

Spring Appeal - April 1966

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Semi-annual appeal for funds. She says the destitute they take in become part of the Catholic Worker family until they die. Says the Lord asks, "Do you mean what you say when you repeat my words, 'All men are brothers'?" (DDLW #836).

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Beloved Fellow Workers:

It was not too long ago that Charlie was walking along the Bowery and saw an old man crouched in a doorway, frightened, dirty and most miserable. When he got close to him to see how dirty he really was, he almost passed him by. The man wasn't drunk. He was literally a castaway. The only story that we could get from him was that his boss, a potato farmer for whom he had worked for years, had driven him to town and dropped him off on the Bowery. He had been sleeping around for a week. When he became part of our family it was a job cleaning him up, and of course he didn't stay clean. We had to keep at it. Work is as necessary as bread, and our new guest spoke of his longing for the country, so we took him to the Catholic Worker farm (which was then on Staten Island) and there he wielded the hoe and spade and cut grass, and in the winter chopped wood for the greenhouse stove to keep some baby banty chicks warm. People often ask how long folks stay with us, and we can only say that it is until they die. That is, those like Albert, who are at the end of their rope. He was one of those who died last year.

All kinds of people join our family and stay for longer or shorter periods. There are those who want work so badly that they will not seek welfare agencies, and are ruptured and epileptic or accident-prone and so are bad insurance risks. Or they are too old. So they take to collecting bottles and cartons and old rags to earn their living. One girl, who comes to us off and on between stays at a big mental hospital, was asked by one of our guests who shared her room what the Catholic Worker was for and she said, "for the wounded."

I write only in detail of the dead and of the past, in such a story as the one about "Poverty and Destitution," which we are reprinting from **Dissent** in this issue of the paper, because I do not want to violate the privacy of the living by

disclosing their woe, for much of which they themselves are blamed when they are alive. I write these things to indicate the kind of work we do in our house of hospitality, which in New York is also the place the paper is mailed from and meetings are held. The paper itself is edited from the Farm at Tivoli, which is also a retreat and conference center as well as a house of hospitality on the land. We are forced into doing the work because the Lord asks us, day in and day out, “Do you mean what you say when you repeat my words, ‘All men are brothers.’ ‘Do not judge.’ ‘Forgive seventy times seven.’ ‘Sell what you have and give alms. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom’?”

We want to be servants of the poor and servants of you, our friends, who by your contributions enable us to keep up this work over the years. And so we are again making our semi-annual appeal. And it is not just the poor we are reaching but destitution at its deepest level.

There are such beautiful stories in the Old Testament about how God brings help to those who need. Through Habakkuk to Daniel in the lions’ den; through Elias to the widow of Sarepta; through an angel to Elias himself when he lost courage in the desert. In the New Testament Jesus tells us how to ask for that help—with faith and perseverance like a friend knocking on the door of a friend night and day. So help us please, again. I ask in the name of St. Joseph, who provided food and shelter for his God.

Gratefully,

Dorothy Day

P.S. We have found a house and are trying to buy it.