

## 'Broken Shards and Falling Crumbs'

By Corrine Schraufnagel who works as a nurse at Stout Street Clinic at Samaritan House



Kathleen and Corrine at Samaritan House Clinic

**W**hen I complete an intake with a new patient at the shelter I volunteer at this year, there is a never-ending string of questions I must ask. Do you have diabetes? What is your HIV status? Who would you like me to put down as an emergency contact? Normally these questions are all answered with some conversation, explanation, or a simple yes or no. The question that is most difficult for my clients to answer typically stops discussion in its tracks.

Have you ever experienced any trauma in your life?

After a pause of a few seconds, they usually respond with "Well, what do you mean by 'trauma'?"

My education as a Public Health nurse did not teach me how to respond to these questions and answers; not even my background on the streets of Skid Row in Los Angeles could have prepared me for some of the things I would hear in reply. Awful things. Life-altering events. Rape as a child; physical and emotional abuse as a child; beatings by ex-husbands, ex-boyfriends, current boyfriends; ex-wives leaving

**“I am asked to share in Christ’s burden of sorrow, if only for a short while.”**

with everything; police brutality; racial discrimination; near-death beatings and robbery for a \$50 bill; 30-year meth addictions; mommy dying by daddy’s gun; siblings dying in tragic car accidents; almost dying from exposure on the street; watching best friends die on the street. The list goes on in an endless accolade to the unconceivable reality that is daily life for my patients. I am always surprised by the answers I hear, whatever form they come in. The truthfulness I receive blows me away. Who am I to be asking this intimate, revealing question? But I am invited in and asked to share their burden of sorrow, if only for a few minutes.

And for those few minutes, I can honestly hear their hearts breaking. The tiny shards hit the exam room floor. The room fills with a deep silence and then the sound of voices on the verge of tears, voices filled with forced strength, practiced to perfection over the years. Every time this happens, I am acutely

reminded of the Eucharist. Just as I am invited to be a part of my clients’ sorrow and trauma, I am asked to partake in the sorrow and trauma that was Christ’s, that which we celebrate in the Eucharist.

And I am invited in, not as a wayward bystander but as part of the offering; I am asked to share in Christ’s burden of sorrow, if only for a short while.

For those few minutes, we can honestly hear Jesus’ heart and body breaking. The bread is broken. Tiny crumbs of Christ fall to the plate. The room fills with a deep silence and then the sound of voices on the verge of tears, voices filled with forced strength, practiced to perfection over the years; we recite the same words as the undeserving centurion, the same sentiment which rings in the crumbling hearts of my patients:

“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” †

Cathryn, 5th from left, "Expanding her Identity"



## An Expanding Identity

By Cathryn Dutton who works at Guardian Angels School

It is often hard to understand others' burdens and heartaches. Even the most well-intentioned people can find it difficult to relate to or empathize with those who are poor and homeless, those who have mental illness or special needs, those who have been victimized and those who are marginalized. I have found that even despite my best efforts to live and serve alongside these people, sometimes it's hard not to feel that "they" need help from "me"—middle-class college-educated me. It's often a challenge to blur the lines to create "us" when the differences can be so blatant.

I have found that living in an "intentional community" for the past four and half months has greatly strengthened my ability to broaden the definition of my community. My community is not just the eight other young volunteers I live with or even all the

other people who consider themselves a part of the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers. My community is Denver, Colorado, the United States, the world—the human community. Values that I have always considered my own have been renewed and fortified by realizing this and by being able to practice them in the smaller space of my house community. As surprising as it may seem, a lot of patience and compassion is required when living with eight different people who all have a lot of passion, opinions, and ideas. Not only does living in this sometimes hectic but mostly energizing community challenge me with my own ability to be patient and compassionate but I am also shown constant patience and compassion by each one of my housemates. I see a great deal of love, kindness, and support in our household and I know that the other eight people who sit

at my dinner table every night are helping me to truly come into the woman I want to be and the kind of servant I believe I am called to be.

My community has also helped open my eyes to the fact that everyone struggles. Though this is a pretty obvious statement, I think that sometimes it is easier to consider "the big issues"—things like poverty, immigration, abuse and violence, mental illness, etc, to be distant problems. Maybe some of the children that I work with or some of my housemates' clients have to deal with these horrible issues but I don't. My friends don't. In sharing our stories this fall, the nine of us learned a lot about each other—including that none of us is a stranger to heartache. Some of us are personally familiar with poverty, abuse, illness, living on the margins, and other "big issues." I think knowing that these people whom I love and trust and consider to have similar values and passions as I do have also struggled just like the people whom we serve. It makes us all seem a little bit closer to one another. It bonds us together and it makes the lines between who is the helped and the helper, the served and the servant a lot less clear. And I like that.

I know that living in community, not only with my eight beautiful housemates who I have grown to cherish so dearly, but with the greater Denver and human community, has planted within me seeds of patience, compassion, and understanding. I know that these values will allow me to grow into the person that God made me to be and to continue to work for peace and justice in the world. ✝



The other half of CVV Group 18

## Who Is My Neighbor?

By Casey Sharp,  
who works at Lutheran Family Services

"I just thank God I was born here and not over 'there.'" We often hear statements like this when we compare our lives in the United States to the vast majority of the rest of the world. We seldom stop to consider the kind of God implied by that kind of "thanks." No one chose to be born; even less a latitude and longitude. We must be careful not to worship a slot-machine-god that randomly blesses our country while leaving much of the rest of the world in bitter circumstances. Inequalities and injustices among the nations often seem so ingrained in our world that we mistake their presence in creation for the approval of the Creator.

