

Critical Housing Crisis

Helen Gatonyl

It is a mark of a caring society that all peoples are given the opportunity to live in environments of safety and security so that both they and the children of our future are given opportunities to participate fully.

The earthquakes that hit the Canterbury region in 2010/11 destroyed a significant amount of rental housing and damaged many homes. This has resulted in reduced supply, increased demand and increases in rental costs. The average weekly rent in the Greater Christchurch area has increased 31% since August 2010. Tenants are significantly affected by issues of affordability, accessibility and suitability of rental housing.

Rental Survey

The Tenants Protection Association (CHCH) Inc rental survey was a response to the concerns expressed by many tenants across Canterbury with these rent increases and with the quality of their housing.

The report considered the results of the survey which asked tenants questions about rent increases, quality of rental housing and the effects of rising rents on tenants' well-being post- earthquakes.

The survey was conducted in the Christchurch and Canterbury regions (including Ashburton, Waimakariri and Selwyn districts) over a 3 month period – from mid-February to mid-May 2013.



The costs and effects of finding and applying for housing, household moving expenses and paying new bonds and letting fees is huge on tenants. They report high stress and anxiety in not only finding the money to cover the initial costs but also the effects on their children of having to move to a new district and new school and being further away from social supports.

Tenants were asked to explain how the rental increases affected their and their families' well-being. The main categories identified by the tenants were:

- Inability to afford / find more suitable or appropriate housing
- Inability to afford any extras / discretionary spending such as holidays,

petrol, school camps, clothes, leisure activities

- Feeling stress, worry, depression, fear of the future
- Inability to afford food
- Lower standard of living
- Need to move away from the city
- Inability to afford heating / power bills
- Inability to save for a house deposit
- Needing to get extra flat-mates
- Inability to afford doctor's visits and medicine

Rising Costs

The rising cost of rental housing has clearly had significant effects on tenants, particularly the



vulnerable and disadvantaged such as young people, the elderly, solo parents, families with low incomes, people with health issues, and people with poor credit ratings. Tenants of all income levels with dogs report extreme difficulty finding housing. Many tenants have reported incidents of rent gouging (excessive rent increases e.g. \$80per week, \$100per week and more) which has far-reaching effects on tenants' lives, especially those on fixed incomes.

Some tenants have identified the **letting fee** as being a significant barrier to getting rental housing. With rising rental costs, the extra burden of paying the agent's letting fee (1 weeks' rent plus GST) is causing extreme hardship. The Ministry of Social Development does not give an advance on a benefit to pay this fee. With no other financial resources and no assistance from the Government to pay this fee some families state that they are facing homelessness.

Some tenants report that they believe they have received notices to terminate the tenancy so that landlords can increase the rent before the required 180 day separation between rent increases. The legislative provision that allows landlords to end a

tenancy with 90 days' notice without cause is seriously undermining tenants' security of tenure. Given the current lack of housing supply, the effects on tenants are extreme. More families face the prospect of homelessness or dislocation and all of the social and health problems that result.

Many tenants report that a major effect on them of the rent increases is the inability to find or afford better housing. Tenants who have been encouraged by medical professionals to find a warmer, drier home to address chronic health problems cannot afford a better standard of housing and thus remain unwell. Families that need to find housing with more bedrooms to accommodate a growing family cannot afford the rising costs and end up in overcrowded living situations and face greater risk of the associated problems that go hand-in-hand with overcrowding such as more frequent illnesses, stress and domestic violence.

People living in overcrowded circumstances also fit the definition of homeless as used by Statistics New Zealand:

'Living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing: are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household or living in uninhabitable housing'ⁱ

While most tenants report that the very basic standards of housing such as toilets, running water, etc as detailed in this study are being maintained, they report other problems with their dwellings such as broken/cracked windows and windows that don't open, doors that are stuck, broken pipes, unsafe flooring and leaking roofs are not being repaired.

If a *Warrant of Fitness for Rental Housing* programme was in existence then a landlord would be required to meet standards that would address these problems before they were able to rent out their properties. The recent announcement that the Government will implement a Housing Warrant of Fitness system in Housing New Zealand properties is welcome but must be extended to include the private sector as soon as possible given that this sector houses the majority of tenants.

Helen Gatonyl is manager of the Tenants Protection Association which has for thirty years operated in Christchurch to provide information, advice and support for tenants. It has for many years called for a W.O.F for all rental properties.

ⁱ Statistics New Zealand. *New Zealand definition of homelessness*. 2009

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation's founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate three houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert, Thomas Merton, and Joseph Cardijn. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We usually receive back more than we ever give. We promote non-violence and a 'small is beautiful' approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism. We also engage in regular prayer and generally struggle along like everybody else.

We celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations

***I was a stranger and you gave me shelter.* Matt 25/36.**

Affordable shelter is a right being undermined every day in many cities and towns across NZ.

Real Estate Institute figures show Canterbury has the fastest-selling homes and the fastest-rising prices of any New Zealand region. However, costs are bearing little relation to the needs of many people who are being milked of everything they have in order to try and get accommodation. Christchurch house prices are 10.6 percent higher than a year ago, while inflation accounts for only one quarter of that. 'Trade Me said rental demand was 16 percent higher from April to June than the same three months last year, and are up 22 percent over 12 months' (*The Press*, 9 July 2013). Surely this is stealing by stealth?

The response of the political and civil authorities is always the same – let the 'market' determine the levels of rent and housing affordability. The same mantra is applied to food and energy. This 'free market' mantra underpins corporate capitalism the world over. Yet it is obvious the 'market' cannot provide what is needed at an affordable rate. As can be seen by the housing crisis outlined above, it is anything but free. It is simply unregulated.

Yet it is obvious the 'market' cannot provide what is needed at an affordable rate. As can be seen by the housing crisis outlined above, it is anything but free. It is simply unregulated.

This type of thinking, in religious terms, is heresy. It is a premise condemned by Church teaching – and nailed repeatedly by Pope Francis in recent talks. He is clearly teaching that so-called 'market forces' should not be the sole criteria for social policy, especially in providing for basic human needs like shelter and food. And in his final social encyclical (1987), Pope John Paul II called such thinking 'a structure of sin'. Powerful words indeed!

What appears to have happened in Christchurch in particular is that housing numbers have been substantially reduced by the quakes. That's pretty obvious. But with the 'market' and not human beings determining the social spin offs from this devastation, costs have soared way beyond peoples' ability to pay – and way beyond what is just or fair. The

Government refuses to take a stand to protect the vulnerable from price gouging. . This means they are left to face the future unprotected in any way. No doubt they will be blamed for their own plight by those with plenty!

A recent Tenants Protection Association (TPA) survey found Christchurch tenants were paying more than 40 percent of their income on housing alone. Food and other basic needs were left to scrap over the remaining percentage. As TPA director Helen Gatonyl said, 'Tenants cannot afford to pay for power bills, food, petrol or going to the doctor.'

Without constraints, this is a recipe for structuring further levels of poverty right into the social fabric of our society. When rentals have jumped almost overnight from around \$300 per week to \$800 – \$1000 per week, simply because of the shortage of housing, then we have a growing crisis. Plenty of rentals have gone down this road in recent months.

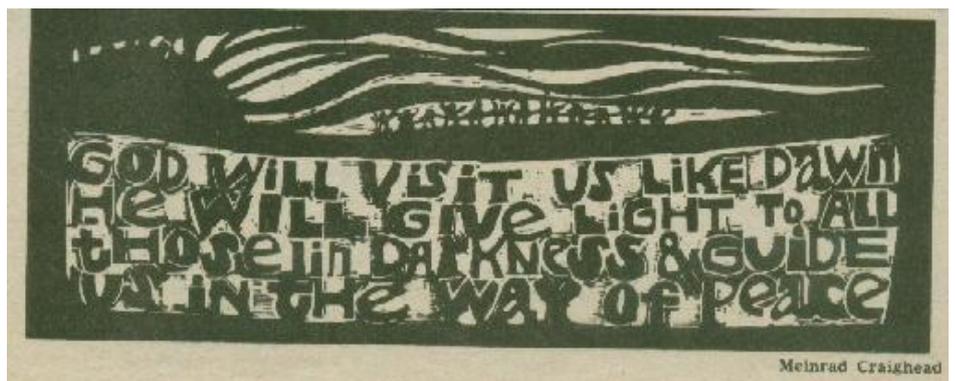
Jesus identifies with the homeless one who knocks on the door. It is the Risen Christ who knocks. In the same way, Christ identifies with one who 'has nowhere to lay his/her head' because houses are too expensive, only available to the well off, while rentals continue to climb out of reach of the poor.

In shutting the poor out of the housing market, we are shutting Christ out. As Pope Francis said recently in Brazil, 'When someone abandons the poor, that person becomes poor himself. Don't let the attitude of the disposable society enter your heart. No-one is disposable.'

The Catholic Worker practice of personalism challenges each person to try and take some responsibility for their homeless neighbour. Our needy neighbour is Christ. That is why Dorothy Day always promoted the idea of a 'Christ room' for the needy in every home and every parish.

On the wider front, the Government needs to bring in some controls to limit the price gouging that is going on under their noses. Unaided, 'market forces' will never provide the sort of economic and social justice that people deserve in a democracy and in a nation with a history of giving the underdog a fair go.

