

Fall Appeal - December 1962

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Begs for help to pay rents and local taxes. Says their work is life-giving and "It is by prayer and alms that we do penance for our own sins and the sins of the world, and we can all give alms." (DDLW #797).

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality
175 Chrystie Street, N.Y. 2

Dear Fellow Workers in Christ,

We are very late in getting out our semi-annual appeal for the simple reason that we never send one out until we are hard-pressed and there is no money to pay those many rents which fall due on the first of the month. Though we own the farm and the two little beach houses on Staten Island, both well used all the year round, we pay very high taxes there. And yet when it is all broken down and the numbers we care for are considered, the rent per person is very small. But even so those rents in New York City are well over a thousand dollars a month and the landlord or agent is at the door on the first of the month to collect. We cannot buy, even if we had the money, because building code requirements are ever stricter—sprinkler systems, steel self-closing doors, a bath for every five persons, separate entrances to each room—in fact, an institution is required. In spite of all the institutions in and around New York there is not a day when we do not get a request from one of them to take care of someone who just does not fit in. There is a great need for a Christ room in every home as well as new institutions such as our Houses of Hospitality. Our House is surely a decentralized one. There is the day headquarters, an ancient loft building, where kitchen, where dining room, waiting rooms, clothes rooms, and offices are always full of the destitute. Then there are our sleeping quarters, apartments scattered around the near neighborhood. The ones I share with five others ranging in age from eighty years to nineteen, have no heat (we light the kitchen oven), the toilet is in the hall, the bathtub is by the sink in the kitchen. Rent is low and we are indeed pilgrims, uncertain when our neighborhood will be demolished for expressways and housing so expensive and regulated that it will drive us ever farther into the remaining increasingly overcrowded slums. While there are poor there we must be with them.

I have just returned to Chrystie Street and St. Joseph's House and if it were not for daily Communion at Mass, bringing confidence and strength, one could not bear the communion with human destitution and the fears which lead to madness in these times of crisis which are so concentrated around us. But **Work**, blessed **Work**, restores balance. The life-giving work of feeding the hundreds who come each day, and consoling by word and deed, keeps joy in the heart.

"I have left myself in the midst of you so that you can serve me in the least of

these my brethren,” Jesus said to Catherine of Sienna. And St. John of the Cross said, “Where there is no love, put love and you will find love.” What do any of us want but to grow in love, that love which casts out fear?

So joy is here, not only in the sun on the yellow leaves of the sycamore trees on Chrystie Street, in the dance of the pigeons in the clear, but also to be evoked in the hearts of our Catholic Worker family whom we beg you to help once again as you have done so often before.

It is by prayer and alms that we do penance for our own sins and the sins of the world, and we can all give alms. And as for prayer, someone once said in reply to an anguished remark, “I don’t know how to pray,”—“You know the words, don’t you?” So we can say “Our Father, Thy will be done,” knowing that it is His will that all men be saved. So let us exercise ourselves in faith, in hope and in love. My own gratitude and love go out to all of you for sharing in this work of ours.

Dorothy Day