



Fall/Winter 2008

Dorothy Day House

Each day folks at Dorothy Day House rise before the crack of dawn to prepare breakfast. Our volunteer base and two employees work hard to bring a warm meal to the folks at the Berkeley Men's Shelter in the Veterans building and at Trinity Church. Most evenings each month, dinners are prepared and served by various East Bay groups at the Men's shelter. And during the winter, DDH runs the Storm Shelter at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

Community Dinners at the Shelter

More than 15 years ago, when Dorothy Day House volunteers had stabilized the breakfasts we serve in the Shelter and in the vicinity of People's Park (now at Trinity Church), we looked into occasionally serving dinner in the shelter. The goal, as we do with our Christmas/holiday dinners, was to make home-cooked meals we'd serve at home and to sit down and share a meal with the residents of the shelter. We decided to encourage local schools and churches to take on an evening or two each month to be responsible for a meal. This program, in true Catholic Worker grassroots fashion, with the scheduling skill of Cynthia Geddes, blossomed into meals served almost every night of the month.

The diversity of groups that serve dinner at the Shelter represents the original ecumenical nature of the Founders of Dorothy Day House in the early 90s. When we left the kitchen of the St. Mary Magdalen parish in North Berkeley, where we branched out of the Berkeley Catholic Worker, we floated around from kitchen to kitchen including our own, but most notably to St. Mark's on Bancroft and the Berkeley Zen Center on Russell Street. We finally settled in the shelter in the Veterans Building, where we have been for a good 15 years. But during that time, we've had volunteers from just about every church and temple and school, and organization in the Berkeley and Oakland vicinity! These ties have led to an interesting array of groups serving dinner. In the months ahead, I will write about different groups that serve the same people, but at the tail end of the day, instead of the crack of dawn.

If one of these stories moves you, know that there is the opportunity to touch base with an organization and simply join in and cook and serve and eat in the tradition of our forebears Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

This month, we start with the folks from **Berkeley Zen Center**, whom I count as early volunteers from the days of St. Mary Magdalen, when I remember doing breakfasts with Maylie Scott, a good friend of Shura Wallin (DDH co-founder and former volunteer coordinator) and a truly joyful participant in our breakfast program.

Berkeley Zen Center, 1929 Russell Street, Berkeley 510-845-2403 berkeleyzencenter.org

Quick Note: we are still raising funds for the **Sleeping Bag Drive** for the Winter Berkeley Emergency Storm Shelter. Please see back page and consider participating.

Berkeley Emergency Storm Shelter Call for Volunteers

A **winter shelter** for 50 located on Bancroft Way
for our family of homeless folks.

The shelter at St. Mark's Episcopal Church at 2300 Bancroft Way has been operated by the Catholic Worker for the past five winters. This shelter receives funding from the City of Berkeley provided to Dorothy Day House and has limited nights of availability. The shelter is open on those nights of inclement weather beginning the Monday after Thanksgiving through the Wednesday before Easter. Nightly opening times vary as well as the nights of operation as funding is limited.

We need people at opening time between 7-11 PM as well as closing time between 5:30 – 8AM to facilitate our efforts.

Contact **J C Orton @ 510-684-1892** to sign up.

Berkeley Zen Center and Shelter Dinners

In November, I visited a Friday night dinner crew working in the Dorothy Day House kitchen at the Veterans Building on Center Street. This kitchen in which we prepare breakfasts daily, with one shift at 5:30AM and the other at 6:30AM, was abuzz with evening/dinner activity.

***"We have all know
the long loneliness
and we have
learned that the
only solution is
love and that love
comes with
community."***

- Dorothy Day

John, Louise, Betty, Lance and Yuri were diligently chopping vegetables and meticulously laying out lasagna noodles alternated with a meat or vegetarian mélange in our deep heavy cooking trays. Two pans would be enough to feed the 60 or so residents of the shelter that night. We chatted amicably while they continued to work diligently to get a good, solid meal on the table. And I must say that as we talked, my stomach was rumbling at the suggestion of the smells of this delicious food.

The Berkeley Zen Center group handles two Fridays (2nd and 4th) per month. Lance tells me that the connection goes back to the days of Maylie Scott in the mid-90s.

As Lance laid out the lasagna noodles, he explained that he does this just to feed and show respect for the shelter residents.

Continued

Zen Center Dinner continued.

Lance says he is not here to proselytize, but to share a meal and in the process to show respect. Betty, who has been doing the dinners for six years, says it is their opportunity to “give back,” balancing what they do all day for themselves, and this only 4-5 hours/month. It is a fraction of their time to get outside themselves and give to others. Their conversation reminded me very much of Dorothy Day’s words from *The Long Loneliness*, “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community. **It all happened while we sat there talking, and it is still going on.**”

Lance related his original introduction to Zen Buddhism, when he went to Tasajara in ‘92-‘93. He knew nothing about Zen then and dove right in. He now practices regularly. Here, he struggles with the experiences with the men in the shelter. He’s had many heart-warming, deep, thoughtful conversations in the shelter. And in true Catholic Worker fashion, when there is enough food, they sit down with the residents and eat as equals, sharing bread.

Betty keeps coming back because they are so appreciated, a sentiment echoed by all the volunteers. The men just love the home-cooked meals and never cease in their expression of thanks. Louise related what she learned about the frailties of the men in the shelter. While they all have stories of regular lives that got thrown off by a problem, often with drugs or alcohol, they are coping. Some have jobs, but still cannot afford housing and do not have family to fall back on in times of trouble. The health concerns, that we take for granted can be handled by our health care providers, are far more problematic for the shelter residents. This is exemplified in their lack of teeth, which is why Louise and John were finely chopping vegetables. Dinners are always meant to be easily chewed and digested.

The group is looking forward to their post-Christmas dinner they serve the fourth Friday of every December. They always bake whole chickens with gravy, mashed potatoes, beans, salad, and all kinds of desserts. The men in the shelter really appreciate this home-cooked holiday feast and it was clear from the enthusiasm and smiles of the dinner volunteers that everyone loves providing this meal.

Regular Small Business Donors

Consider patronizing our regular small business donors, who help us in many ways to provide significant portions of the meals we serve.

- Berkwood Hedge School
- Polly Kerr--The Burrito Factory
- The Cheeseboard Collective
- Armando--Starbuck's (Shattuck)
- Nadia--Peet's (Telegraph)

Foundations

We are grateful for the support of the following foundations:

- City of Berkeley
- Walter & Elise Haas Fund
- Y & H Soda Foundation
- Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund
- Crescent Porter Hale Foundation
- Van Loben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation

Winter Shelter Sleeping Bag Drive

Each winter, Dorothy Day House runs the **Berkeley Emergency Storm Shelter** for 50 men per night. Our shelter has less stringent rules, welcoming those not welcome at other shelters, in an attempt to get everyone off the street. We open this shelter up to supplement the regular shelters when the weather is cold or rainy. We have cots on which the men sleep, but must replace the bedding each year. This year, we would like to use sleeping bags so that the residents can keep them when they leave. Furthermore, we will distribute other sleeping bags on the streets throughout the winter. **Yes, they are really only \$10.86 each!**

	Number Sleeping Bags	Total Cost
	1	\$ 10.86
	2	\$ 21.72
	3	\$ 32.58
	4	\$ 43.44
	5	\$ 54.30
	10	\$108.60

Your Name _____
Address _____
Phone (optional) _____
Email (optional) _____

For pledges, we will send a reminder. All donations are tax deductible. We do not share our mailing list.

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Catholic Worker
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