–Jim Consedine



Editorial 2 Labour Laws Under Attack

Lest anyone had any doubts as to the National Government's social agenda, they need only look to the Employment Relations Amendment Bill currently before parliament.

The Bill will fundamentally alter the relationships – hard won after any years of struggle – between employers and workers, coming down strongly on the side of employers.

Fundamental changes proposed include:

The right for employers to opt out of collective bargaining. At the moment, collective bargaining once commenced must be continued until agreement is reached, or there is a valid reason as to non-completion. The proposed changes will allow employers to opt out of collective bargaining if they stall. They will have all the power.

The right for employers to opt out of multi-employer collective agreements. The union movement believes this will lead to the fragmentation of national agreements, inconsistent wage rates.

A proposal to remove the 30-day rule for new employees. Currently, staff are covered by a collective agreement for the first 30-days regardless of whether they belong to a union or not. This proposed change will result in employers being able to offer some staff lesser terms

than others at the commencement of their employment.

Other changes proposed include more flexibility around meal breaks and tightening rules around striking. Again, these all favour employers over workers rights.

The Catholic Church has a long tradition of social teachings regarding the rights of workers in the workplace and in wider society, including the role of workers in sustaining a life of dignity and security for themselves and their families. But National-led governments have traditionally favoured the rights of capital and employers over workers.

The last time the National Government was in power, they introduced the anti-union Employment Contracts Act on May 1st 1991, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's 1891 groundbreaking encyclical on workers' rights, *Rerum Novarum*. How was that for cynical timing?

Over the past 120 years, Catholic Social Teaching has had plenty to say about relationships in the workplace – rights, responsibilities, justice. They have stressed the importance of good relations and of there being a balance of power between employers and employees.

This current round of industrial legislation further erodes the principles and protections outlined in these social encyclicals. They should be scrapped.

—Jim Consedine

Editorial 3 Mary and the Dragon

Like me, haven't you always been fascinated by the dragon story we hear at Mass on the Feast of the Assumption? (Rev 11/9, 12/6-10)

When I was young, it was easy to take it literally and have Mary go floating up to heaven, body and soul! Later I doubted it, and later again, I totally disbelieved it. At that time I discovered the irony of the word 'assumption'. Now I think the actually imagery doesn't matter. It is what is behind the words and what they represent that matters. And it contains a vital message for our time.

In the forty years that followed, we brought Mary back down to earth and we loved her as an earthly mother and sister. But now I am beginning to realize why our Catholic heritage gave her titles like 'Queen of heaven'

This is really my main point. We have been so inspired, warmed, uplifted by knowing Mary in this down-to-earth way, I wonder whether we are shortchanging ourselves if we limit ourselves to this pragmatic approach. There is a fundamental aspect of our life and faith that is connected to the supernatural and cosmic. This aspect has become sidelined because it was presented as remote and

saccharine.

Note the day's other readings. The epistle says the end will come when God hands over the Kingdom 'having done away with every sovereignty, authority and power'. Luke's gospel says that 'God has done great wonders and scattered the proud in their plans, and pulled down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the downtrodden.'

The great power of the day at the time of writing was the Roman Empire – depicted by the dragon and pulled down from its throne by the subversive message of Jesus. The same message is still alive today, subverting the modern empires of our time which seek to expand seeking to dominate the world. Sometimes the powers use brutal violence, other times they use more subtle means like the seductive power of consumerism. What we have though is the sure knowledge that the power of evil – though it looks so menacing – is nothing before our God.

I sense something wonderful and powerful in Mary's role in our salvation. The mythical dragon story carries much validity and truth for our own time.

—Catherine Land

A Call to Discipleship

Anne Rampa

There are advantages to choosing a lifestyle of downward mobility, which the Catholic Worker Movement has traditionally called ‘voluntary poverty’. One of these is that we gain some perspective on the experience of those financially less well off in our society.

Since I was originally from a middle to upper income family, it was somewhat of a surprise for me to discover how much simply being less well off affected how we were treated. Of course, in many ways it wasn’t a surprise too, because I knew my own prejudices and vanities, and expected to receive them back. Indeed I don’t think that a degree of material poverty frightens us as much as the accompanying loss of status and respect does.

In other words, the experience of comparative material poverty in our society is not, I think, as distressing as the marginalization you experience because of it. We live simply on recycled housing, furniture, clothes, car, crockery etc. – on things that others don’t want or need – and we have plenty, because we live in an affluent society. We are comfortable. The discomfort comes from how we are regarded because of this, how we are led to feel ashamed. I sometimes imagine how much worse it would be for us if we were black as well, or mentally ill, or suffering disability in some other way. More than charity, the poor in our society need friends.

