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St. Louis Catholic Worker house turns 35

Mary Ann McGivern | Oct. 8, 2012 NCR Today

In late September, the St. Louis Catholic Worker celebrated its 35th anniversary. I was one of the seven founders of Karen House, and on the morning of Sept. 29, three of the seven attended the house's "Breakfast with the Founders." Another founder, Ann Manganarao, has died. Luanna Schinzel was unable to attend, and we have lost track of the other two.

Actually, we've been able to list 96 men and women who have been part of the community during these 35 years. We tracked down many of them, and some came back for the party from as far away as North Carolina, Michigan and California. And of course there have been hundreds more cooks, carpenters and house takers. Many came.

It was so wonderful to remember, to tell stories, to be asked penetrating questions. How did we pray? How did we support one another? How did we reconcile with one another? Why did we choose the consensus model and create a community decision-making structure?

Here was a tough one for a roundtable discussion in the afternoon: Our Catholic roots and our commitments to nonviolence and voluntary poverty draw white, middle-class college graduates to the Catholic Worker. Can we overcome this tendency to elitism? That's not quite how the question was framed, but it is what we talked about.

The food, all donated, was terrific. We sang. We played a raucous game of trivia. We prayed together. We had a roundtable on nonviolent resistance that I will write about another time.

Anniversaries are a good thing. The Worker has been a great gift in my life and I was glad to celebrate it.

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