shown! Finally we are hoping to have a musician do a few songs for us.

We hope that our small offering may help our friends understand a little more about our life and mission. We also want to express our deepest gratitude for all of the love and care that you have demonstrated towards our community...

Farmfest and European Christian Anarchist Conference will hopefully be moving online. Check our facebook page for details: [@thecatholicworkerfarm](https://www.facebook.com/thecatholicworkerfarm)

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55, and Carmen Trotta, 55, entered the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. Carrying hammers and bottles of their own blood, the seven sought to enact prophet Isaiah's command to 'Beat swords into plowshares.' Following a three-day jury trial last October, the seven were convicted of misdemeanor trespass and three felonies: destruction of government property, depredation of government property on a military installation, and conspiracy. They now face lengthy sentences.

To find out more visit kingsbayplowshares7.org



Giuseppe Conlon House Wish List

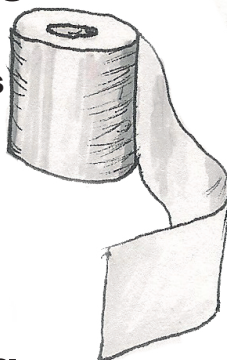
Food

- Chopped tomatoes
- Peanut butter
- Cooking oil
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Easy-cook rice
- Basmati rice
- Brown rice
- Oats
- Couscous
- Noodles
- White vinegar
- Hummus
- Nutritional yeast
- Tahini
- Soy sauce
- Spices & herbs
- Honey
- Muesli
- Breakfast cereal
- Fruit juice and squash
- Herbal teabags
- Chilli sauce
- Nuts and seeds



Toiletries

- Toilet paper
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Shampoo
- Liquid soap
- Razors



Cleaning

Eco-friendly products:

- Anti-bacterial spray
- Bicarbonate of soda
- Multi-purpose cleaner
- Toilet cleaner
- Laundry detergent
- Floor cleaner



Miscellaneous

- NEW Men's underwear
- M-XL
- Candles and tea lights
- Umbrellas



Support our work

We are a part of the radical, Christian, pacifist Catholic Worker movement started in 1933 in New York by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. There are now over 150 houses and communities in the United States and in other countries. Catholic Worker houses are financially independent. There are no headquarters, nor is there a central organisation. For more on the international movement visit: www.catholicworker.com.

At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for around twenty homeless, destitute asylum seekers who are not allowed to work or claim benefits. In collaboration with two local churches we also serve a meal for over fifty people on Sunday afternoons.

Donations welcome!

We are not paid for this work. We receive nothing from the government. For reasons to do with our political witness, we are not a registered charity.

We rely on our readers' donations to pay utility bills, volunteer and guest expenses, for building repairs, printing, and household supplies.

Ways to donate:

Cheque: send cheques payable to 'London Catholic Worker', to Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1 BG

Online banking: London Catholic Worker, Triodos Bank, Acc No: 20066996 Sort Code: 16 58 10

Paypal: visit our home page www.londoncatholicworker.org

Standing Order: to arrange a standing order use the adjacent form (left) or visit www.londoncatholicworker.org

Standing Order Form <small>Please use block letters</small>	
I wish to pay the London Catholic Worker £10/ £20/£40/other amount per month/ other	
Payments to be made monthly/ other First Payment to be made on: / / 20 and monthly thereafter	
Name of your bank	
Address of your bank	
Your account name	
Your account number	
Your bank sort code	
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Bristol BS1 5AS	Until further notice the sum of the value indicated above
Signed	Date
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