Bringing up children

In much of this experience, the Church, and I include all Christian churches here, has been a place of refuge for our family from the judgment of ‘the world’. In the Church we found friendship, support, and respect. It has been on the whole a kinder place, and I am grateful to it, especially for my children’s sake. Our ‘recycled life-style’ has impacted mostly on them in their formative years. Many times one or two of them have urged us to increase our income so that they didn’t have to feel so embarrassed. However we have resisted the pressure from them, and it has been a source of lively family discussion about how we think we can best build a better world for everyone. I should add that they are luckier than many poorer families, since we have still managed to give them some extra-curricular activities, and send them to Catholic high schools, that allow reduced rates for low income families.

There have been times, however, when we have experienced exclusion within the Church, and seen others suffer the same way because they were not middle class, financially successful, mentally or emotionally competent, or white. We have seen wealthy families greeted and befriended with enthusiasm, while poorer people have

been ignored. That’s what keeps people striving for more, over above what they could possibly ever need, or even use! Consequently, looking down on people with less money becomes a way to make you feel better, which creates the desire for more money in them, and so the vicious cycle continues.



The antidote to all this destructive consumption, and breakdown in the human family, is to immerse ourselves in relationship with God who waits longingly for us in love and fidelity. St. Paul tells us we are meant to be in the world, but not of the world. It should not be the world that is forming and informing our attitudes and opinions, and it is the world that worships money. God is infinitely kinder than the world. We all know how hard it is to please the ‘world’, and feel acceptable by it’s rigorous standards, anyway! Seriously, is there anyone out there who thinks they’ve made it in the acceptability stakes?

God has also given us instruction, through His son, Jesus, in how we are to regard those most rejected by the world, the ‘lowly ones’. We are to treat them as the presence of Christ to us, which means as being actually above ourselves in deserving of dignity and respect! If God is the one largely forming and informing our intellect, emotions, and actions, we would be going to the highways and byways and begging the poor into our Church.

I am not naïve to the problems and complications this could bring into our lives. We shared our home for 14 years with homeless strangers, many of them mentally ill, many of them suffering addictions of one kind and another. I had to learn that welcoming the marginalized did not mean I couldn’t challenge bad behaviour, and expect respect myself. Seeing Christ in ‘the distressing disguise of the poor’, as Dorothy Day puts it, is not easy.

But we all need to constantly examine how much we have allowed the world to seep into our consciousness and behaviour, and put renewed energy into making sure God has the upper hand in our lives and attitudes. That’s when we are truly a Church alive in Christ, and not dead in the world.

Anne Rampa is married to Jim Dowling and together they have seven children. They mostly live at the Peter Maurin Catholic Worker farm, north of Brisbane.

Myths to Debunk

Brian Turner & Murray Horton

In religious and philosophical circles, we are well used to the power of myth.

As Rudolf Bultmann and NZ's Lloyd Geering have shown, myths can be powerful vehicles for religious and philosophical truth, but they can also be dead ends for truth and enlightenment and need, as Bultmann put it, to be 'demythologised' or debunked.

And as in religion and philosophy, so in economics and business. There are myths that need debunking.

Here in Aotearoa-NZ, CAFCA (Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa) has addressed a number of 'key' myths pertaining to foreign companies operating in New Zealand.

One key myth is that 'we need their money'

Actually transnational corporations make massive profits out of New Zealand (\$15.5 billion gross left NZ in the year to March 2013), so they need our money more than we need theirs. These profits are NZ's biggest invisible export and are the main cause of NZ's very high current account deficit (which is not caused by 'us' spending more than we save).

A related myth is 'they pay tax here'

Don't assume that at all. In 2009 the four big Australian owned banks settled out of court with IRD for \$2.2 billion of taxes they had avoided (that settlement was for less than the sum sought and avoided penalties which would have been imposed by the court). It was the biggest tax avoidance case in NZ's history. Right now IRD is pursuing a number of big Australian owned companies through the courts for tax avoidance. CAFCA has also investigated another foreign company which paid no NZ tax for five years and basically injected no money into the NZ economy, operating almost entirely on borrowed money. It was a liability not an asset to the NZ economy.

But 'we need them for our jobs'

No we don't. Transnationals are not big employers. Five out of six Kiwis work for NZ owned companies which transnationals need in order to operate in NZ. Once again, they need us more than we need them. Not only are they not big employers but, in many cases, they have

actively contributed to mass unemployment and/or a serious downgrading of NZ workers' conditions (eg Telecom).

Another key myth is that 'selling things to foreign owners helps NZ's foreign debt problem'

No it doesn't. Despite a quarter of a century of systematic public asset sales, NZ's foreign debt has continued to balloon. Roger Douglas himself said 'I am not sure we were right to use the argument that we should privatise to quit debt. We knew it was a poor argument but we probably felt it was the easiest to use politically.' Nothing has changed since his commendable honesty.

