

St. Joseph's House (Chrystie St.)

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Chronicles life at St. Joseph's House: repairs, grocery bills for "the line", managing subscriptions, endless mail and visitors. Asks St. Joseph to "impel" readers to help pay the grocery bills. (DDLW #692).

I'd like to call this just Chrystie Street, but our readers might jump to the conclusion that Tom Sullivan is back from the Trappists. Yesterday we received a letter from Jack English (Brother Charles) who is also at Our Lady of the Holy Ghost Monastery at Conyers, Ga. and all is well on that prayer front. So it is up to someone to write of the goings on around Chrystie Street. To begin with the front of the house –the rain, I notice, has washed the bricks on one side to a pale pink. Grass is growing along the edges of the fenced-in lot next door which has become a parking lot, the old theater on the corner has put up a heavy "riot fence" as they used to be called during industrial strikes, so that the men that make up the **Catholic Worker** breadline cannot make a jungle of either the lot or the space under the fire escapes which are roofed with corrugated sheet iron. Many were the little camp fires burning there at night, close against the building, many were the men sleeping against the side of the building. Now they seek darker corners, more sheltered doorways.

Larry the painter continues to keep us shipshape and the doors and window trim on the first floors are painted. Inside the house, we have replaced the old linoleum on the first two floors. Pete and Roger were given the good heavy floor covering by the Sisters at St. Rose's Cancer Home, and one of our guests who is from the west coast spent days in putting it down. Larry the cook continues in the kitchen through the hottest of the Summer, and Marty and Roy over the dish pans. The sink is rusting out and springing new leaks daily and we sadly need to replace them. Jack English purchased them when we moved here five years ago. We'll get him to pray for money for a new one.

Bread keeps coming in from the Divine Providence temporary shelter for children, and Al Gallion, who does all the driving now, picks it up daily. But the food bill has mounted perilously. Tony de Falco called up this morning. He has the corner grocery at Hester and Mott Streets and we have traded with him and his family since 1936. He always has let us charge our groceries and comparing prices, he's been as reasonable as most wholesalers. When we were getting our

new headquarters here five years ago, he let the bill go up into the thousands and we never really caught up again. Right now the bill is five thousand dollars, a heavy, heavy load for him to carry and for us to owe him. Ammon's fast of ten days did a little to lower it! Guess we'd all better do a little more fasting. Trouble is, even going on that principle, "everybody take a little less, and there'll be enough to feed more," more and more always are arriving. Our guests start arriving at five, lining up for coffee and bread; two hundred or so then. The house, about fifty-five of us, eat at seven thirty; the house eats again at eleven thirty. There are pancakes today, and Smokey Joe, who was in the marines, is reminded of tug boats and calls them collision mats. The line comes again at one o'clock, two to three hundred servings of soup and bread; then there is a lull until supper time at five thirty, and last night there were seventy-five sitting down to table. The extra at night are mostly women who live at the Salvation army or in the neighborhood who earn enough to pay for their lodging, but not quite enough to eat on. There's the woman who sells pencils and chewing gum, who has the deaf and dumb son. There is the old Jewish woman with the scarf around her head who gets feebler, day by day. She is clean and well cared for, but we don't know where she lives or who her people are. She just comes in and sits down and eats, and when she leaves she puts a half dozen slices of bread in her pocket book.

File Room

The only place in the house that is really quiet is the file room where right now Bob Steed and Tom Caine and Carol Perry are trying to catch up on new subscriptions, changes of address, carding of contributions whether they are the apron sent in this morning from St. Paul, Minn., bundles of clothes, or the dollar that came in this morning. We don't file many letters any more, we just make a note on the card—"letter about the land." "Interested in works of mercy," "Conscientious objector." "Objector to conscientious objector." Enough mail comes in every day to keep us busy answering letters and visitors come in from all parts of the country and from the world, and the people of the household drift in and out of the office which makes it hard to concentrate. The tradition is that the downstairs office is business and people must be quiet to concentrate. But here, we are only typing letters or stores, or visiting, so there is chatter and comings and goings not only from outsiders but from insiders.

Old Joe Davin was not happy on Welfare Island and now he is home again. He thought he would like it having worked there once, but he was lonely and now he is home again in the bosom of the family with everyone dropping in and out and offering him cold drinks, hot drinks, meals and between meal snacks. Surely there is a deep significance in that phrase, "they knew Him in the breaking of bread of bread." When people share food together they are communing, they are comforting one another. That's why our grocery bills are so high, there is so much of it done around here.

When I was a little girl my mother used to impress on us all that it was a terrible thing to hint. I remember one occasion especially of a visit we paid and I kept hinting that I liked the doll my little friend had. I got it when I got home, but not the doll.

Tom Cain helps us in the file room, and translates Fr. Ude for us, and letters beautiful little mottos to decorate the house. I have one on my desk, "Unto old age and grey hairs O lord, forsake me not." He just came in and said that we had a cricket in the back yard! We have two privet hedges transplanted from the Hennessy acres a few years ago, and one vine of ivy, and that represents the vegetable kingdom. We have plenty of cats, and one black dog. And now a cricket praising God out there. A cheerful note.

During the summer we received three statues of St. Joseph, all of them works of art, which surely should be a sign that our good friend is watching over us. St. Teresa of Avila said that she never asked anything of St. Joseph that it was not granted. So we ask him to impel you to help. Paying the grocery bills is casting bread on the waters. It will return a hundred fold.

DOROTHY DAY