This year I have had the honor of working with the refugee resettlement department at Lutheran Family Services. Many of my clients come from what we can frankly call the very manifestation of Hell on Earth. Out of the estimated 18 million refugees worldwide they have been given the rare opportunity to join the 70,000 allowed to rebuild their lives here in the United States every year. If that number seems low (and it is) just keep in mind that the USA lets in more refugees than the rest of all of our developed-world allies combined. Very few get this opportunity; much less with their entire families. There are about eight million refugees who have lived in refugee camps for over five years. Many of my clients, especially the Bhutanese refugees, were born into refugee camps. Bhutanese refugees under the age of twenty have never even set foot in the land of Bhutan. They have only known the shadow of a life found in the refugee camps of Nepal.

Every day at work I find my "first world" sensibilities brutally humbled by these refugees who have endured so much to come to this country. Truly, few Americans are more "American" than the ones who were not born here. They know what this country means far better than I. One story in particular sticks out in my mind. A few months ago I helped an older man from Eritrea get a job at a local hotel. It was a difficult minimum-wage job,



Georghi and Casey at Lutheran Family Services

one many Americans would not take, but this man was so joyful just to have any kind of work. He had been working long enough to receive basic health benefits, and I was helping him with the paperwork. We came to the part about life insurance. He was eligible for a basic life insurance policy with his health benefits. It was only when I had to explain the entire concept of "life insurance" to a refugee from the developing world that I realized that life insurance is the epitome of a first world luxury. In Eritrea, no financial benefit comes to your family when you die. As I explained life insurance to him, he seemed confused at first. Eventually he understood despite our language barrier and my inability to explain something so common to me. After I finished he paused, folded his arms over his chest, and leaned back in his chair a bit. Then he pointed one finger to the sky and looked up and smiled at me saying, "God is my life insurance." I choked back the lump in my throat from being in the presence of such faith.

To work with refugees is to reject (or rather expand) my own sense of nationality and group identity. I understand that my own birth in this nation ought not give me any sense of entitlement. Contrary to the Puritan ethos of our history, God does not love the people of this land any more or less than

anywhere else. His love is infinite and expands in all directions. As I help refugees find jobs and regain a sense of self worth I am humbled and honored to in some small way express God's love for them. I get to be a small part of the true intentions of the Creator. The differences between people and cultures are real. We should not gloss over them or ignore them in a weak attempt to be "tolerant." However, working with people from all over the world I find that those very real differences can only bring us together more and more in a mutual fascination and respect for one another's unique human experience. The Qu'ran tells our Muslim brothers and sisters, "We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other (49:13)." Our differences are a lesson in love. We may have been born "here" and they may have been born "there" but when we let God's love enter into our sense of geography we find that the world suddenly shrinks. Last year I hardly could have pointed out Bhutan on a map. Now the struggle of Bhutan's refugees has become an intimate part of my own life. The other side of the world suddenly moved in next door, or rather they were there all along, and I am finally getting around to meeting my neighbors. ✝

## The Spirituality of Hospitality

By Maureen Brabec who works at Sacred Heart House Denver

As a volunteer, I am a guest. Since being warmly welcomed into the CVV community in August, I've had housing, plentiful food, spiritual encouragement and formation, and professional development at no financial cost to myself. It has all been gifted to me. I am dependent on the hospitality of the CVV staff, Sacred Heart House staff and the entire Denver community to be sustained here.

The homeless and at-risk populations of Denver are not usually fortunate enough to receive the same hospitality I have. I never worry about where I will sleep, how I will eat, or what I am doing tomorrow. Even with that knowledge, it has been a huge challenge for me to integrate the Christian value of hospitality into my work at Sacred Heart House of Denver. It is very easy for me to get into "checklist mode," that is, I only feel that I'm getting anything done when there is a tangible result or a measurable outcome. That tendency is something I have been working on erasing from my prayer life in a special way this year.

The challenging thing about erasing this personal tendency and being a case manager at a homeless shelter is that checklists can be a very efficient way of helping residents. This is especially true at Sacred Heart House where the residents have 30 days to establish adequate income and find suitable housing. As you might imagine this is no small feat for the women to accomplish. Over my first few months I realized that it was possible though, especially for the highly driven women. So by November, I became very efficient at weeding out anyone who called (cont. pg.3)



Tania meets with Maureen at Sacred Heart House Denver



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## The Spirituality of Hospitality

(Continued)

the shelter and might be a “bad fit” based on the guidelines established before I got there. I was strangely proud of myself for being able to eliminate potential “bad fits” according to our eligibility requirements and digging for issues that might prevent prospective residents from successfully finding housing within the month that they lived at Sacred Heart House. I had forgotten the importance of hospitality, of welcoming each person as Christ, in favor of trying to find the “perfect resident.” Are there any perfect people? Am I perfect? No and no. I was successful in keeping the needs of the shelter in mind but I had forgotten the generosity and hospitality of Christ. I had forgotten that in my imperfection God accepts me and all of us in light of our whole selves - our good qualities, our weaknesses, and our attempts to become better people.

Aware of all these things Christ welcomes us all to the table of sacrifice every day of every week. The Eucharist is a greater gift than my case management skills or a place to stay and Christ sacrificed himself for us so freely. Christ’s generosity and hospitality reminds me to be as generous as possible with the small gifts I can offer. If we accept God’s hospitality, we will be welcomed into our Heavenly home at the end of our earthly lives. We accept that invitation every day of our lives by extending the warm welcome of Christ to all we meet. Paul exhorts us in his letter to the Romans to “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7 NAB) That call is what Christian hospitality is all about. So the next time I feel frustrated with a resident or feel hesitant to offer someone an in-person interview, I will strive to remember the hospitality Christ offers each of us and extend it to my sisters. 🙏

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