Yet another myth is that 'they can't take the land or the phones with them'

True – and why would they want to when they can own them here and milk them for all their worth. The company which now owns the Crafar farms is called 'Milk NZ'!

Land sales to foreigners are only part of a much bigger picture

Who owns and profits from our banks, supermarkets, media companies, telecommunication companies, airlines, transport companies, insurance companies etc etc is a matter of national significance which affects everyone in the country; one which is rapidly becoming a branch office economy dominated by transnational corporations.

Finally, it's not that CAFCA is anti-global

We live in a globalised world and are challenged to be responsible global citizens, not narrow nationalists. But there's a huge difference between being real partners in global justice and development instead of passive pawns endorsing the false myths of multinationals.

For more about CAFCA go online to www.converge.org.nz.

Rev Brian Turner is a former director of Christian World Service. Murray Horton is the organiser of CAFCA.

Funeral Choice

www.funeralchoice.co.nz

A Catholic Worker project

Cheaper alternatives to
consumer funerals

CW website

- Leading articles from the first 16 years of *The Common Good*
- Alternative funerals
- Restorative justice
- Other theological issues

www.catholicworker.org.nz

Child Poverty Court Challenge

Susan St John

Why are so few older people materially deprived? The answer, very simply, is that governments have implemented policies to minimise deprivation among the elderly. By contrast, New Zealand society has chosen to tolerate significant child deprivation. We could choose otherwise.

Professor Jonathon Boston

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is very grateful for the financial contributions and the messages of wide support both before and during the Court of Appeal case that was heard in May. We were delighted that the court case was so well attended by so many supporters. They were bearing witness to the importance of the principle of equal treatment for all low income children that has been buried for too long in New Zealand.

The latest report from the Ministry of Social Development Household Incomes in New Zealand: trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982 to 2012 (2012) says that 25% of New Zealand children are in poverty. Revealingly they say:

‘From 1992 to 2004, children in workless households generally had poverty rates around four times higher than for those in households where at least one adult was in full-time work. From 2007 to 2012, the difference was even greater – around six to seven times higher for children in workless households. This to a large degree reflects the greater WFF assistance for working families than for beneficiary families.’

The fall in child poverty rates from 2004 to 2007 for children in one-Full-Time-one-workless two-parent households was very large (28% to 9%), reflecting the WFF impact, especially through the In-work Tax Credit. (Perry (2012).

We believe that in an ideal world, improvements to policy would occur as the result of reasoned argument in policy forums and evidence-based reports from experts. However since 1996 when the National government first introduced policies that discriminated between the children of the deserving and undeserving poor we have made no progress with this approach. The latest example was the woeful government response to the Expert Advisory Group on Poverty report.

Hence a legal challenge, while extremely demanding, has a very important place in the democratic process. As it is not good form to comment in the media on the progress and nature of the case while it is still being deliberated, we think it is worthwhile apprising our supporters of what happened in the court and helping them to be primed to comment, express opinion etc once we get the decision.

CPAG’s arguments

It is hard to summarise the complex arguments briefly, but for CPAG the issue is black and white. About

230,000 children do not benefit from a social security measure called the In Work Tax Credit that has twin objectives: to reduce child poverty and to incentivise paid work. The majority of these children (170,000) are found below the 50% poverty line and live in significant hardship. Māori and Pasifika children are grossly over-represented in this group.



There can be no justification for this grave disparity in terms of any higher good- i.e. incentivising work. The IWTC is an extremely poor work incentive; while there may have been a few sole parents who initially came off a benefit when the IWTC was introduced, the numbers on benefit quickly reverted. The IWTC turned from being a carrot to being a stick to punish children when parents lost hours of work as happened in the recession and the Christchurch earthquake.

The origins of today’s problems are found in the 1996 family assistance changes that gave an inflation catch-up worth \$20 per child per week, but marked off \$15 of this, called it the Child Tax Credit and paid it only to those whose parents who were deemed ‘independent from the state’. Despite vehement protests by Labour and promises to reverse this nasty policy and return to treating all low income children the same, in 2006 the Labour government took the Child Tax Credit and made it more generous especially for smaller families. They called this new payment the In Work Tax Credit.

We are seeking a declaration that the IWTC is unlawfully discriminatory in that it creates material disadvantage for those children in beneficiary families by denying their parents a significant child support payment of at least \$60 per week. Furthermore that such partiality cannot be justified, as the Crown does, by calling it a work incentive. If the government wants a work incentive there are many superior ways to achieve it without using a child-payment that is needed to provide the basics for children in poor families.

Should the Court of Appeal agree, it is very likely that the case will be appealed by the Crown and will be contested in the Supreme Court. It can be expected that there will be significant interest in the case internationally as this policy breaches certain human rights treaties that New Zealand has ratified.

Susan St John is Associate Professor of Economics at Auckland University and a spokesperson for the Child Action Poverty Group.

Around the Traps

Asbestos has been a major theme at both Suzanne Aubert CW and Thomas Merton. Francis and companions were out of their home for a period in early August to enable builders to clear the roofing of asbestos. Jim was moved from Thomas Merton CW to another site as repairs were made to his house. Subsequent to that those being completed, the landlord has decided to sell the house so Jim is relocating to another place after being nine years at Estuary Road. He leaves behind a patch of garlic, some broad beans shooting through and many happy memories!

The 7th national CW hui is to be held at the end of August at Southern Star Abbey, Kopua, in the sunny Hawkes Bay and a good attendance is expected. This follows six previous hui held at Paraparaumu, Hokianga (2), Rapaki, Whanganui, and Otaki. These gatherings

have proved to be vital in helping establish and maintain a common spirituality and focus among Catholic Workers in New Zealand. It is here we build relationships, do theology, sleep a little, pray and sing a lot, reflect on the issues, celebrate our lives, plan the future and eat lots of fresh vegetables. A full report on the Kopua gathering will be included in the next edition of *The Common Good*.

It has been nice having Margaret Ingram in Christchurch recently. Margaret is our most distant member and lives on a kibbutz in Galilee near the Jordan River, which runs past her front door. While here, besides catching up with friends and family, Margaret helped lead a Wednesday night gathering at the Suzanne Aubert CW and shared something of her story.

Early Spring

I write the blossom growing on the
kowhai tree perceptibly

the ti kouka the walnut the ngaio the snakeskin bluegum
mapou matipo fig full of birdsong

sparrow thrush korimako blackbird kereru
singing wildly up the dawn

snowclad white mountains blue blue sky
cool morning air in my breath

tiny green and yellow finches playing in the kowhai blossom
sucking nectar, walnut tree still and lifeless

this is the only way through
these words I write to you inch by inch perceptibly

washing hanging on the line two days drying in the sun
korimako whistling me a psalm on a blue blue day

snakeskin gum leaves at my feet all the trees
covered in winter greenery but for the walnut the cherry the apple

I am here to observe to watch closely a leaf growing
blowing barely in the air to scribble these words into the sky

—Kathleen Gallagher

an easy essay

to live close to the Spirit
is more important
than going places
and doing things
and being important

to live close to the Spirit
is to see the bigger picture
to make the connections
to reach out and reach in
to centre on God

to live close to the Spirit
is to keep things in perspective
to connect with all living things
to know that sun, wind and rain are gifts
to be part of one another

to live close to the Spirit
is to be aware
to know one's place
to sense the presence
to encounter the divine

—Jim Consedine

Atomic bombing anniversaries

John Dear S.J.



While traveling in Europe in 1981, some friends and I visited Dachau, the Nazi concentration camp outside of Munich. Most of it was razed, but the original fences and barbed wire

remained, along with a few buildings. That was enough to send chills down the spine. It was too much for me to take in. It's still too much for me to take in.

Upon leaving, I noticed the beautiful suburban neighborhood surrounding Dachau. The houses, green trees, streets, shrubs, shops -- it could have been any suburb in the U.S., and it was right next to the Nazi concentration camp. I was shocked and asked the officials, 'Was Dachau like this 35 years ago? Were these homes here?' Yes, they answered. They smelled the smoke and went on with their lives.

The normality of evil! The suburban life of evil, the resigned acceptance of the big business of death right in one's backyard -- that's what I saw in Dachau, and that's what I saw again Sunday as I drove up the mountain to join the annual Hiroshima commemoration peace vigil at Los Alamos, N.M., the birthplace of the atomic bomb and headquarters of the U.S. nuclear weapons industry. I think it's the most evil place on earth.

It's also one of the most stunning locations in North America: the steep red cliffs, the pine trees, the Rio Grande down below, the distant mountains. And on the mesa, this beautiful, normal everytown with its Starbucks, restaurants, hotels, churches and hospital -- and nuclear weapons labs that work overtime to prepare the end of the world.

Los Alamos is in the second-richest county in the nation, with more millionaires per capita than anywhere else, even though the surrounding counties are some of the poorest. New Mexico recently returned to first place in child hunger and child poverty among the 50 states. Yet at Los Alamos, we spend billions building weapons of mass destruction.

It's a cliché to speak of the normality of evil, not to mention its banality or legality, but in Los Alamos, the big business of death surrounds you like nowhere else. Everyone is given over to death. They've gotten used to death. They've made peace with the bomb. They've become possessed by 'Lord Nuke,' and they don't know it. It's like walking into a zombie movie, like stepping into *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Vigil

It was pouring rain with thunder and lightning on Sunday, so we did not process through town on our regular peace march. Instead, our little crowd gathered in the stone shelter overlooking Ashley Pond, the exact place where the Hiroshima bomb was built. As in the past, we recalled the book of Jonah, put on sackcloth and ashes, and sat in silence for 30 minutes to 'repent of the mortal sin of war and nuclear weapons and beg the God of peace for the gift of nuclear disarmament.'

After our silent sitting, I offered a few reflections. Then we turned to one another and shared our feelings about our prayer, Los Alamos, Hiroshima, our war-making country and the Gospel of peace. Then we had a conversation and a closing prayer.

'You and I are trying to wake up and stay awake, to open our eyes and keep our eyes open, to be conscious of the fullness of life and the evil in our midst,' I said. 'We're trying to non-cooperate with evil, to wake others up, to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the reallocation of these billions of dollars for death instead for pro-human services -- for food for the hungry, homes for the homeless, universal health care, education, decent jobs, dignity and well-funded international nonviolent conflict resolution. This is the holy task God has given us: to be abnormal people of nonviolence in a world of normalized violence.'

Mortal Sin

Among the disturbing aspects of Los Alamos are the packed churches. The nuclear weapons labs are made up predominantly of Christians with the full support of the local churches, including the rich, large Catholic parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This is an incomparable blindness, or worse, it is comparable to the packed churches in the neighborhoods of Dachau and Auschwitz, where Nazi officials regularly attended Mass and prayers then spent the rest of their day killing our sisters and brothers.

This is a great blasphemy, and we need to name it as such. Jesus was nonviolent and called us to be peacemakers and to love our enemies, I pointed out. All Christians and all Christian churches are called to be nonviolent and to love enemies, not to support preparations to vaporize them. Christians who work at the labs, like everyone there, should quit their jobs and find new nonviolent, life-giving work and join the movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

Silent contemplative prayer is perhaps the best response to the culture of death that is Los Alamos. Sitting in sackcloth and ashes centers us in mindfulness and brings us to a clearer realization that we are all in this

together, that we all share some complicity with this culture of death, that none of us are exempt. We tried to repent like the people of Nineveh, to take responsibility for our part in the culture of war and to ask our higher power for the sobriety of nonviolence. It was, of course, a modest gesture, but it's a start.

'God of peace, bless us as we repent of the sin of nuclear weapons and war,' we prayed at the end. 'Bless everyone here in Los Alamos and the world. Bless us all with the gift of a world without war, poverty and nuclear weapons.' In the end, we felt our prayer was heard.

And that was the surprise. Everyone left consoled, renewed and hopeful. Why? Perhaps because we were not alone. If we had gone there on our own, we would have felt despair, or worse, we would have turned away and felt nothing like walking zombies. But sitting together in a communal spirit of peace and prayer, we felt uplifted. Perhaps it was because we were addressing reality, the

proverbial dead elephant in the room. Perhaps most of all, it was because we tried to engage the God of peace about this work of ultimate evil. The consolation everyone felt was God's response. That was a great blessing.

6 and 9 August mark the 68th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These dates invite us to reflect on the 'normalcy' of our culture of death and how much we fit into it. Do we want to be like the suburban people of Dachau or Los Alamos, or can we peacefully say no to the culture of death, try to help each other wake up to the fullness of life, and turn to the God of peace for the gift of nuclear disarmament?

That's what Hiroshima asks of each one of us.

Peacemaker [John Dear S.J.](#) visited NZ in 2009 at the invitation of the *Catholic Worker*. This is an abridged article from NCR Jun. 11, 2013

Declaration

World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs Hiroshima, 5 August 2013

Sixty-eight years have passed since Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered the atomic bombings. The bombs instantly devastated the two cities and took the lives of over 200 000 citizens by the end of 1945. They created 'a hell on earth', which denied humans either to live or die as humans. The *Hibakusha*, who survived the days, have continued to suffer from wounds in both mind and body. The tragedy like this should never be repeated anywhere in the world.

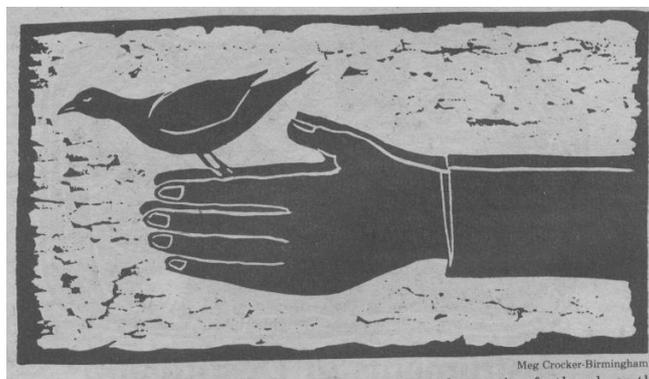
Nuclear weapons are the worst weapons of mass destruction, the use of which is a serious crime against humanity..

They have to be banned without any further delay.

There are still nearly 20 000 nuclear weapons in the world. One nuclear bomb, if used, could cause disastrous tragedy. Even a small portion of them would cause a large scale climate change, which could lead to famine around the world. Total ban and the elimination of nuclear weapons is an urgent task for the whole of humanity.

Towards 2015, let us urge the nuclear weapon states and all other governments to implement their agreement to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. In every country we must inform the wider public of the atrocity and inhumanity of nuclear weapons and strengthen the public opinion in support of the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Let us organize many varieties of actions which everyone at grassroots can take part in, such as peace marches, by making use of social media and other means.



Kirihimete Raina Paniora (1943 – 2013)



‘I never knew I was a radical,’ mused Aunty Raina Paniora at Clarehouse morning prayer last year, after a hui of young radicals had met with her. ‘I wished you were all here with us.’

Raina Paniora an identity in the Catholic Worker for the past 10 years or more and known to all as Aunty Raina, was tragically killed in a car accident in May this year, just 3 weeks before we were to celebrate her 70th birthday. In her typically radical fashion, she had chosen to have that birthday at the derelict home where she grew up across the Whirinaki River.

There used to be a swing-bridge, but that has all gone now. The marae would have been much easier but her strong attachment to her place of birth and her parent’s memory were common knowledge.

Raina was a woman of many faces. She crossed all sorts of racial, social, religious and generational gaps and gave generously of herself wherever she was. Among her many gifts was a ministry to the sick and dying, in the hospital, in people’s homes, sharing sacrament, scripture, song and massage. She had an unerring sense of when people’s end was near and wouldn’t leave the bedside until they died, when she would offer the prayers for the dead and comfort and help of the family.

She moved easily in all situations, including the CW. Known up and down the country, she attended most of our hui. At her tangi, her daughter recounted how ‘mum had disappeared for a week or so and we spotted her on TV at the Ploughshares trial in Wellington’. She was a faithful supporter of the Hokianga CW, always there as kuia to guide and strengthen us. We also provided a handy pool of drivers when she needed one on one of her many errands of mercy. These often took her as far as Auckland, or Hamilton, occasionally Wellington. She spent many hours on the road that finally claimed her life, usually in the service of others, as was the case in that final trip.

Her tangi was an event fitting for such a great woman. First came the contest for the privilege for hosting the tangi itself, a contest between Whirinaki, the place of her birth, and Waimamaku, where she had lived for the last 30 years with her husband Reuben and her five children. The children wanted to honour the generosity of Reuben’s

hapu, so Waimamaku won.

Everyone local was there, Maori and Pakeha, several schools from Auckland and Hawkes Bay, hospital, fire brigade, RSA, kapahaka groups and churches. And then group after group from everywhere. She was laid to rest beside Reuben, as was their wish.

We still can’t believe she has gone. *Kua panitia matou. No reira, moe mai e te whaea I Te Ariki.*

Catherine Land

Bob Leonard (1941 - 2013)

Bob Leonard, veteran peace activist, died after a lengthy illness, 14 August. He was 72.

Bob was a very active member of Campaign Against Foreign Control from 1984-2010,. In fact, Bob was the face and voice and engine of ABC since it was founded. In many respects he was the ABC. He played a leading role in all our campaigns past and present – such as Harewood, Black Birch, and of course, Waihopai (where he was arrested once). For those of you who came to our Waihopai protests, he was unforgettable as Uncle Sam.

Bob and Barbara and their infant son Graham (who is now Dr Graham, a nationally renowned volcanologist) came to Christchurch from the US in the early 80s as Reagan refugees, to get away from the threat of nuclear war. Immediately they plunged into the local peace movement. In those days, 30 years ago, CAFGINZ (now CAFCA) was very much a peace and anti-bases group.

Very soon Bob helped set up *Citizens for the Demilitarisation of Harewood*, a group campaigning about the US military base at Christchurch Airport (which is still there). Once the Waihopai spy base was announced, in 1987, the Anti-Bases Campaign was born.

He was the founder of ABC’s newsletter *Peace Researcher*, in 1983, and was Editor or Co-Editor until health reasons forced him to quit in 2002. He wrote all of ABC’s submissions, some of which are remarkably topical (such as on the GCSB Act that is the process of being replaced by the Government at present). He fronted Parliamentary Select Committees and the Intelligence and Security Committee. He spoke at public meetings around the country, he did innumerable media interviews. For many years he acquired and analysed the official flight data recording US military planes arriving and departing from Harewood.

He was centrally involved in helping the defence of the three Waihopai Domebusters. His expert affidavit was of great importance and he was delighted that they were acquitted of criminal charges by a Wellington jury in 2010.

He will be sadly missed by many.

Murray Horton

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